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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

SKETCHES OF ROBERT BROWNING'S WOMEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the College of Liberal Arts

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

(Mrs.) Mame Morris Boulware

1929

SKETCHES OF ROBERT BROWNING'S WOMEN

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Girlhood.

No other poet has given to the world such a diversity of woman characters as has Robert Browning. Longing for variety he represents his womanhood, not in classes but by individual differentiation; he portrays the simple, the complex, the subtle, the particular, the impulsive and others--each distinct from the rest.

Browning emphasizes natural charms less than intellectual and moral loveliness. He strives to depict women as they are in themselves. By suggestions of spiritual nature, by delicate workmanship, he sets his feminine character before us. With dexterous versatility he creates type after type, each a character in herself.

Two of the important dramas, *Pippa Passes* and *Columbe's Birthday* are named for women. More than twenty of the poems have titles or suggestions of women's names.

Browning places woman side by side with man. He considers her as important and as interesting, placing her sometimes in situations where she is instrumental in bringing about the catastrophe of the drama. There is no patronage but a candid admission of mutual help and assistance. Again and again it is the feminine character who sees the truth and impresses it upon the men in the story. Some of his women characters are keenly susceptible to the influence of flowers, skies, landscapes; it is from them we get in Browning some descriptive passages that are filled with great beauty.

Most of Browning's heroines are intellectual; many of them

are suffering souls. He interprets life by telling what a common experience may be in a soul's development. Often the portrayal of his women comes from the lips of associates. We feel the presence though we get only glimpses of her now and then.

We should study Browning not because he gives us hidden meanings to be interpreted, and beautiful thoughts, but because in the silent, thoughtful moments, alone with Browning, one gains a sweet reward.

The greatest picture Browning has given us in his poems is that of his beloved wife who is the perfect soul, the "angel of his bosom". This paper does not touch on those poems, because no comment could enhance the picture Browning draws of her charm, her intelligence and her spirit.

Especially charming and tender are Browning's studies of girlhood. They are portrayed in sadness, joyousness, innocence, subtlety and passion. They have their adorable perfections and imperfections. Alive and human, they radiate ardor and inspiration. There is not a character among them that alternates between smiles and tears.

Browning's favorite girlhood characteristics are gaiety, courage and trust. These girls are not merely half-grown women; they wear a nimbus of shining youth and the "white blossoms in their garlands are immortal". They are buds that do not lose their leaves or beauty and fall among the weeds.

Character: Pippa

Poem: Pippa Passes

Browning gives us an occasional song-bird among women; a lyric character, whose exquisite emotion utters itself in song; quick, lyrical outbursts from her joyous child's heart. One of the leading characters in the Girlhood group is happy little Pippa, (short for Felippa), the heroine of Pippa Passes. She is a little Italian working girl "who winds silk the whole year round to earn just bread and milk."

She has but one single holiday in the year, so on this day she rises early, sings to the sunbeams in her wash basin, sings to the purple lily, sings of the happiness that awaits her, sings for any or no reason.

In portraying this lighthearted girl Browning gives us the same child-like trust and simplicity found in Pompilia: a total freedom from any taint of worldliness; an exquisite child who finds through her companionship with bees, birds and flowers the way to know God. Pippa is in love with life: the freedom of the woods, the sunbeams, the leaves and blossoms, the hillsides - these thrill her. Modesty and spontaneity combine in her with an insatiate longing for real experiences. There is an incarnation of love for humanity which at the same time possesses unusual individuality of character.

Pippa with her unseen and unseeing influence is the central figure destined to affect in successive steps four groups of persons whom she pictures to herself as the happiest in Asola: rising slowly from the rapture of guilty love, through the pride of bride and groom, of mother and son, to the happiness of the love that is devoted to the service of the Maker.

Impersonating all these characters in her fancy, she comes upon each of these selected groups at the critical moment and unconsciously her songs cause the turning point in each life: Ottima and her guilty lover are stung to repentance; Luigi, the faint hearted patriot, is nerved to stay the tyrant; Jules, the artist, is taught the lesson of self-sacrifice and of heroic faith in his bride: the Monsignor, the holy priest, is impelled to act from godliness instead of guilty greed.

Pippa's outstanding characteristic is her great purity: she possesses a knowledge of good and evil and her virtue is the result of choice. Her purity covers her like a cloak and unmolested she wanders through the groups of coarse students; even Bluphocks, the villain, dares not approach her directly.

She serves Browning's purpose in teaching the lesson of the importance of unimportant people; the lesson that God knows no distinctions and over rules all things for the best.

Above all she teaches that love raises its standard continually, growing more and more divine, from the shamelessness of Ottima gradually leading upward to reciprocal love between man and

wife, whence it leaps to the unselfish love of mother for child and finally reaches the love of God, the all-satisfying love.

Browning shows that Pippa is better off in her simple, happy near-to-God-through-nature life than if she had come into her inheritance as daughter of Monsignor's brother. Hers is the upward look; the sweet serenity of perfect faith and the largest hopefulness. She is more like a fairy or an angel than like a human being. Unconsciously she is a messenger from heaven to punish the guilty and reward the good.

Browning's doctrines, -there is good in every being, harmony from discord, personality is power, God is love and love is the divine principle of life, -are voiced in this exquisitely dictioned drama.

Pippa's concluding song speaks plainly and simply to those governed by sympathy and love of humanity:

"All service ranks the same with God
With God whose puppets, best and worst
Are we; there is no least nor first."

Character: Balaustion

Poems: "Balaustion's Adventure"

"Aristophanes Apology"

Balaustion, the Wild-pomegranate-flower, a good natured creature of superb physique, and a profound philosopher, is a true girl in every respect. Her ardor, her versatility her tenderness and her lovely sweetness crown her queen of Browning's women.

When she is introduced to us, she is sitting with four girl friends on the banks of a Rhodian stream relating in her magnetic manner the story of her adventure. This fourteen year old girl had adopted Athens into her heart by studying Euripides, and other Greek poets, so she became the soul-child of Greek philosophy. Its truth and beauty sway this lyric girl and she bursts into song whose theme is the wonders of art, poetry and Athens. Brilliant in intellect and versatile, she typifies one of Browning's most cherished ideals of woman-individuality. The passion for intellectual beauty sets her apart and makes her complete and stimulating. Magnetic in personality this Rhodian girl with true patriotism persuades her frightened people to leave Rhodes and go to Athens. By her incomparable courage she inspires the flagging oarman and with the intriguing song of life and liberty which saved the Athenians at the battle of Salamis, she leads her kinsfolk out of the presence of death. She is hailed as triumphant as "the whole city came rushing out of gates in common joy to the suburb temple" to hear the play of

Alkestis from this fascinating child as she stood on the top-most step. Her sacrificial spirit is again shown when she leaves the talent, her gift from a wealthy Syracusan, on Herakles tripod in the fane: for had not Herakles twice wrestled from death her devoted ones?

