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# Three Unholy Churchmen of Robert Browning's Poetry

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Three Unholy Churchmen of

Robert Browning's Poetry

(TITLE)

BY

Everett L. Millhorn

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**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
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Religion was at the basis of Robert Browning's character, and it was the function of religious poetry that his work fulfilled. Perhaps it was inevitable that he should find and seize upon as his own all that was optimistic in Christian theology. He believed that the development of the individual was the purpose of its existence. Development and growth, whether positive or negative, meant a closer union with reality. In Browning, God was adjective to man. The most noble quality of Browning's is that he does not proceed by chastising, castigating, and pulling down. He builds up; he is positive, not negative.

In this study three of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues will be discussed. The same subject occurs in all three: Browning is writing about three unholy churchmen. The poems for discussion are "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church."

Browning's tour of Italy in 1838 is probably responsible for the earliest of these poems, "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," which was published in 1842. While there he had the time and opportunity to visit the monasteries. The setting is post-medieval. During this period in history the act of revenge became a highly refined practice. Not only did men kill their enemies, they also

were determined to destroy the soul. According to DeVane "Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius at his devotions, and thus send his soul to heaven, but to wait and trip unawares, is perhaps the best known example in English literature of this Renaissance psychology."<sup>1</sup>

In the poem Browning makes use of italics to indicate every word which the speaker mocks. This term is used in the sense of "to imitate derisively." In line 25 the speaker of the poem mocks Brother Lawrence's mild ejaculation of "saint" when his lily snaps. In lines 71 and 72, the speaker reverses the order of the introductory phrase of the prayer of the vesper service: "Plena gratia/Ave Virgo!"

It is unfortunate that most annotators have failed to observe Browning's skill in having the speaker distort the Latin service. One commentator says, "This is the beginning of a prayer in automatic reaction to the bell."<sup>2</sup> Another merely states, "This is the beginning of the vesper prayer, 'Hail Mary, full of grace.' Browning has varied the Latin somewhat."<sup>3</sup> Anyone familiar with the vesper prayers and chants of the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>1</sup>W. C. DeVane, A Browning Handbook, (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1955), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>E. K. Brown and J. O. Bailey, editors, Victorian Poetry, (New York, 1962), p. 774.

<sup>3</sup>James Stephenson, Edwin L. Beck, Royal H. Snow, editors, Victorian and Late English Poets, (New York, 1934), p. 259.

knows that Browning has made the speaker vary the Latin, but why does he? The poet wishes to reveal the diabolical hatred in the speaker's mind by having him reverse the order of vesper service confusedly. Browning reveals his skill as a psychologist by having the speaker use in his mockery the sounds which would be used by one motivated by hatred. It requires little sociological research to prove that one who expresses hatred, anger, or envy will speak in a tone of voice pitched much higher than that of his ordinary speaking voice, and that when he imitates sounds his voice will interpret them according to his state of mind.

Three cryptic syllables near the end of the poem are usually glossed as representing the sound of bells, evidently on the authority of Hiram Corson's statement. In his Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry, he says also that "Hy, Zy, Hine" represents the sound of the vesper bell. A more plausible interpretation, made by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke in passing and as if self-evident, has been either overlooked, or presented with needless hesitation or in places unlikely to be sought out by the Browning student. By this reading the "Hy, Zy, Hine" is a part of the muttered soliloquy, an experimental mumbling of the opening of a forbidden conjuration, interrupted by the bells. The syllables are a climactic utterance, consistent with the speaker's character, with the unity of the poem, and with Browning's practice elsewhere. And though no



direct "source" has been located, it is fairly obvious where Browning might have found hints, if hints were needed for so apt an invention.

Mrs. Orr's Handbook, which "has . . . advantage of having been corrected by Browning himself,"<sup>1</sup> says only, "He is turning over some pithy expedients, when the vesper bell cuts short his meditations."<sup>2</sup> An echo of Arabic is possible; it was an occult language, and in another poem, "An Epistle of Karshish," the name Karshish seems to have been chosen because its Arabic meaning exactly suited that physician's description of himself.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps more likely, if the syllables are not simply coinages, is some sort of play with Latin or Hebrew. Browning studied Hebrew in later years, and in his "Jochanan Hakkadosh" attempted some mystification with the language.

DeVane, in 1934, offered this note: "generally assumed to represent the sounds of the vesper bells, but it may be the beginning of an imprecation against Lawrence."<sup>4</sup> The next year, in the first edition of the Handbook, he was more cautious;

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<sup>1</sup>W. C. DeVane, ~~Browning's Parleyings: The Autobiography of a Mind~~, (New York, 1964), p. 259.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Sutherland Orr, ~~Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning~~, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1886), p. 252.

<sup>3</sup>Maureen Wright, "Karshish," ~~Times Literary Supplement~~, (May, 1953), p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>W. C. DeVane, ~~The Shorter Poems of Robert Browning~~, (New York, 1945).



'There have been many ingenious but no satisfactory explanations of "Hy, Zy, Hine!" Perhaps the words echo the ringing of the vesper bell, which causes the monk to cross himself and begin his 'Hail Mary, full of Grace.'<sup>1</sup> In the second edition (1955, p. 114) he mentions both possibilities but makes no choice.

The poem, a favorite anthology piece, nearly equals "My Last Duchess" as a short early example of Browning's method in the dramatic monologue. In the sunlight of late afternoon Brother Lawrence is pottering amiably about his plants in the monastery courtyard. In the shadows of the cloister another monk stands glowering at him and muttering venomous contempt. As Brother Lawrence waters his "damned flower-pots," every movement about the garden is an offense. Every remembered trifle of daily conduct is an insult: harmless bits of refectory conversation rankle in the memory, he is both too careful in washing his dish and spoon, and too careless about formalities like making a cross of his knife and fork. Sins of the speaker are transferred to the man he hates: Brother Lawrence is lewdly attracted by women outside the wall (but conceals his wishes); he might be lured into lust by the indecent pictures in the speaker's French novel. For more direct measures, supposing Brother Lawrence were near

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<sup>1</sup> DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 103.

death, perhaps he could be tricked into a heretical utterance and thereby damned.<sup>1</sup> But this is idle; Brother Lawrence is in disgustingly good health. Why not enlist the direct aid of the devil? By means of a faulty contract, it should be easy to escape Satan's power until

Blasted lay that rose-acacia  
We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine . . .  
'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia,  
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r -- you swine!

The grotesque monosyllables may well have been the beginning of a forbidden ritual utterance--not seriously, of course, in the daylight, but as a test of memory and a satisfying way to swear at Brother Lawrence. The vesper hour interrupts this impious exercise, and with no change of mood we slip mechanically into formal recitation of the appropriate service.

Such dabbling in black magic is patently in character. The speaker's malice is intense enough to lead him into any practicable way of destroying Brother Lawrence. His own piety is clearly shown to be a hollow matter of triple sips of orange juice, symbolic placing of his cutlery, and dutiful routine observance of the canonical hours. Complacently sure that this is enough, he either perceives no lust, anger, or envy in himself, or thinks they are cancelled by the white-magical observances

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<sup>1</sup>Fred A. Dudley, "Hy, Zy, Hine," Research Studies of the State College of Washington, XXV (1957), p. 63.

that constitute his religion. To contemplate outwitting Satan, and for the moment at least to confine himself to safe daylight muttering, fits exactly the rest of the poem.

As an echo of bell-notes the syllables seem curiously inept. English "ding-dong," French "din-dan," Spanish "tin-tan" might have served our speaker's mood. His mood is hardly such that he can be supposed to shift instantly into fanciful imitative mouthings; and had Browning meant to throw in original bell syllables of his own, could he not have done better than "Hy, Zy, Hine?" When he employed onomatopoeia it was not usually subtle or obscure:

Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife  
 . . . a wee white mouse./ Weke, weke . . .<sup>1</sup>

There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling  
 Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,  
 Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,  
 Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering.<sup>2</sup>

Even the "Gr-r-r" in the last line of the poem, although a little awkward to read, is perfectly obvious in meaning.

Magical practices are referred to in Browning's poems often enough to show that one of his characters may well try out an incantation of such an act is appropriate. The poet who harangues the title character in "Pauline" speaks of himself as one "Who

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<sup>1</sup>"Fra Lippo Lippi," ll. 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>"The Pied Piper of Hamelin," ll. 197-200.

learned the spell which can call up the dead." Abt Vogler mentions that Solomon "named the ineffable Name" to compel the service of "Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk." Mr. Sludge, "the medium," holds forth at some length about the "Great and Terrible Name" and the tradition of its occult power.<sup>1</sup>

His acquaintance with occult writings is an editorial commonplace. To his first work, "Pauline," he prefaced a long Latin quotation from Cornelius Agrippa, making what he later called an "absurdly pretentious" introduction, about the power and mystery of the work to follow. His next publication, "Paracelsus," is directly concerned with another famous occultist and is in some degree indebted to the elder Browning's copy of Paracelsus' Opera Omnia. In his own long note to the poem he translates a French biographical sketch of Paracelsus, and in footnoting a reference to the Abbot Trithem speaks of "his staunch friend Cornelius Agrippa" and again quotes from the Latin "dedicatory epistle prefixed to the treatise De Occult. Philosoph . . ."<sup>2</sup>

How closely he studied such treatises, how seriously they must be regarded as "sources," is questionable. Clearly he had had them in his hands, which is enough to have reminded him of the

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<sup>1</sup> Dudley, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>P. G. Kenyon, editor, Works of Robert Browning, (London, 1912), p. 171.

long history and semi-secret prestige of occult practices. But surely the outright invention of three bizarre syllables was not beyond the powers of Robert Browning. An exact source may exist, perhaps, in some Black Mass prayerbook or manual of magic. It is evident, however, that from his first published book in 1833 to one of his last in 1887, Browning alluded now and then to the superstitious practices of occultists. This together with contextual plausibility, suggests that "Hy, Zy, Hine" is not an echo of the sound of bells but is a "charm's beginning," tentatively tried out with a view to possible use, some midnight, in dead earnest.

In seeking to injure the simple Brother Lawrence, "my heart's abhorrence," the speaker in the poem conceives a subtle attack on Brother Lawrence's faith when he refers to the great text in Galatians.

Scholars have, of course, sought to find this "great text in Galatians." The text most generally offered is Galatians 5:19-21, which enumerates seventeen, not twenty-nine, "works of the flesh": adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and idolatry, to name only five. The only dissent from this opinion which I was able to find is noted by Edward Berdce, who takes the "great text" to be Galatians 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which



are written in the book of the law to do them."<sup>1</sup>

Though Berdoo's explanation is perhaps more to the point than the other, both are unsatisfactory, because they suppose that Brother Lawrence is to be caught, at death, in some grievous offense against morals. Yet everything in the passage points in the opposite direction. Browning speaks of tripping on a text which entails "damnations" and of the possibility of trapping Brother Lawrence in Manichaeism.<sup>2</sup> It is rather clear that Browning had in mind the great division of theology into dogma and morals. In this stanza, the plot against Brother Lawrence directed against his faith, is based on dogma. In the next stanza, with its mention of "the woeful sixteenth print" of "my scrofulous French novel," the plot is against Brother Lawrence's morals.

Thus, it is dogma with which we are concerned here, and texts containing lists of moral offenses are quite beside the point. Browning's monk intends to demand of Brother Lawrence just as he is dying, the explanation of a difficult text; if Brother Lawrence deviates one hair's breadth from the orthodox explanation he will incur a "damnation." Damnation, in Roman

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Berdoo, A Browning Cyclopaedia, (New York: G. Allen, 1898), p. 473.

<sup>2</sup>Arnold Williams, "Browning's 'Great Text in Galatians,'" Modern Language Quarterly, X (1949), p. 89.

theology, is the technical term for the condemnation of a heretical proposition.<sup>1</sup>

For such a purpose, a few parts of the Bible are better suited than the Epistle to the Galatians. The second and third chapters, especially the third, abound in various texts. Various theological treatises contain lists of a great many errors concerning the displacement of the old law by the new. Proof cited in these treatments quite often comes from Galatians 3.