The youth, who three days stood at the temple drinking in his appreciation of the glory of the play and the attractive interpreter, does not veil his love. The ringing line, "We are to marry, O Euripides!" sums up this eager maid who has a mind as well as a heart and soul; she is priestess as well as goddess. Every word she utters is stamped with the Browning marks of trust, gaiety, courage and true patriotism that cherishes most closely the soul of its country. The eager yearning for the truth and the intensity of soul agreement between these two great souls would seem enough to justify a happy marriage. There is no such match made as the lovers of the same book! Dante calls it "Loves Purveyor!"

A touch of unworthiness and modesty is seen in Balaustion's comment, "Ah, but if you had seen the play itself!" How naturally girlish is the picture of Balaustion and these four Greek girls discussing a subject dear to every girl's heart! Her closing compliment to Euripides is excellent: "Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?"

In "Aristophanes Apology" the wild - pomegranate - flower has reached its completeness. Balaustion is married to Euthukes and together they are speeding across the waters to Rhodes. To free herself from anxiety she rehearses the year's happenings and he becomes the copyist. Her womanly bearing when she quiets the mob with a frown, bears the insults of Aristophanes, and endures his self-praise, makes Balaustion the triumphant woman.

Character: Evelyn Hope

Poem: Evelyn Hope

This poem pictures the lament of a man who loved a beautiful young girl who died before she was capable of loving in a lover's sense. She is described as being sixteen years old, having amber tresses, red lips, a frank young smile and a spirit of dew and fire. Her appreciation of the beautiful is shown in the reference to her having plucked and placed in a glass of water, a red geranium.

Evelyn Hope is pictured in her opening bloom, with soul so fair and true, and body pure and gay. The man is thrice her age and their paths have diverged greatly; yet his devotion is so fervent he argues she will not be lost to him. He can wait; he will be more worthy of her in the world to come.

Nothing remains now but the pure white brow and the sweet, cold hand wherein to lay love's last token. So, inside her dainty hand he shuts a leaf which will be a symbol to her of his love.

There is not a word in the poem that hints at Evelyn's possible love for another man. The physical element of love is entirely left out.

Browning brings before us the startling contrast of breathing life and icy death with painful sharpness. Side by side with the fixed and peaceful image of the young girl in her last sleep, we have the warm living girl in her flower-like beauty.

Character: Nameless

Poem: The Last Ride Together

Sympathy toward a rejected lover causes the girl with her proud, dark eyes to consent to this last ride and permit a last embrace. Half-pitiful, she fixes her gaze on him with life or death in the balance. No line that Browning has written is more characteristic than "Who knows but the world may end tonight?"

A glance into the lover's heart and mind reconciles us to believe the girl's conduct was warranted, though Browning refrains from teaching that privileges of lovers should continue when that love has been changed to friendship.

From her long silence hope comes to him again: that expectancy which comes along with the stimulating joy and exhilaration of riding.

Character: Eulalia

Poem: A Soul's Tragedy

Betrothed to Luitolfo and the beloved idol of Chiappino, Eulalia, the shrewd woman, is just the opposite of Anael. At the outset, we find this heroine at the home of Luitolfo awaiting the return of her lover who has gone to plead with the Provost not to exile his friend, Chiappino. Eulalia shows a wholesouled magnanimity and a philosophic self-poise in listening to Chiappino, for she must have been very indignant at the charges he made against her lover. We are won to her at once through the womanly sorrow at Chiappino's unreturned love and her frankness in dealing with him. Yet, we deplore the fact that she engaged herself to him, even though a short time to make a study of him. Chiappino found her love worthless, as is all love that is put on to work out a problem.

True to her lover, her first thought is always of him. As a woman, she sees the highest possibilities in Chiappino, but she has no plan with which to raise him. She desires his welfare and her faith does not die until the last spark of trueness leaves him. The glittering position as bride to Chiappino, the new Provost, pales in comparison to the pure flame of love for her true lover, Luitolfo. Constancy, loyalty and scorn of deceit are this shrewd Eulalia's outstanding characteristics.

As an artistic creation, Eulalia is a failure; her love for Chiappino was not a natural passion and consequently could produce no natural result. The office of love is to broaden, not to censure; so if Chiappino should fail in development it was because her pretended passion did not answer the purpose of real love. She solved the mathematical problem of proving Chiappino egotistic, and dishonest and Luitolfo unselfish and honest; in this she was a success.

MOTHERHOOD

THE OLD DUCHESS: IN THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

VIOLANTE: WHO BOUGHT POMPILIA

POMPILIA: THE KING AND THE BOCK

LUIGI'S MOTHER: PIPPA PASSES

THE LOUSCHA: IVAN IVANVITCH

Motherhood

In Browning's gallery of women, he gives us few pictures of mothers with babies; yet, in his caricature of mothers he reaches from the lowest depths to the highest peaks of womanhood. With a masterful hand he depicts the women of the streets, the sympathetic and influential women, the self-centered, cold, relentless women, the lily-white soul-~~all~~ mothers.

A restlessness, caused possibly by innate responsibility, characterizes each of Browning's mothers. They are women alive to the best interests of their children; women who make prompt and immediate decisions; whose lives have been enriched by the exultant, all-sufficient love of one's very flesh and blood. Browning also depicts mothers displaying sacrificial love; whose conduct on fleeting glance would be termed inhuman, impossible, but on further thought an act of charity, that gives to the child a better environment, closer, more wholesome companionship and riper affection.

Having known the joy of fatherhood himself, Browning, with the utmost sympathy and tenderest thought, pictures this sweetest reality—the mother-love for her child. It transforms, exalts and crowns a woman's life with consummate joy.

Character: The Old Duchess

Poem: The Flight of the Duchess

The sick, tall, yellow duchess, mother of the duke, is a typical dowager of the darkest hue. Jealous of the lovely, flower-like daughter in-law, she seeks in every possible way to make her life miserable. On her first arrival, the old mother-cat is described as standing in the rear like a wind to the Nor'ward-cold, repulsive, and unsympathetic. Her severe criticism, her menacing glances and her sharp tongue of censure crush and deaden the life and gladness of the young duchess.

The Old Duchess "smelt blood with a cat-like instinct." Her mission was to dispose of the young duchess so that she might be in power in the palace once more. She left no stone unturned to accomplish that purpose; her gods of life were power and greed; in gaining these she developed hatred, malice and jealousy.

Character: Violante (who bought Pompilia)

Drama: The Ring and the Book

There lived in Rome in 1679, an elderly couple, Pietro and Violante Comparini, who were so fond of a good living that they had gone beyond their means, accumulating considerable debt. Having pride, they would not beg, nor did they desire a papal bounty. Times were hard and creditors urgent, so the wife, a shrewd Italian woman with little principle, decides that if they had a child, the estate that was tied up for the benefit of an heir-at-law could be turned into much needed cash.

Devoted to her husband and knowing a child would please him, Violante secretly visits a mother who was dying in poverty, disease and shame. Money passes between the two and the babe becomes Violante's, who deceives her husband into thinking the child is their own. This child becomes the Francesca Pompilia of the play.

Violante displays as much mother love as those who have daughters of their own. In her testimony, Pompilia said that Violante loved her as she loved her babe; never was there criticism of Violante's treatment of the child.

Pompilia, a marvel of happiness, innocence and affection, brought much joy into the hearts and lives of this couple, who reciprocated her love.