The task of finding an exact text in Galatians which involves precisely twenty-nine condemnations is not easy. Theological errors are not generally listed according to the text to which they pertain, but according to the author of the errors or to the subject, in this case the old law. However, somewhere in the vast mass of theological literature there may be a document that exactly lists twenty-nine errors or heresies founded on a misinterpretation of some text in Galatians.

If so, the text is probably the third chapter. To speculate boldly, it could easily be Galatians 3:21: "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteous-

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<sup>1</sup>The Manicheans, followers of Mani, a Syrian (fourth century) who tried to combine extracanonical doctrines with Christianity. See Miriam K. Starkman, "The Manichee in the Cloister: A Reading of Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,'" Modern Language Notes, LXXXV (1950), pp. 399-405.



ness should have been by the law." At least the text is a good sample of the sort of theological trap to be laid for the simple Brother Lawrence.

If we accept this explanation as the proper one, we get a somewhat changed conception of the speaker. We have already seen him as a Pharasaical precisionist, who frustrates the Arian by drinking his orange juice in three sips and commemorates sotoriologial doctrine by laying knife and fork crosswise. Now he appears as a hair-splitting theologian, completely acquainted with all the subtle distinctions of dogma. This compound extreme of ritualism and exaggerated intellectualism is the complete antithesis of Browning's notion of true religion.

The Victorians valued Browning as a poet of doctrine, whereas modern critics, even when sympathetic to Browning's art, are frequently suspicious of his philosophy. They praise Browning for his psychology and style and try to discount his ideas. But if the Browning Society was often a cause of embarrassment to the poet, there is no question that Browning would have been more alarmed by the misplaced emphasis of the "New Critics."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W. David Shaw, "Character and Philosophy in 'Fra Lippo Lippi,'" Victorian Poetry, II (1964), pp. 127-132.

A Victorian like Arthur Symons may have exaggerated the importance of ideas in poetry when he praised Browning's characters for their power to think.<sup>1</sup> We cannot be content to reevaluate Browning merely from the dominant point of view of our own time.

Browning the dramatist-philosopher, the poet of "Fra Lippo Lippi," is confronted by a difficult problem one we must first understand if we are to appreciate the triumph of the poem. It is important to remember that Browning the thinker, the Victorian, philosopher of art, religion and morality, believes in his ideas, and is eager to persuade his readers. But there is also Browning the psychologist, the dramatist, who was a genius in the monologue convention, and who knew that "doctrine" without "art" meant dullness. As an artist-philosopher, his object is to combine the two roles.

"Fra Lippo Lippi" was first published in Men and Women in 1863. Except for a few changes the text has been the same since 1885.<sup>2</sup>

Browning conceived the notion of the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" on a visit to the Accademia delle belle Arti in Florence. While there he saw the "Coronation of the Virgin," the painting which

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Symons, "Is Browning Dramatic?" Browning Society Papers, VII (1885), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>W. C. DeVane, A Browning Handbook, (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1955), p. 216.

Fra Lippo describes at the end of the poem. At the same time that they were visiting the galleries of Florence, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were also reading Le Vite de' Pittori by Georgio Vasari. In his book Vasari wrote of the lives and notable works of seventy well-known artists and architects of that time. Browning doubted much of the information Vasari had written of Fra Lippo Lippi. To verify Vasari's statement of Lippi's birth, Browning consulted Filippo Baldunucci's Delle Notizie de' Professori del Disegno de Cimabue.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Edward Dowden in 1856, Browning wrote:

I was wide awake when I made Fra Lippo the elder practitioner of Art (than Masaccio: e.e., Hulking Tom), if not, as I believe, the earlier born. I looked into the matter carefully long ago, and long before I thought of my own poem, from my interest in the Brancacci frescoes, indeed in all early Florentine art. I believe the strange confusions and mistakes of Vasari are set tolerably right now; you may know, he took Lippino the son for Lippo the father. I suppose Lippo to have been born, as Baldunucci says, about 1400.<sup>2</sup>

Browning found in the Renaissance painter a very sympathetic character; one like himself, highly individualistic, suffering from the tyranny of artistic convention, and like himself energetic, and instinct with seemingly well thought-out aesthetic opinions which chimed with Browning's own.

Our first impression of Fra Lippo Lippi is not very favorable. Caught in the wrong section of town, obviously tipsy, he attempts

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<sup>1</sup>DeVane, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas J. Wise, editor, Letters of Robert Browning, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 103-104.

with jocularly and crudeness to bribe, threaten and wheedle his way out of an embarrassing situation. The whole situation must be as definitely conceived as if a part of a play. The reference to "Cosimo of the Medici" should be spoken very suggestively, and we should feel with Lippo the consequent relief that resulted, and the dismay also of the police on finding they have in hand an artist friend of the greatest man in Florence. "Boh! you were best!" means that the hands of the policeman have been released from his throat.

The opening of the poem requires a conception of night and a sudden surprise:

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!  
 You need not clap your torches to my face.  
 Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk.

These words cannot be given excitedly or dramatically without realizing the role the police are playing, their rough handling of Lippo, and their discovery that they have seized a monk at an unseemly hour of the night and not in a respectable part of the city. We must identify ourselves with Lippo and feel the torches of the police in the face, and the hand "fiddling" on his throat. The situation and the terms are symbolic. The street and monastery represent apparently contradictory forces, both religious and artistic, which Lippo is challenged to reconcile. They pose a tension between sensuous beauty and animal passion, on the one hand, and self-abnegation and spiritual discipline on the

other; between what on the surface seems artistic naturalism.

Lippo is obliged to defend himself in an argument which is both an honest attempt to attain a spiritual and artistic synthesis and a rationalization for his shortcomings. Yet the poem is dramatic. Lippo is keenly aware of the street-monastery conflict which finds appropriate expression in situation and action. The poem is never static, but opening with a situation which presents the conflict, it moves steadily toward its dramatic resolution, the description of the "Coronation of the Virgin."

All this dramatic action, however, must be secondary to the conception of the character of the monk-painter. Almost immediately, in the very midst of the excitement, possibly with reference to the very fellow who had grasped his throat, the artist, with the true spirit of a painter, exclaims:

He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!  
Just such a face!

and as the chief of the squad of police sends his watchmen away,  
the painter's heart once more awakens and discovers a picture,  
and he says, almost to himself:

I'd like his face--  
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door  
With the pike and lantern, --for the slave that holds  
John Baptist's head a'dangle by the hair  
With one hand ('Look you, now, as who should say)  
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!  
It's not your chance, to have a bit of chalk,  
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!  
Yes, I' the painter, since you style me so.  
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,



You know them, and they take you? like enough!  
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye--  
 Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.  
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.

Thus the monologue is introduced, and with a captain of a night-watch in Florence as listener, this great painter, who tried to paint things truly, pours out his critical reflections:

A fine way to paint soul, by painting body  
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further  
 And can't fare worse.

This great reformer in art is made by Browning to declare why men should paint

God's works--paint anyone, and count it crime  
 To let a truth slip by.

While the action proceeds, the poem is enriched by a series of intersecting dialectical movements. The structure of the poem, the shifts in Lippo's mood and temper, and the backward and forward movement of the argument signal the violent nature of his conflicts. We move from jocularity to seriousness; from ladies of question to saintly beauty, from artistic integrity to compromise, from moral indignation to complacency, from defiance to deference, from pathos to humor, from emotional effusion to calm logical argument. Particularly effective are the violent transitions from, for example, spring nights and carnival time to the mew and its saint; from light, ribald songs to Saint Jerome knocking at his poor old breast to subdue the flesh. Lippo is inwardly divided.

He is, indeed, primarily sensual. Even he makes no effort to explain away his presence on the street, and one knows that he would be less satisfied with hand-holding. There is physicality in his speech. His diction, sharp and clear, displays a firm grasp on the exterior world. Much of his language is earthy and sensuous. His imagery, too, is dominantly concrete.

To see Lippo as merely sensuous, however, is to see him only in part. Talk of the life force, for example, introduces a series of paradoxes: the street and the Garden, the loose ladies and the Virgin, animal indulgence and holy reverence. He speaks of the hunger-pinch, meat and drink, and good serge robes as only a part of man's needs.

In spite of his suggestive nudgings and winkings, underneath his blustering he is genuinely embarrassed by the subterfuge which the restrictions of his order induce him to take. Normally sensuous, he rebels against monastic vows:

You should not take a fellow eight years old  
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.

The pull of life is too strong for him:

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,  
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream.

Out of this dilemma grows an artistic and moral apology which reacts against the vivid initial impression of Lippo's sensuality. Together they create for dramatic purposes a dialectical tension



which reveals Lippo as not merely a sensualist but a thoughtful, though frustrated and often compromising creative artist.

After the first few moments, after the back-slapping and bribing, Lippo's mood changes and he argues in earnest. Caught in an embarrassing situation, he is forced to develop his defense on the spot. His argument, therefore, is not formal and fixed as that in "Saul" seems to be, but alive, developing, dramatic. Its structural wholeness results from Lippo's intellectual and emotional stability and his eagerness to communicate, characteristics everywhere apparent.

Repetition and rhythm, devices which might readily convey sensuousness, function importantly to stress idea. Alliteration serves a number of ends. In the following lines, alliteration of key words points up important meanings, at the same time subordinates others:

Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter  
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight, --three  
    slim shepes,  
And a face that look up . . . zooks, sir, flesh  
    and blood,  
That's all I'm made off! Into shreds it went,  
Curtain and counterpane coverlet,  
All the bed-furniture--a dozen knots,  
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,  
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,  
And after them. I came up with the fun  
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met.

Alliteration serves the dual purpose of achieving conversational cadence and of emphasizing thought. Often alliteration heightens



prise at being caught and also the intensity of feeling which he has long curbed but which now at last, under the influence of wine and with rational excuse, he releases. They contrast with the more sustained, more deliberate statements of the middle and latter sections of the poem. Their fragmentariness suggests Lippo's lack of inhibition, the intensity of thought and feeling that throbs in his head and presses for expression. Though always coherent, the sentences in the earlier part are less consciously formulated than those in which he rationalizes his failures. The early part of the poem is constantly interrupted by interspersed bits of sun, the last of these appearing two-thirds of the way through the poem. Their obvious sensuality and their suggestiveness represent one side of Lippo's character and supply by implication information not directly given in the poem. In contrast to the other sentences, they are initially more frequent but more sustained, more lengthy. As Lippo becomes increasingly sober, subduing his sensuality, they appear less often and in more fragmentary form. Further, they suggest Lippo's changing attitude. The first and the last refer to death, but with entirely different implications and in a way which, when the two are placed in juxtaposition, becomes especially meaningful:

Flower o' the broom,  
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!

makes life and love synonymous. The last, "Death for us all, and

our own life for each," counterpoints against the thoughtless hedonism a sense of life's deeper meaning, even of man's responsibility.

The effect of cadence upon tone, texture, and meaning in the poem is apparent especially in the following:

Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take  
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,  
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?  
Why one, sire, who is lodging with a friend  
Three streets off -- he's a certain . . . how  
d'ye call?  
Master--ah . . . Cosimi of the Medici,  
I' the house that caps the corner! Bohl you were best!

Here Browning's faithfulness to the actual movement of the speaking voice shapes a medium in which matter is enhanced by structure. The impulsive character of the sentences precisely reflects Lippo's initial mood.

Lippo's speech is colloquial also in that it contains no words ordinarily omitted in conversation. There is no padding for the sake of conventional meter. He represents his case with conviction and directness. His aim is the clear and sharp communication of ideas.