Beginning with deceit and lying, Violante conceives the idea that a marriage of Pompilia to Count Guido, a man of rank, will exalt the family station. So without her husband's knowledge, the child of fourteen is secretly married to a man much older than herself.

Garrulous and simple, Violante violates all principles of loyalty when Guido turns her out of his palace and she retaliates by exposing the facts of Pompilia's birth. This is another stain on Violante's history - a most selfish, cowardly act which destroys the halo which shone around her love for Pompilia.

This character brings out the discussion as to whether or not a lie is ever justifiable. Browning makes his belief quite clear that it is futile to justify such deceit even when mother-love is involved.

Character: Pompilia

Drama: The Ring and the Book

Browning tells how, one summer day, by accident, he picked up from a Florence book stall an old yellow vellum-bound book 10 by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, relating to a certain Guido - Franceschini who married in 1693 a certain Pompilia who had been brought up as the daughter of Pietro Comparini and his wife. Guido took her soon afterwards to his home at Arezzo, where for three years they lived unhappily. According to her husband, Pompilia was an intractable and unfaithful wife; Guido, according to his wife, was a cruel, infamous husband. Pompilia suddenly fled with a young Priest, Caponsacchi, back to her parents. Guido pursued the fugitives, came upon them at the last stage of the journey, and had them arrested on the charge of adultery. Caponsacchi was relegated to Civita Vecchia, and Pompilia was detained in a nunnery. She was dismissed to go to her parents' home where she gave birth to a child. There on January 2, 1698, Guido appeared with four retainers, killed Comparini, his wife and left Pompilia for dead. She survived four days. The accused were executed after they "wrangled, brangled and jangled a month."

Thirteen of the twenty - two pieces of the original document are in Latin "interfilleted with Italian streaks." From these Browning squeezed every statement of fact they could yield.

The facts as Browning found them in "The Old Yellow Book" were dead and inert; to give them life, he must breathe his spirit into them. Just as a ring, once his wife's, worn upon his watch chain had undergone the delicate process of being made beautiful by hammering the ore with the alloy, so Browning decided he could give the thoughts of "The Old Yellow Book" artistic form by mixing them with his fancy. The facts of the book were the jeweler's ore; the poet's fancy was the jeweler's alloy; his fancy mixed with facts - was the jeweler's ring; hence, the name "The Ring and the Book."

Character: Pompilia

Poem: The Ring and the Book

Pompilia, victim first of the mediocre, ignorant, and small-souled, then of the very devil of baseness, is one of the purest and most beautiful of imaginary creatures known in any language. Too, she is the most exalted type of motherhood that Browning has given us. When but two weeks old, this child of crime and misery is sold by her heartless mother to Violante for the paltriest of motives, money. Ignorant of her parentage, for twelve years in her happy, carefree way, Pompilia lives with and loves her foster parents as her own. Suddenly she is snatched away to be married to a base, vile wretch, Count Guido, an impoverished nobleman of satanic lineage whose terms of endearment vary from spitfire to mongrel brat, and whose embraces were to her as "sulphur, snake and toad." Bought at a hawk's price to do a hawk's service, watched and guarded, her life considered a chattel, Pompilia is such a model of perfection in her innocence and patience, the common people considered her a martyr. Perhaps, nowhere in the poem is her merciful spirit so well portrayed as when on her death bed she pleads that Guido be told that she has forgiven him. She cannot have the eternal resentment toward the man who had bestowed on her the great crown that consummates woman's life.

Vivid pictures of how the rightly spoken word in dire need might have prevented human sacrifices are shown when Pompilia clasps in vain the feet of the Archbishop and begs the poor Friar and Governor for help.

So long as Guido sinned against her alone, she bore it; but with the first intimation that another soul was wrapped up in her own she rises magnificent in her strength to surmount in time the wall of freedom which seemed closed against her. To bring up her child as hers alone, away from the influence of her fiendish husband caused her flight and no code of ethics condemns her.

Pompilia was murdered for money, not honor. The "snow-white soul that angels fear to take untenderly" was reviled by that fury of fire, as child cheat. Charged with falsehood and unfaithfulness this perfect soul who could neither read nor write is accused of having written perfidious love letters to a Priest whom she had seen only once!

See the frail little body black from head to foot, hacked to pieces with twenty-three jagged knife cuts a few hours before her death struggling to live long enough to vindicate her child, her heartless mother who sold her, and spending her last breath absolving a "lustrous and pellucid soul!" Hear her in her anguish implore the nuns "anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house is heaven!"

She is magnificent in her triumph; for when Guido attempts to harm her, she snatches his sword and in righteous wrath denounces the cowardly husband until he slinks away, beaten, from her presence. God thwarts the wicked scheme and law bears out God. It finds the soul of Pompilia snow-white. The fragile flower is as strong in her denunciation of lies and hellish plots as she was docile first to her foster parents then to the detestable husband until he made her life miserable.

Caponsacchi's reverence and compassion for Pompilia in her desperate need are to be commended. Even her husband's wicked brother, Canon Girolamo, smiled at her entreaties, fearing the result should he offer her help. The burning, meaningful words, "I am yours," from a priest, showed Caponsacchi's heart and soul. His love is pure, deep and holy: not a passionate lover, but one, steadfast in the face of death dares to show pity and knows "duty to God is duty to her." Pompilia loved Caponsacchi as her guide, protector, deliverer and a soul mate. Her continual solicitude that he be absolved from all blame shows her love and does not detract from her womanly spirit which is maintained at all times. The trueness of their love is shown when Caponsacchi tells Pompilia that her life has been a divine benediction to him, leading him to be a Christian. With soul knit to soul he reads in the carriage the Vesper service and she gives worshipful hearing.

Pompilia's relation to the man who helped her escape from her almost four drear years in that dread palace, was of utmost purity and innocence. To her he was her God-sent means of deliverance from a life that was no longer bearable. Genuine unselfishness is her motive. The halo of approaching motherhood which is to crown her as one carrying out a divine commission makes this "Lady of Sorrows" with her "voice immortal", a picture of exquisite delicacy.

Pompilia, the sweetest little mother any one could imagine, lived but two weeks to enjoy the God-sent gift, yet the babe's coming converted her from a sufferer to a defender. She forgives everybody; even the satanic husband, who treated her so cruelly. She excuses him as she would a wayward child. She cannot have hatred in her heart toward the man who, however inhuman he may have been, bestowed upon her the greatest joy that crowns a woman's happiness—a darling innocent life.

Gaetano was hers alone, born of love, not of hate. From the very beginning the hope of maternity changes her despair to joy. She sees birds carrying sticks and wool for their nests and hears beauty in their songs she never heard before. Jealous lest she lose her babe's first smile, the mother heart held the babe close hoping he might smile before the appointed time—one month. What expectation!

Heavenly thoughts fill Pompilia's mind. She says she never realized God's birth before. She places her babe in her arm just as she remembered Mary and the babe, Jesus. Such faith and beauty!