There is an ironic inversion of values in the one well-known metaphor which Lippo borrows from the Old Testament. "And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over," he says, referring to physical rather than spiritual fullness. Aware of antagonisms between street and monastery, Lippo searches for a unifying principle. He is not intellectually blind nor merely confused; he

does not occupy middle ground for lack of convictions; he is not an opportunist shifting positions as self-interest dictates. At his best, he thinks honestly, clearly, creatively, and in the blurring of division lines he points toward reconciliation of two areas of experience considered irreconcilable by his peers.

Lippo's purpose is integration, and for such a task he is naturally endowed. He is fully alive, intellectually, emotionally, and sensuously. Two passages, from many possible ones, illustrates his method of thinking. Both pose questions illustrative of his intellectual honesty and his desire to arrive at truth:

Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head--  
 Mine's shaved--a monk, you say--the sting's in that!  
 If Master Cosimo announced himself  
 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!  
 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!

What would men have? Do they like grass or no--  
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing  
 Settled forever one way.

Discarding conventional thinking, he introduces moral issues of revolutionary possibilities.

Influenced by his environment, he formulates ideas from recalcitrant materials. His early life on the streets gives him insight beyond that of the ordinary monk; and perhaps for this reason his experiences with the order was left upon him a less traditional, more personal imprint. A grotesque mixture of monk



and man, he is peculiarly fitted for the task of reconciliation. He has retained his close contact with the world, and his awareness of spiritual values--in spite of his little respect for monasticism. His problem is to achieve integration in his painting, to bring together successfully body and soul, nature and spirit.

Perhaps his most distinguishing characteristic is his creativity. It marks his thought both as artist and moralist. His creative mind finds outlet particularly in his use of words. Frequent ungrammatical formations and constructions show his disregard for convention and his willingness to experiment. Word creations and compounds suggest his inventiveness. His compoundings demonstrate particularly his intellectual vitality and ingenuity; they are products of a synthesizing mind.

Lippo uses his capacities to achieve, partly, the reconciliation which he seeks. He asserts that all of life is good and that each part of it can lead to a fuller realization of God. He accepts it all, flesh and spirit, and in protest against the monastic dichotomy insists that man achieves his highest development through a process of inclusion and synthesis which dedicates both body and soul to the best of which they are capable.

His artistic concepts develop naturally from this interpretation of life. Nature's revelation of God becomes unmistakably clear when it is interpreted and ordered by a creative artist:

Art was given for that;  
 God uses us to help each other so,  
 Lending our minds out.

Thus, the artist converts nature into humanly significant forms, discovering God in the process. His purpose is to illuminate the mind, to order the emotions, to sharpen the senses. He treats not a philosophy, a code, a dogma, but a set of values, relationships, meanings:

For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love  
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
 And so they are better, painted--better to us,  
 Which is the same thing.

The end of art is understanding and sympathy, not external action:

Why, for this  
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones,  
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,  
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.

The issue clarifies when we contrast what Lippo defends with what he attacks. He protests against one-dimensional symbolism, abstract appeals for morality, allegorical representations such as those which cover the walls of medieval churches. Ecclesiastical art of the Middle Ages, often beautiful in conception and execution, was far removed from flesh-and-blood reality. Its purpose was to teach, to call upon men to separate themselves from a sinful world. Embracing the whole of God's creation as good Lippo uses art to teach a love for the world that would seem blasphemous to a medieval theologian. The world, instead of being a snare, becomes to him a



declaration of God's glory, and his purpose is to show that glory by painting common, ordinary things in an honest, realistic manner. To Lippo a proper appreciation of Nature is sacramental in a way that contradicts a great deal of medieval teaching. Actually, his basic quarrel with the monastery is theological even though he discusses it in artistic terms.

From the nobility of his conception, however, he lapses at the end of the poem into a reality less lofty. We are checked at the point of persuasion by Lippo himself:

It's naturel a poor monk out of bounds  
Should have his apt word to excuse himself.

As penance for his night out he pledges to paint a picture, a description of which brings us once more to recognize his paradox. His motives are mixed; it is conceived as a peace offering, yet, in contemplation of it his imagination kindles and he is swept far beyond his initial objectives. Jocularly gives way to earnestness as he visions a host of pious, pure saints, into whose company, he though unworthy, is drawn. They are attending, significantly, the coronation of the Virgin. The painting becomes a kind of penitential office through which Lippo is cleansed and made a part of holy communion. "A sweet angelic slip of a thing (his divine mistress) . . . puts out a soft palm" and leads him into the "celestial presence." But clay that he is, Lippo cannot long abide the rarified atmosphere. The spread of wings is trans-

formed into a kirtle under which he, until disturbed by the hothead husband, plays hot cockles with the angelic form now become something less.

This picture is a symbol of Lippo's whole experience. Perhaps he lacks the necessary moral strength and courage to effect a more nearly perfect integration than this last effort achieves. Perhaps the end which he envisions is too difficult for any man. His final artistic compromise, his last roguish remarks before disappearing into the morning light bring our minds back once more to the beginning of the poem. And we know that there will be more paintings which serve as peace offerings to his order, more night escapades, and more internal struggle and intellectual searching. The poem begins in darkness with the face of Lippo only dimly lighted by the watchman's torch but as the painter gropes his way toward a clearer understanding of himself and his mission, the morning dawns murky, its dimness a symbol of Lippo's partly successful, partly unsuccessful, attempt to integrate monastery and street into one clear vision.

Perhaps the most devastating of the three churchmen in this discussion is the Bishop in "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church." Browning presents to us a man whose sole aim in life was to acquire material wealth, possessions, but who also was devoured by a never-ending desire to attain immortality.

The poem, originally titled, "The Bishop at St. Praxed's," was published in February, 1845, in Hood's Magazine. In March of the same year it was included in Dramatic Romances and Lyrics entitled, "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church (Rome, 15--)." Browning has written to F. A. Ward that the poem was one of his favorites, "and just the thing for the time--what with the Oxford Business. . ."<sup>1</sup> There have been several alterations in the poem, but since 1849, when some new lines were added, it has remained unchanged, with the exception of minor corrections in punctuation.

Browning probably wrote the poem after his second trip to Italy in the fall and winter of 1844. His basis for writing of the Bishop was probably derived from his visit to St. Praxed's Church in Rome. There he saw the lavish decoration and the tomb of Cardinal Cative. F. G. Kenyon states that it is possible that one of Tennyson's poems "St. Simeon Stylites," was a pattern for the structure and content of "The Bishop Orders his Tomb."<sup>2</sup> They are both dramatic monologues in which one man is requesting sainthood from God and another man is bargaining with his sons for immortality.<sup>3</sup>

The irony of the poem arises from the juxtaposition of two ways of seeing and two standards of values. The poem is not didactic for any point of view or code of behavior; that is, the discrepancies do not exist between Browning's obviously "right"

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<sup>1</sup>W. C. DeVane and K. L. Knickerbocker, editors, New Letters, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1905), pp. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup>F. G. Kenyon, editor, Robert Browning and Alfred Domett, (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>DeVane, p. 167.

world and the Bishop's obviously "wrong" one. Mr. Roma King says that in this respect it differs from "A Modest Proposal," in which Swift established the conflict as existing between himself and a somewhat indefinite opposition. We are always conscious of the writer's presence and feel the force of his moral indignation.<sup>1</sup>

In the poem as in "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning's personality has been, to quote Joyce, "refined out of existence," and the poem is permitted to speak for itself. The result is objective drama rather than subjective didacticism. The discrepancies which produce the irony, then, must exist within the poem itself. They are provided primarily by diverse ways of seeing the Bishop of his world. First, there is the view rising from the facts of the poem; then, there is the narrower, more subjective one of the Bishop himself. That these two views are not correlative is immediately apparent. Although the Bishop is not entirely free of conflict, the major discrepancy occurs between his view of himself and the external reality.

Browning's task was to write the poem so that the two points of view would be precisely communicated in an effective, compelling manner. The representation of the Bishop and his objective world was the easier task, accomplished by a selection of

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<sup>1</sup>Roma A. King, *The Bow and the Lyre*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 53.

significant incident, a use of full, rich details and precise language. To convey the Bishop's subjective view of himself was more difficult. The Bishop was confused, a fact dramatically revealed by the variance between his fully conscious and his semi-conscious speech. In the former, we see the Bishop as he habitually thought of himself and as he faced his world, "popes, cardinals, and priests." In the latter we penetrate a region strange even to the Bishop and glimpse there the half-formed thoughts, imprecise emotions, and moral confusion, as he suggests: "In St. Praxed, the blunder as to the sermon is the result of the dying man's haziness; he would not reveal himself as he does but for that."<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to underestimate the fullness and complexity of Browning's treatment of the Bishop. As a character, he lives in a smaller world and is less complexly motivated than Fra Lippo Lippi, lacking the intellectual vigor and the moral concern on the one, and the inner conflicts of the other. In this respect he is more like Jonson's characters than Shakespeare's. However, his presentation in the poem is complete and satisfying. Eliot distinguishes between the "surface qualities" of Beaumont and Fletcher's work and Ben Jonson's by saying that the former's is superficial with a vacuum behind it, but that Jonson's superficialities

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<sup>1</sup>W. J. Rolfe and Heloise E. Hersey, Selected Poems of Robert Browning, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), p. 195.



are solid.<sup>1</sup> So with Browning's Bishop. His world is limited, but it is fully conceived and convincingly communicated; intellectually and emotionally the Bishop is a logical part of it. He escapes being burlesque, as do many of Jonson's characters, because in relation to his world he is not incongruous. The superficialities, we recognize, are in the Bishop as a man, not in the poem.

Pride is a distinguishing characteristic of the Bishop, and an important ironic tension arises from the disparity between his imagined and his obviously real status. The most frequently repeated words in his vocabulary are "I" and "mine." His sense of exaggerated self-importance isolates him from other people, whom he fails to distinguish from things. Either they are objects to use or barriers to overcome. "A Jew's head cut off at the nape" is simply a simile to designate the size of a piece of lapis lazuli. He speaks of God as a statue and of himself in his immortal state as a piece of sculpture. The mother and the sons have "eyes as a lizard's quick." Conversely, he gives life to the inanimate: "a sunbeam's sure to lurk," "impoverished frieze," "starved design."

Isolated by his pride, the Bishop feels no great need for human relationships. The Bishop is a mere collector. The sons'

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<sup>1</sup>T. S. Elliot, *The Sacred Wood*, (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 116.

mother was a major acquisition along with his villas, baths, manuscripts, and art objects. She, of course, was forbidden him by the laws of his church, and the sons were illegitimate; but neither she nor they created for him a moral problem. He regretted only that she was greedy, a charge that has at least two implications. In context, the Bishop seems ironically to accuse her of loving material things. More obviously, having loved and got her body, he rationalizes that she tried to get his soul, a word which itself is ambiguous. At the conclusion of the poem his single comfort is that he won her, not because he loved her but because she was fair and Gandolf envied him.

He shows the same insentiveness toward his sons. They are pleasant reminders of his triumph over Gandolf, and he hopes to use them to achieve his last great desire. Significantly, with only one exception they remain unnamed, impersonal. Their unresponsiveness to their father's request must reflect his long disinterest in them. The lines "Nay, boys, ye love me . . ." and "Sons, all have I bequeathed to you . . ." are ironic. The Bishop has felt no need for companionship, and his contempt for people makes his dependence upon his sons at the conclusion of the poem especially meaningful. His appeal to Anselm suggests his desperation, and the son's unfeeling rebuff indicates how little his father had cultivated human relationships.



There is an undercurrent of sardonic humor in the poem, a characteristic which became increasingly important in Browning's poetry as he matured. The Bishop's hatred for Gandolf, obviously becomes ludicrous. His grotesque pride, objectified in the elaborate tomb, contrasts sharply with the futility of the opening line of the poem, "Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!" the meaning of which the Bishop only vaguely apprehends.