Pompilia closed her eyes in death four days after the attack by her husband, giving to the world the story from her own lips and speaking in gentleness, forgiveness, and with bravery toward her husband and all who had wronged her. Guido, called upon her to save him and Caponsacchi the worldly priest turned saint under her influence and blessed her. So this fair flower from the lowest muck of Rome is "First of the first, perfect in whiteness."

Character: Luigi's Mother

Drama: Pippa Passes

The scene inside the ruined turret on the hill above Asolo is the most representative picture of mother and child that Browning gives us.

The son, Luigi, is fifteen years old; impetuous, determined and burning with patriotism for his Italy, he is willing to die for his native land.

Fearing his safety, Luigi's mother pleads with him to put the crime aside; that early morn and not night is for adventure; writers must be sensational; half of Italy's ills are feigned; surely she is not so wronged as has been represented. Her appeals are addressed to Luigi's physical interests; he is so young; there is no possible way of escape; he has always been to her the ever obedient son, surely he will not now be cruel and unkind. Then she argues the futility of one with so unsteady a hand, hot head, and nervous heart trying to assassinate the King! She even mentions the subject nearest the boy's heart, the blue-eyed Chiara, who is to come in June. What would she say?

Her fear reaches its height when patriotism triumphs through Pippa's song. His mother knows in his going her sacrifice is necessary for Italy's freedom.

Character: Louscha

Poem: Ivan Ivanovitch

This folk-lore tale is laid in the vast Russian wilderness alive with hungry beasts that know no fear. It portrays motherhood's first disgrace.

It all literature there is no better example of cowardice than in Louscha, the mother of three innocent children whom she fed to the Satan-faced wolves in order to save herself! Among what monstrous things shall she be classed?

Browning says that the fox-dam will slay the felon sire that dares assault her whelp: that the beaver will conceal her young from harm: could a human mother, throbbing with mother-love, do less?

Louscha 's sacrificing the puny, undersized, most loved darling first is most unnatural. One by one her babies are torn from her arms by the ravenous wolves and she lives! The one and only protection was the lighted twist of pitch which Louscha either dropped or forgot to use. There is the lack of even brute instinct to preserve her offspring.

Louscha forfeits the right of God's divinest gift-motherhood.

COURAGEOUS WOMEN

POLYXENA: KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

CONSTANCE: IN A BALCONY

GUENDOLYN: BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

COLUMBE: COLUMBE'S BIRTHDAY

LADY CARLISLE: STAFFORD

Courageous Women

Every character in this paper chosen as Courageous, may be found in the dramas. Browning's dramas containing powerful passages are not of action, but of thought. These outstanding heroines are painted with an artist's imagination; their keen intelligence and courage bring saving help to mankind. They are women of power, placed in critical situations; they are fellow-workers, standing side by side of men; thoughtful always, brilliant often, their deepest desire is for love; hence, for service. With their good and evil passions balancing, they are effective agents, in bringing about the climax of the story.

Browning delights in placing an artful woman like Constance as a foil to a clear-brained, honest man, as Norbert. He sees women sharing with men the unceasing struggles of life. The solution of the problem many times is put into the mouth of the woman.

In the study of Browning's dramas we find united the two great principles which form the foundation of all his best work: knowledge, which is Browning's philosophy, and conduct, which is his art.

The representative woman of the 19th century was grave, resolute, possessing the authority of wisdom. Her heart and brain worked bravely together; she was the counsellor, the comforter, the wise, guardian angel. She possessed intelligence in affairs, clear womanly insight into men and intrigue. Browning, in his portraiture of womanhood has not been unmindful of these characteristics, especially in dramatic monologues in which he has no superior in literature.

Character: Polyxena

Drama: King Victor and King Charles

Browning speaks of Polyxena as "the noble and right woman's manliness" as opposed to the extreme sensibility of Charles and ill-considered rascality of D'Ormea. With a broad vision which readily grasps and analyzes a question from all sides, Polyxena charitably conceals with a mantle of loving sympathy the repulsive and undesirable. As a wife who has studied her husband, this courageous woman knows Charles' earnest good purpose as well as his immaturity of powers; so her optimistic nature endures his wrongful doubts and she becomes his divinely chosen counterpart.

Charles, with his vacillating will, is a misfit; he would eagerly give up the royal crown for a life of quiet and contentment; but Polyxena, persevering, tactful and devoted, insists upon his remaining true to his throne which she thinks is God-given. She argues that duty is man's greatest concern, not happiness.

In her understanding of involved court affairs, Polyxena never violates her natural womanliness. Her presence and influence strengthen Charles' self-reliance and discourage self-pity. She has no fear of D'Ormea, whose deceitful stratagems and lying tongue she scorns. Her dissecting eyes soon ferret the character of the vain, choleric, inconstant Victor.

Eager for the quiet of home life, away from courtly duties, the devoted Polyxena takes the burden of being a real helpmeet in Sardinian affairs. Her keen sightedness and resourcefulness when Victor appears to claim the crown and her deft maneuvering of the unstable conditions, place Polyxena among Browning's most courageous women.

Character: Constance

Drama: In a Balcony

In this fine bit of psychological study, Browning has given us a nature in which court diplomacy, self-sacrifice, passion and worldliness blend in proportion so strangely that critics are baffled by the resultant womanhood. Only an artist could have molded a character with such a mighty, though erring mind, and a love, the essence of unselfishness. Naturally sweet and attractive, she possibly would not have made the error in judgment had she not been a typical product of court-life, educated to put her trust in political plots and conspiracies.

Conceding that Constance's reasoning is fallacious in that she seems to forget that no mortal ever grows too old to love or be loved, her innate longing for success in gaining the Queen's consent for the betrothal and her feeling of security in the Queen's affection, outweigh somewhat her short sightedness in discerning the Queen's character.

Emotional and impulsive, Constance serves as a fine background to the mute, passive, acquiescent attitude of the Queen. Rarely does a smaller nature understand a larger one, so Constance does not read the Queen correctly. Ignorant of human nature, she cannot conceive of how the withered, tragic Queen bereft of personal charm, starved for love, could be capable of tenderness of self-sacrifice. Fired with her uncontrollable love for Norbert, the Queen's favorite, Constance, insists that there is no other way of approaching her majesty except through the ruse that since his heart's choice, the Queen, is denied him, he will take the next dearest.

During the sacrificial scene, Constance with marvelous courage and magnificent unselfishness, offers a complete surrender for what she considers the good of her lover. Driven to desperation because of her deception, she tries to retrieve her act by reminding the Queen of her present bond in matrimony, insinuating even the shame of considering Norbert's proposal.

The supreme test of a perfect love comes when the Queen enters and Constance unhesitatingly insults the love of Norbert, thereby resorting to the most desperate means of keeping up the deception. Never once does one feel an exaggeration in the superior force and irresistible power of Constance's love for Norbert. Such love is ages old; love charged with emotion, self-sacrifice and courage. Through all the deception, the keen, satirical remarks and the insults, Norbert realizes his soul is knit to Constance's though the present situation is blinding, indeed. In this perfect union, forgiveness and reconciliation follow though both realize that the Queen sinned against, will crush her ungracious offenders in her relentless grasp.