Scattered throughout the poem are utterances by which the Bishop seeks to hold the wandering attention of his sons, particularly "Draw round my bed," "Draw close," "There, leave me, there!" and "Well, go! I bless ye." The movement toward and then away from his bed provides a kind of dramatic framework within the context of which the Bishop imparts various matters to his sons. It is the imagery of ritual which seems to me to make this movement symbolic.

The egotism of the Bishop is manifested by his desire to be the center of attention. His sons, gathered around his bed, are implicitly compared to "those nine columns round me, two and two, / The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands . . . ." the columns which the Bishop hopes will surround his last resting place, this being anticipated by the bed. Later, a second identification is made: the bed becomes an altar, and the Bishop has not hesitated to compare himself as a possible object of worship. Here

the Bishop sees himself not only immortalized as a shepherd, but as one who has already participated in a type of pagan reincarnation. While he lies "dying by degrees," the physical erosion of his body in a temporal scheme is contrasted with the spiritual breaking and eating of the sacramental bread of, in fact, God's body, in an eternal scheme. This contrast is extended in the gradual diminishing of the candles around the bed which, in the ritual of the Mass, remain "steady." It is interesting to note that these lines are among the most regular in the poem, where the calm repetitive use of the introductory conjunction "and" suggests the reiterated ceremony of which the Bishop hopes to be a continual witness, and in which the ceremony of eating the bread is not only an eternalization but an arresting of his own present state of gradual, irrevocable decay. This present decay, in the Bishop's eyes, is hastened by the maltreatment of him by his sons, whom he regards as almost Satanic. At their hands he feels himself undergoing a pagan sacrifice: "For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude to death. . ."

But the Bishop, before reverting to the final outburst against Gandolf, brings this odd ritual to a close. He orders a portion of the candles to be extinguished, "Few tapers there," and commands his sons to go, giving them his blessing, and saying, ". . . giving, turn your backs/Ay, like departing altar mini-

strants." The Bishop has indeed become, in his own eyes, priestly significance. The reality of his failure to hold their attention is contrasted with the idealization of their function. This, together with the fusing of the images of bed, tomb, and altar, of pagan "eating," and the transference of the sacramental imagery to a specific situation, constitutes the core of the poem.

His preoccupation in this life has been materialistic and sensuous; and his achievements may be viewed from either his own perspective or from the more objective one provided by the whole poem. Eventually, of course, they must be viewed from both, for the poem's meaning lies in the tension created by these disparate views. The Bishop's distorted sense of values, intensely acquisitive spirit, and inflexible will provide another paradoxical contrast both to the first line of the poem and to the situation at the conclusion.

The Bishop is a man of external brilliance, displaying catholic learning in his allusion to ancient literature and art, in his cultivated speech, and in his vocabulary, which is learned rather than colloquial. Characteristically, he uses such words as "limb," "carrion," and "conflagration," sharp contrasts to Lippo's more homely diction. He has a wide range of artistic interests, admiring the mosaics of angels, the paintings, the statuary in the church, a good line of poetry, the beauty of the

ritual. A learned vocabulary, formal tone, rhetorical elegance, balanced and periodic sentences, and Latin syntax give polish and elegance to his speech.

The Bishop's choice of imagery, lacking in structural complexity helps define his limitations. A subconscious expression of his deference to crude force and power, "As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse," "Like God the Father's globe on both hands," "stabbed me with ingratitude," it is an ironic counterpart to his own weakness. Like other elements of structure, it is primarily sensuous, displaying his fascination with the physiological, "Jew's head cut off at the nape," "Madonna's breast," "great smooth marbly limbs," the plastic, the tactile. His concern with these things when he himself is on the point of dissolution provides irony as well as an explanation of his desire to be embodied in a tomblike world.

The scene itself is symbolic. The Bishop, arms folded, feet outstretched, lies on his couch with the bedclothes for a mort-cloth dropping around him in laps and folds of sculptor's work. His sons, like columns, stand round his bed. There is in the situation a rigidity almost as if the old Bishop were actually as well as figuratively dead. As the poem develops, we sense a merging of the symbolic into the actual, with the important reservation that the imaginary will never materialize.

Light is used here to suggest inner drama much as it is in "Fra Lippo Lippi." The Bishop is dying by slow degrees as the night wears on, with his bed-chamber lighted by tapers. Whatever vision he may claim is fitful and uncertain; his phantom-like being may at any moment be lost in darkness. As his hope wanes and death approaches, the candles are partly extinguished.

In the passages spoken in semi-consciousness an inner superficiality parallels his surface brilliance. He seems only vaguely aware of the meaning of his quotations until circumstances force upon him the fact that life is vanity and man is mortal. The most revealing passage in the poem is:

The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,  
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance  
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,  
The Savior at his sermon on the mount,  
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan  
Ready to twitch the Nymphs last garment off,  
And Moses with the tablets . . . .

Here pagan and Christian elements are indiscriminately brought together in a manner which to the moral judgment appears incongruous. The confusion seems largely to cancel what might otherwise appear the import of the questions, spoken also in semi-consciousness. The Bishop, however, apparently recognizes no inconsistencies, accepting all, as appropriate subjects for art. Thus the projected bas-relief is a symbolic expression of his standard of values, suggesting the superficial hold Christianity



had on him. That it appears confused is consistent with the traits which have already been noted in his conduct. It should be stated again that Browning is not discussing morals didactically. Here, as in "the Statue and the Bust," he is concerned with a standard of values primarily as a psychological stimulus which produces action revelatory of character and situation.

Irony serves in the poem as the unifying function. It provides a means of bringing together the diverse ways of seeing. The central ironies result from a juxtaposition of the Bishop's high evaluation of himself and his actual insignificance when he comes to die; his illusion that he has controlled great wealth and the final discovery in the defection of his sons that his ownership is only temporary, his materialistic one-dimensional view of life and his grotesque desire for a kind of immortality, his pride in the exercise of authority and the realization of the ineffectualness of his "order."