Character: Guendolyn

Drama: The Blot in the 'Scutcheon

The magnanimous character of this drama is Guendolyn who has the dauntless courage to desert her lover if need be that she may take her place beside her fallen cousin. She argues that in error the "world has been won many a time, by such a beginning." Her attitude toward Mildred after she knows of her sin, is the correct bearing of Christian womanhood toward fallen sisters. Love, sympathy and loyalty combine in Guendolyn to make her a capable and forgiving woman. She is the only entirely natural character in the play; the representative of common sense and practical influence. Among all the weak personages in this plot of confused clashing of pride, innocence and remorse, Browning chooses to place Guendolyn as the central figure.

Guendolyn exemplifies the fact that "a friend in need is a friend indeed;" that we must serve those who are unfit to serve themselves; that the man who deserts his friend when he stands in need of his help is unworthy to be beheld by the meanest dog! She typifies the Good Samaritan binding up the wounds of the spiritually sunken; offering the helpful message which says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Courageous, resourceful and loyal, Guendolyn's character is expressed in her own words, "What is done, is done; my care is for the living." To her, one's life may be transformed; remade as a piece of clay, fashioned and tried by the amateur until the most perfect

is attained. She endeavors to direct peace and harmony out of the hopeless understanding, but her efforts are in vain because of Tresham's fatal blunder caused by his beastly family pride.

Guendolyn is a striking exemplification of high-minded feminine common sense, of clear insight into the truth of things. It was she who discovered Mildred's secret; who by her own intuitiveness discovers that Mildred's visitor and her affianced husband are one and the same man.

Guendolyn is the rock on which we can rest in quiet: A woman of the world, yet not worldly; one who gains more loveliness by every experience; a woman with a sympathetic contempt for the intelligence of men with whom she is associated.

Character: Columbe

Drama: Columbe's Birthday

One of the most pleasing of Browning's women is this philosopher, a woman close to the universal heart. She is one of the thoroughly good women of poetry and fiction.

All her happy young life she has lived in a retired castle on a river's brink and now amid applause and demonstration she is crowned Duchess of Juliers. Her gay girlishness, her jeyousness, and her clear, deep, noble nature attract us from the beginning. Columbe is first a woman, then a queen.

Young, beautiful, Columbe after a short twelve months becomes the prey of royal parasites. Endeavoring to keep faith in her fellows, innocent, brave, frank and constant, this heroine is the fire and soul of the play. She moves everybody by her own emotion.

In a short time, the real state of affairs in her kingdom is disclosed; she experiences the utter worthlessness of court affection, yet she is loath to part with her ducal crown. Berthold, the rightful prince, appears with a greater claim to the throne. Untouched by love or the fates of her position, she suddenly finds herself in the midst of a whirlpool of affairs and love.

When Valence, the hero, a poor advocate who loves her, comes to plead the cause of suffering men and present the wrongs of his townsmen, Columbe wonders what the world will say should she release the

crown to Berthold and marry Valence. Shall she lose a throne or gain the love of a life-time? The seeming hesitancy is puzzling unless one finds the key later given in the drama-Columbe had never before dared to look within herself. Awakening affection gives peace.

Browning gives his philosophy of love through Columbe: Love is the divine principle of human life; love is faith and there is no substitute for it.

Columbe's belief in love brings her out of the chaos, free and unstained by a single wave of ill-feeling or mean thinking, into a quiet haven of affection and power. She is lovely indeed; a picture of incarnate truth. Courageously she chooses obscurity with Valence rather than an unhappy life with Berthold. She relinquishes the glittering robes and jewels of vanity to accept the love of a true man.

Columbe represents a prescribed model of womanhood whom we continue to know better because there is always in her more of choice womanhood to be discovered. She also portrays one way in which a woman may seek love in an honest way and yet have that love thwarted or almost lost through false ideas or lack of self-knowledge. Where can we find a more exquisite sanctity of the woman than is diffused like a perfume through Columbe?

Character: Lady Carlisle

Drama: Strafford

There is a wonderful resemblance in the invented Lady Carlisle which history surmises rather than describes. There is the same inclination to fix the heart on the great man and to serve him with no return of affection.

Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle, while brave and courageous as are all women who sacrifice themselves to men who do not appreciate or understand them, is lacking in self-assertion.

A woman is supposed to have the compensation of being at least a unit by her husband, but for her to sink her individuality to promote the interests of her husband is beyond all reason. Undoubtedly, she cares for Stafford but lack of will power keeps her from taking decided stands.

Stafford selfishly accepts her sacrifices of her time, talents and attention with no thought of ever reciprocating her devotion, and unlike most of Browning's chrewd women, Lady Carlisle demands no reciprocity. She puts no valuation on herself, therefore, she should expect none from Stafford. Women are valued at their own estimate of themselves. Her self-abnegation sacrifices her worth. No woman is well balanced who allows her courage and boldness for her lover to outweigh her self-respect.

Wavering between her devotion for Stafford and her own selfish interests, she reveals Charles' real nature to Stafford. At last she resolves to denounce him to Queen Henrietta whom she angers, so Lady Carlisle immediately retracts and reverses her decision.

Lady Carlisle's love is constant enough to dare to save him and her plan of rescue is ready to be carried out; her unrecognized and undeterred devotion is tenderly pathetic; it has a courageous dignity of faithful service rewarded only in serving.

FAITH AND CONSTANCY

ANNAEL: RETURN OF THE DRUSES

ELVIRE: FIFINE AT THE FAIR

Faith and Constancy

Love is the fulfillment of the law and faith produces love. These two theories of Browning are exemplified in his faith and constancy poems.

In his poems which treat of love between man and woman, Browning regards the union of soul with soul as the crowning achievement. Above all things love is needed as the soul travels upon the uncertain way. He argues that love is the only secret of a victorious life, and that love and life are purified and made richer; wider visions of spiritual experience are opened.

We admire Browning for his dignified seriousness, as shown in Elvire. Anael's personality is startlingly real, with her keen, penetrative intuition. Both are women exerting a great inspiring influence upon the men who are dearest to them; they are intellectual with the power of choice. They choose to be true and loyal, in their great love for each other a fact which Browning says is the whole secret of a happy wedded life.

Character: Anael

Drama: The Return of the Druses

Of all the heroines of the great drama, none is more interesting than the Druse maiden, Anael. She is typical of the women Browning has revealed; eager, complex, capable of growth, liable to fall. Beloved by the Druse leader Djabal, and sister to Khalil, Anael is the picture of heroic faith.

Kept hidden by her mother on account of the fate of women possessing beauty, no wonder this simple minded girl, looking upon Djabal and his elegance for the first time, should think him some supernatural being! Loving him with the intensity of a passionate nature, Anael believes implicitly in Djabal's divine claim that he is Hakeem, the Messiah, the God incarnate; yet, and here is the cause of his suffering, she can feel in his presence only a deep human love. Her heart pleads to love him as a man, not a deity. How human, that she craves the God Hakeem, yet is unwilling to relinquish the man in her lover. She cannot kneel to him. He seems no God. What astonishes her most is that he loves her for the purely human qualities. He demands no goddess. She is pure, true, and tender, yet in contrast, she is weighed to earth with a sense of spiritual deficiency. Her innocence shows Djabal his own deceit and treachery. Although she is but a child to him, he cannot tell her of his guilt.