It is questionable whether at the beginning of the poem the Bishop realizes the full significance of the words "Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!" for with apparent unawareness he proceeds directly to describe plans for an elaborate tomb. Both the title and the opening line counterpoint the Bishop's illusion against the reality. In the first, he is unaware of his limited power; in the second, of his own weakness. The poem provides



the dramatic development of his discovery of both.

One of the ironic devices used throughout is the Bishop's quotations. They are precisely applicable to him, but any real meaning which they might have has been so submerged that it fails to operate on a conscious level. Like the priestly blessing which he gives his sons, they are echoes of ecclesiastical duties performed emptily in the past. Appearing only during his semi-conscious moments, they convey more truth than he is able or willing to admit. The lines

Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:  
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?

are followed directly by

Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--  
'Twas ever antique'black I meant!

However, he does not yet realize how much death really will end for him. He displays a characteristic attitude in his reference to his sons' mother:

. . . she is dead beside,  
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since.

Weakness and death belong to his mistress and Gandolf, strength and life to him. He may confuse himself with God but never with other men. It is an embittering blow, therefore, when he is brought at last to acknowledge the common tie, death, with his mistress and Gandolf. His frustrating impotency in the presence

of death causes him to wonder whether life has not been a dream after all. For to him life had meant fighting, having his orders respected and obeyed. Now, in contrast, his strength and power are gone. "Do I live . . . ?" he asks. Passivity is certainly death. The Bishop's concept of life as activity is counterpointed by his actual powerlessness. We have both the Bishop of endless striving and animal activity, and the Bishop fossilized symbolically in marble.

The latter is the more basic and eventually predominates. Faced with the inevitability of death and fearing extinction, he turns to the tomb as a means of preserving his superiority and places his "order" with his sons.

From this point, the tension increases until the Bishop comes partly to realize about himself and the tomb what the reader has known from the beginning. The poem is a dramatic presentation of a self-revelation which forces the Bishop to accept a reality paradoxical to the illusion under which he has lived. More striking than the discrepancy between the tombs is his changing relationship with people and things, particularly with Gandolf. In the beginning he is triumphant and Gandolf is humiliated; in the conclusion the Bishop has been humbled and Gandolf relatively elevated. Gandolf won a minor triumph by dying first and securing for his tomb the best niche in the church, even

though his resting place was marked by paltry onion-stone. "Put me where I may look at him," the Bishop gloats. In contrast, he muses, his tomb will be magnificent, his triumph final and complete, "For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!" Only gradually does he realize that he will not have his wish. Instead of lapis to delight the world, there will only be

Gritstone, a'crumble! Clammy squeres which sweat  
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through--

Instead of reposing in luxury he will be

Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine  
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at.

The last line is the important one. The relative positions of the Bishop and his old enemy have been reversed.

Further, the imagined tomb was a symbol of values which the Bishop had considered enduring. It was to be an appropriate summation of his achievements, embodying his cultural and material wealth. But instead, he receives the same cheap gritstone that marked Gandolf's grave. He attempts to bribe his sons, but contrary to his supposition, in them lies the power of action. At last he discovers what earlier had existed only vaguely in his subconscious: all, indeed, is vanity.

The final irony is in the line "Well, go! I bless ye." The Bishop has one thing in mind and makes the statement lightly. It has been part of his ecclesiastical duty to give empty blessing,

but unwittingly, it is no longer empty. What he once had given nominally he now gives actually. Dying, he leaves "all" to his sons, and by his own definition of the good life he bestows on them the greatest blessing. It is doubly ironic that this, the first genuine blessing he has ever given, brings him no spiritual comfort. In Christian terms I would not suggest that the poem is concerned with presenting a Christian message, the Bishop's failure to realize his ultimate disparity: that he is himself only the shadow of an enduring substance.

It has been argued that Browning's popularity with his contemporaries was largely due to a dual morality which condoned the sins of his characters. For the Bishop meets at Browning's hands with comprehension, pity, and punishment, a punishment more classical than Christian in nature, as the Bishop is more classical than Christian in outlook, or perhaps we can say more neo-classical than either, toning down the tortures of a Tantalus or a Prometheus to an eternity spent oozing through an inferior gravestone subject to the mockery of his hated rival. Browning might sympathize with his sinners, but he never suggests that the offender can or should be allowed to get away with it. Salvation for Browning could only be realized within an ethical framework through repentance, and the Bishop shows no sign of repenting. The last line of the poem is "As still he envied me,

so fair she was!" This text was no casual choice. Scripture for Browning was never mere proverb. He remembers texts in their Biblical contexts. As to the interpretation to be put on Browning's poems, his first words were also his last word, for the quotation is taken from Ecclesiastes 13: 7-8:

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:  
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.  
Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is  
vanity.

As the Bishop is handled with comprehension, pity, and punishment, this dual morality of Browning's is prevalent in Fra Lippo and the speaker of the "Soliloquy." The speaker in the "Soliloquy" is dual in his condemnation of Brother Lawrence, and in his dual attitude of the "Pharasaical precisionist" and the "hair-splitting theologian." Fra Lippo's duality is shown through his monastic order, his position, with his intensity of thought and feeling that throb in his head and are expressed in the actions of his outward life. The Bishop has lived exulting in his position and now must die as other men do: his concept of life as activity is shattered by the realization of his own impotence.

It is this division within the structure of the personality itself Browning stresses in his characterization of these three representatives of organized religion. The duality of the supposed purpose and intent of their lives and duties is con-

trasted with the actuality of their lives. As their reality is exposed they become more like the "weak" common man. Browning brings this development about by having the individual himself show his purpose for existing--his worth to humanity--his reason for being. As stated at the beginning of this study, religion was at the basis of Browning's character and perhaps it was inevitable that he found and seized upon as his own all that was optimistic in Christian theology.

Nevertheless, in the handling of actual conditions and psychological states, Browning is inevitably the poet of paradox and irony. His portrayal of the deceptiveness of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, man's inherent inclination toward self-deception, and his ability to disentangle the diversities produced by life's paradoxes make him the most revolutionary poet of the nineteenth century.



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