Doubt arises and her conscience urges that she must not become the heavenly bride without confessing her doubt. That Hakeem the omniscient should be surprised at Sir Loys' return, arouses once

more Anael's uneasy doubt. She tries to keep her agitation from Loys to whom she is sent by Djabal. The love scene between Anael and Loys excites one to pity. With the fervor of a devoted lover, he pleads his case in vain. As she has vowed, she will marry the one who raises up her tribe, restores its ancient rights, and destroys the tyrant Prefect.

She decides both men are human and tells Djabal she knew when first she saw him. The unfeigned simplicity with which she surrenders to Djabal is charming. Moved to a state of religious fervor to prove her utter belief and show her faith, she stabs the Prefect, calling on Djabal to change her and him into spiritual forms as he had promised. The aftermath is piteous. Bitter is the suffering when personal love clashes with universal righteousness. This is the agony of Anael. Faith is lost, but love remains. Djabal's refusal to confess his sin to the Druse nation stuns Anael. In the two emotional states, religious enthusiasm and her own womanhood, we see the latter only in bits. How will she act in this crisis? Her adoration of Djabal causes her to seek atonement in death. Anael, with a great tide of tyrannic love and with a poignant life-surrender, hails Djabal as Hakeem, thereby renewing the faith of the tribe.

Anael illustrates another of Robert Browning's theories that man has absolute need of woman's faith in him, if he is ever to learn the use of free will in moral action. Faith in man is the crowning blossom of all philosophy; the grand faith which sees and

yet believes; which looks with open eyes and believes in spite of faults, errors, and sin. It is only in such a faith as Anael's that can ever inspire man to reach toward his highest possibilities.

Thus Anael takes her place among Browning's faithful women: a character full of noble impulses yet beset and vanquished at the last.

Character: Elvire

Poem: Fifine at the Fair

Elvire, the true, is the symbol of domestic love. She is land, the safe, solid earth, not sea. The Venetian carnival, with its glittering lights and human bubbles, is a carnival of human life.

As Elvire, the spotless wife, walks beside her truant-thoughted husband at the Pornic Fair and sees his fearless interest in the bespangled and light headed dancer, Fifine, she shakes her head, with a melancholy smile and breathes a sigh that is almost a sob. She realizes the contrast between the fairy form who "brings sunshine upon her spangled hips" and her own plainness and sober temperament. The charm of a Bohemian life, the gayety of the circus and the troubled look on Elvire's face, encourages the husband to launch forth on a dramatic discussion of the fidelity and infidelity of domestic love, with almost too frank explicitness. With abated breath the wife listens and with pale fingers, presses the arm of her husband whose candid admiration of a gypsy rope dancer is the motif of the poem. He argues that man should live the unrestrained, free life, unhampered by social rules and fetters; that woman should be a fixed star, constant and true; never revolting, always steadfast.

Elvire is the picture of a natural, every day woman; she is not a heroine type nor does she possess commanding traits. Her disposition is affectionate and like every woman who is devoted to her husband, she cannot suppress the tinge of jealousy that invariably arises at the persistent admiration by her husband of another woman.

The rascally husband, with his fallacious reasoning, represents fickle, if not really loose men. Those who, by practicing the untrue, learn the true. He argues we get wisdom from even a physical source; that one may be untrue if thereby inconstancy is learned. This argument is lost on his faithful wife who knows that it is ignorance, not knowledge, that learns through evil. The main thing in life is to be true because this helps to bring marital happiness. She dreads nothing so much as inconstancy. She sees good in nothing that has not permanency.

Browning teaches that temporary inconstancy may be productive of good, for when Elvire and her husband reach home the Don tells his wife he has learned his lesson; he wants no more of the light-headed Fifine, "Love is all and death is naught."

UNREWARDED LOVE

DUCHESS OF FERARA: MY LAST DUCHESS

THE QUEEN: IN A BALCONY

THE YOUNG DUCHESS: THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

JAMES LEE'S WIFE: JAMES LEE'S WIFE

Unrewarded Love.

Browning did not write half as much as other poets had done of the love between man and woman. In his poetry there is not that exultant, satisfied note which one encounters in so many poets. The mere love poem is no main element in his work. Nowhere does Browning teach that love is self-centered.

Being a keen, healthy observer, he is a poet of life and tells how a common experience may develop a soul.

Love is the only secret of a victorious life; if it is mistaken or unreturned, there is a sickening air of hopelessness and helplessness. When love is lost, all is a failure. Nobody requires all heroines to be a success; some must fail to be true to life. In this group of unrewarded love some women have failed because of their own lack of soul response; others, because from the beginning something besides love formed the cornerstone of the life's building.

Browning was gifted in writing the unexpected; phases of life under quick thought and sudden passion became transformed from the commonplace into extraordinary existence.

Character: Duchess of Ferrara

Poem: My Last Duchess

A typical bond woman of the Renaissance is the subject of this masterful poem. The girl blossoming with fresh beauty and ignorant of the world's coldness, is full of love and clinging trustfulness. Her youth and frank happiness make her a favorite with all but her egotistic husband, who, in trying to mold her after his own conventional form, crushes out her hope, her love and her life. He didn't like the way she smiled; so he strangled and threw her into a dungeon.

She is dead and the Duke is negotiating another marriage. Without emotion, he draws back the curtain which covers the picture of the Duchess. This typical autocrat of the Renaissance, with his self-composure of selfishness and genuine devotion to art, gives a sketch of his wife to this emissary of his new father-in-law. We see "that spot of joy", the faint blush brought to the fair cheek by "such stuff as, courtesy"; her eyes, too, eager to miss none of nature's beauty, follow the onlooker; her answering smile, so sweet and winning, with which she acknowledges the slightest attention. The same smile that enraged the Duke. With innate composure he boasts of stopping the smiles all together.

The picture represents conditions where woman is chained rather than freed by marriage.

Character: The Queen

Drama: In a Balcony

The Queen, a political machine, surrounded by willing hands, swift feet, and staunch hearts to do her bidding, these fifty years has been loveless. With a calm and queenly deportment, belonging to the regal state since a child, her life has been lived without the endearing affections of loved ones. Versed in political intrigues and court inclinations, she knows that "There is no good of life but love, -- but love!" All else is a shadow in comparison.

She takes her cousin, Constance, into her home and heart that she may know life through love. She sees the strong bond of affection grow between Constance and Norbert, but she secretly loves him because of his nobility of character. The contrast between the inward and outward state of the queen is so unmistakably drawn as to render her overwhelmingly tragic. Her stupidity in misunderstanding or misconstruing Norbert's appeal for Constance's hand, is unforgivable. Yet pity is felt for her because she is prematurely old, lonely, unattractive, with an immense heart capacity, unsatisfied, though she is married. She yearns for the love and companionship that only a soul-mate can give. Grasping at her interpretation, she decides that we are made for happiness, that God is good; "How soon a smile of God can change the world!"

The strength of the Queen's passion is evidenced by her willingness to dissolve her former marriage; this signifies a childishness mind, grasping for the desired object. Her indiscretion reaches its crest, when failing to follow the gleam of light that would have cleared the situation, she throws herself at Norbert, hoping yet to win him.

When she awakens to the reality of her lost ambition, when she sees heaven open only to close upon her with cruel force, no wonder her affection becomes a retributive spirit of just indignation and malignant hatred, and like a starving creature, wild with hunger, she falls upon her prey!

Character: The Young Duchess

Poem: The Flight of the Duchess

Just emerged from a convent, the beautiful, young Duchess thrilled with eagerness to know life in all its beauty. She loved the movements of the leaves on the trees, the birds in the heaven--all things in nature and humanity. Vivacious and gentle, longing for companionship and love, what a help-meet this fairy-like Duchess would have made with proper environment and a thoughtful husband! Instead, the sight of her husband's face, so stern, and so unsympathetic drove back the joyousness of her own, like a glad sky after a north wind. His superficiality and devotion to ancient customs and traditions causes him to neglect this little wild bird, alive with life. His criticisms and taunts in a few brief weeks change the once tireless maiden into a cowered, listless, shrinking creature afraid of her lord, his mother and herself! She becomes a prisoner in a strangely twisted network of artificial modes and forms, starved for real life.

The psychology of such an instant, complete change is difficult to understand, but there is no misunderstanding nor misinterpretation in the scene between the gypsy and the young Duchess.

Browning's favorite theme of personality is marked in the character of the gypsy queen. Through deep sympathy and love, the young Duchess is lifted entirely out of the commonplace, deadening existence into the full freedom and all-embracing love of nature.

The young girl who has faced insults, humiliation and pretended love makes a joyous escape from the false to the true life. Urged by a kindred soul, the young Duchess finds courage to flee the conventionalities of life which have robbed her of all individuality. She chooses the right to live her own unfettered life.

The divinely human principle that love is the fulfilling of the law has proved true, against the myth of self-destruction and crushing out of life because of disappointment.

The gypsy represents a great deliverer who comes to some in this day burdened with deep conviction or work; she lightens the burden and leaves the soul free to choose. Browning himself played a gypsy's part not long afterward when he delivered a certain little frail body from an atmosphere of pain and darkness on Wimpole Street and transplanted her into the sunshine and health of Italian skies.

Character: James Lee's Wife

Poem: James Lee's Wife

The problem of love mistaken and unrequited, pouring its golden grains on a hopelessly unresponding nature, is discussed in this song-cycle of nine poems.

We learn the story of this discontented couple from the wife: the husband never speaks and is but one time present. Browning portrays to us the moods of nine separate days--each a wail deploring everything in general; the weather, the inconsistency of man, the unsatisfactory study of art, and the signal failure of marriage, at least in her own case.

James Lee's wife is a plain woman, having faded tints of hair and coarse skin, but we find that her beauty lies in a devoted heart and an intelligent mind. Her soliloquies are revelations of the events in her married life, beginning as they end, with an earnest wish that love were an abiding thing.

"At the Window" of their wild little place near Pornic, close to the sea, she awaits her husband's return. In the dreary comment on summer's passing she blunderingly asks if he will change also. When the embrace comes, without much thought we guess what is lacking.

"By the Fireside" she broods upon the contrast of a sailor's life and her warm, safe home. She shudders as she imagines some wife who found her husband's love gone.

She looks on the water "In the Doorway," which suggests to her heart departing fortune and coming disasters. The swallows will soon be leaving. From the scene however, she receives solace and rest by her reasoning that she and her husband have a four room house, the field and love.

In a fanciful mood, she walks "Along the Beach." He has grown weary of her wisdom; she has shown him too much love; been too solicitous; the bond has been felt. She recognizes the smaller mind to which she looks for love. The imagination of James Lee's wife is exquisitely poetical, but the weary wailing of unrequited love is nevertheless doleful.

Leaning back on the short, dry grass "On the Cliff" she looks at the baked grass and idealizes the cricket and a gorgeous butterfly, wondering if the minds of men might not be transformed like them. She is bitterly resentful of the poem she is reading because it depicts her woe and anguish; on further thought she decides the young poet will some day learn the truth. Change is the law, the very essence of life.

"Among the Rocks" she learns the same lesson from good old earth. Each element wholly joys in the other. From this comes the simple doctrine that love is self-sacrifice. "Make the world better by your throes." "He who loseth his life shall gain it."

She turns from the coarse hand of the peasant girl to mold her perfectly modeled clay cast and catches the lesson of

understanding; the worth of flesh and blood. Deprived of earth's ideal, she will make beauty out of her homely home duties.

Perhaps her absence might be better than her presence; so we find her "On Deck" where she has set her face like a rock. She knows too well her husband's love has gone; so why stay and live under the cloud of unrequited affection? In living she resigns herself to her loss, knowing that is no balm for love's wound.

THE UNFORTUNATES

MILDRED: BLOT ON THE 'SCUTCHEON

GIRL IN THE CONFESSIONAL

WIFE OF RICARDI: THE STATE AND THE BUST

OTTIMA: PIPPA PASSES

TABBY BRATTS: NED BRATTS

CLARA: RED COTTON NIGHT - CAP COUNTRY

The Unfortunates

In order to chronicle the stages of all life, some of Browning's women must be pictures of doubt and despair. Because of the number of victims or failures, one is led to believe that Browning liked to dwell on the wayward side of woman's nature. Some of these women, dangerously alluring in their beauty, are placed in critical situations where they must act under the push of quick thought and sudden passion. With little repose in any of these poems, Browning sketches them with a master hand. None of them have the characteristic of timidity - all are tense with feeling and burning with emotion; yet they are women who are not wholly bad.

Browning grasps the subject of these suffering souls with resolute courage; he does not waste words and makes no apologies. Whatever may be his attitude and message for the saint or good, he pleads the cause of the fallen as few other poets have done. He preaches the eternal doctrine of the second chance; of the ceaseless struggle toward a life of purity, however far she may be from it. There is no failure if we but strive. The world is still imperfect but we grow spiritual in trying to gain perfection. At no time does Browning excuse or conceal enormity of sin.

Character: Mildred

Drama: Blot on the 'Scutcheon

One of the most characteristic marks of Browning's portrayal of woman is his admiration for individuality. Under whatever name we might class Mildred, she lacks individuality. She serves as a background to the more important characters. Usually, when Browning presents a character in the grip of circumstances, he gives her words to express herself; but in the character of Mildred he presents her only as others see her.

Mildred, the idolized sister of young Tresham, has been concerned in secret criminal intrigue with the young Earl of Merton. They intend to condone their guilt by marriage. Both are, at the outset, lofty characters with the noblest feelings, desperately in love with each other. Since they belong to the same station in life, there would be no question concerning their union.

Mildred is a sensitive, highly-organized yet docile creature. She is one of those unbalanced persons without poise, whose moral sense of right and wrong is so readily influenced that she does not realize that self-respect, once lost, may, by discretion and humility be won back again.

The first question persons with reason will ask is how Mildred with her environment and training could have stooped so low? We take refuge in her immaturity and inexperience because she had never known a mother's care. Beneath the threat of her fate she is helpless and hopeless. Her trusting and reserved nature would lead

her to be slow in criticizing conventional ideals of life and honor. She loves for love's sake and continues to the end to be lost in her love.

Her second fatal mistake is in the falsehood she leads her brother to believe when she confesses that her visitor is not the Earl, yet she is going to marry the Earl. This deceit lowers her morality again.

In this hopeless tangle, her conception of Merton as a lover comes to nothing because of the family pride of Tresham. Mildred's remorse is of innocence; the mental suffering of one wholly unversed in sin's guilt. Courage, and resourcefulness express themselves in her last words. "My care is for the living."

Character: Nameless

Poem: The Confessional

The Inquisition in Spain is correctly presented in this poem, "The Confessional." Absorbed in her complete yielding to the man she loves, and having been promised that both of them shall be purged by fasting and prayer, this pretty young girl is induced by her long-bearded, deceitful priest to obtain from her lover, Beltran, secret knowledge that is injurious to the church. For her pains she is put into prison and presents a pitiable figure, grim and gaunt; youth, happiness and faith in her fellowman and church are gone; only shame and a "poor wrenched body" are left her.

Watching her lover's execution from her prison window, the girl denounces the disloyal priest and the methods by which she has been deceived. The religion which cloaks a man so vile receives its share of her abusive censure.

The Gospel of Expediency is portrayed in this young woman. The result is the same where one dares not reason out one's own theology.

Character: Wife of Riccardi

Poem: The Statue and the Bust

In 1587, history tells us Ferdinand became Grand Duke of Tuscany and married a French lady, of the house of Lorraine.

Gaily the Duke in his idle way, empty and fine like a swordless sheath, rides by the palace of Riccardi, his minister, on the latter's wedding day. The bride, standing near a window, sees the Duke and they fall desperately in love with each other.

The Riccardi, following the Italian custom of jealous husbands, keeps his young wife a prisoner when he finds out about the clandestine love affair. She says she can assume an easy disguise and escape at any moment. In revenge, Ferdinand erects his bust in the square that he might always appear to be watching the fair one. The bust was made from cannon taken from the Turks by the Knights of St. Steven.

It is conceivable that a woman who is married to a man she does not love may spend her whole life dreaming of the man she does love; she may even fly to him. In fact these two do plan to elope, but the flight is postponed; there are excuses and delays. Browning blames them for their vacillating purpose. Their weakness of will makes a failure of two lives. Their end was a crime but Browning contends a crime may serve for a test as well as a virtue. He argues that it were better for the lady and Duke to have eloped, loving each other as they do, than to keep the longed-for sin in their minds. "Love won, all is won." Love is necessary for perfect development of soul.

The poem teaches the sin of inaction and the crime of aimlessness.

Character: Tabby Bratts

Poem: Ned Bratts

Tabby Bratts was the degraded wife of a man who kept a tavern that was known to be an assembling place for murderers, thieves and rogues. Indeed, these two were confessed murderers. Tab is described by her husband as "brass-bold, brick-built of beef and beer." In their own language they are the worst rogue couple unchanged. Tab, in her coarseness, reeks with filth; she is the lowest specimen of womanhood, corrupted with irreverence, profanity and drunkenness.

She goes for some lace to the prison where Bunyan is confined. He reprimands her for the wicked life she is leading and likens her to a tree all sloughed about with scurf, blasted bow and bole, yet with vital sap on the inside. Astonished that such a character as Bunyan should notice and want to lift her from her life of degradation, she accepts the book, takes it home and she and Ned read and believe the words, "Look unto me and be saved." "Be your sins as scarlet, wool shall they seem like, although as crimson red, yet turn as white as the driven snow." The child, who before her reform was not a love babe, now becomes to her a little angel. Browning shows that affection however crude, may exist between a wife and husband where there is not the slightest respect. Too, there is saving power in Christianity and it reaches the foulest. A realization of ignorance places us nearest to knowledge. In Tab's case the acceptance of the spiritual life required a struggle.

Character: Clara de Millefleurs

Poem: Red Cotton Night-Cap Country

Child of Dominique and Magdalen Commercy, seventeen year old Clara in descriptive terms reveals her growth from grub to peacock butterfly. Young, fascinating, and pretty, in early life, she sells her honor before she recognizes its worth. The badge of poverty was borne when, too young, she married Ulysse Muhlhausen, who possessed youth and intelligence and was a tailor by trade. Unprincipled, and desperately in need of money he would have trafficed his wife. Fleeing to London, Clara lives in a luxuriously furnished magic apartment, having accepted money from Carlino.

Miranda, the son of the great Paris goldsmith, becomes greatly enamoured of Clara and as a means of accomplishing an end, she reveals to him all her shadowed past. For twenty years as his mistress she humored and managed him. Bearing insults and slights from those who understood, Clara bore herself with patience and submission; Miranda even so far forgot himself as to criticize and disregard her. Quiet and unassuming her influence is always for good. She loves Miranda and her motherly interest increases his love for her.

Clara's devotion to him after the Seine episode can never be questioned. Even after he plunges his hand into the fire to purge himself of her image she takes him back. She is

a noble woman, devoted, self-sacrificing and capable of more advanced growth, though limited in capacity. She fulfills the duties of a wife better possibly than some women who are lawfully bound. In making a study of Miranda's likes and dislikes, he was uppermost in her mind at all times. Turning from the murky mire of the past she challenges the cousins to tell one instance where she had turned back. Twenty years of steadfast devotion, though it is not of the highest type, exemplifies the fact of her real worth.

Character: Ottima

Drama: Pippa Passes

Ottima, the great white queen by her own triumphant claim, "magnificent in sin," and her episode with Sebald is one of the tremendous things in English drama. This scene reaches the highest tragic utterance in Browning. A young, beautiful Italian with splendid shoulders and "hair with a cast of life in it" had become the wife of old Luca Gaddi and the mistress of Sebald, a German. Her fearless spirit, and her air of self-importance are at times to be admired. Every sentence she utters shows her the excessive, carnal woman that she is. Deep in the soul of this magnificent, erring creature, lurks the strong belief that "the wages of sin is death", but she will enjoy the present, and ward off the evil day as long as possible.

Temptress of her weaker paramour, whom her indiscretion has dragged into the murder of her husband, Ottima gloats over the deed and encourages Sebald in stirring, passionate words to crown her his great white queen. At this moment the words of Pippa's song,

"God's in His heaven

All's right with the world"

float up to the two guilty lovers. Sebald sees that virtue is better than vice, purity better than lust. Instantly all beauty in his sight, leaves her; his love turns to hate; she is the pitiable, wretched woman cowering before the just wrath of God and the man whom she has so cruelly wronged.

We are shown one germ of good in her, which might be enlarged to cover the gross mistakes and impurity in Ottima. Just at the moment of death, passion is overcome and for a short time unselfishness and remorse are shown in the words, "Not me, to him, O God, be merciful!" She would take upon herself alone God's punishment of their joint deed. Redeemed at last, her love is chaste and pure and rises to the supreme heights of self-abnegation.

Browning's theory that personality is power is presented in the character of Ottima and this scene is one instance in which Browning's ethics and art join.

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