SIX TYPES OF WOMANHOOD FOUND IN BROWNING.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Type Selection</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pompilia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottima</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balaustion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucrezia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildred</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Author</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Environment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Travel</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Personality</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Style</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Viewpoint</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Scope</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Pompilia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Ottima</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Pippa</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CONTENTS (Cont'd)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. Balaustion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Lucrezia</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Mildred Tresham</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the six types of womanhood which I have chosen for this thesis, I wish to state my twofold object in making the selection that I have made. First: I wish to prove the scope of Browning's knowledge and his optimism, in the character delineation he presents, and secondly, I wish to call attention to the presence of a common characteristic in the widely divergent types, - a note of goodness is found in each, and with one exception, that of Lucrezia, a measure of truth is found in each. These qualities differ in intensity in the characters who possess them. I shall mention the characters briefly in the order I have taken them and dwell on each more at length in the thesis proper.

Pompilia's truth and nobility awaken Caponsacchi's soul to the majestic law underlying all life-service of God. Answering the need of Pompilia is the occasion here. He responds to the call with splendid directness.

Browning aims to make the study of soul development through critical moments of experience; he holds that a man is tested by his reaction to the
crowning experience of his life.

In Pompilia is found his most wonderful reading of the soul of woman. He presents her pure in thought, word, and deed. Her wonderful soul shines forth an exalted exemplification of womanhood. When but her own safety is at stake she is submissive to the cruelty of her base husband, but when a life that God has entrusted to her - a life within her own - is in danger, her splendid heroism of soul is shown. The right virtue is used for its proper end.

Browning finds an opportunity in Pompilia of portraying the most intimate relations of human life. The purity and nobility of his own attitude are perhaps nowhere else more admirably shown than in this instance. He teaches here that the body is simply a garb for the soul and the outer expression is only meaningful when it embodies something which is deeper than itself.

Ottima, in "Pippa Passes", has been chosen as an outstanding type of character, strong in courage, callous, cruel in utter sensuality, yet possessing the force and honesty that are usually found in simple characters, whether good or evil. Under this hard exterior, Browning shows the reader a vein of
womanly tenderness in that hour when she expresses her willingness to accept, alone, the retribution for the joint sin. Even without the aid of Pippa, this womanliness and instinctive love for truth would have saved the passionate Ottima. There are natures where direct intervention is unnecessary.

In "Pippa Passes", the lonely little mill girl, Pippa, is the chief character. She is a type of innocent girlhood, charmingly gay, yet possessing a deep seriousness of imagination. She has been selected as an example of one who walks alone through life, apparently too obscure to leave a trace of her passage, yet exercising a lasting, though unconscious influence on those whom she meets. Several illustrations of this unstudied influence are cited in the portion of this thesis that is devoted to discussion of her character. Stopford A. Brooke says of her: "She lives like a flower of the field that knows not it has blest and comforted travellers who have passed it by." The innocence of Pippa, an innocence that is not ignorance, is unlike that of Mildred Tresham in "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." There is a quality of courage in Pippa's innocence that is lacking in the innocence of Mildred.

Balaustion, the central figure in "Balaustion's Adventure," has been chosen for the markedly individual quality of her character. Keen, subtle, and true of intellect as she is lovely, she furnishes a type of ideal womanhood. The reader is vitally, not merely aesthetically interested in her. Her vitality leaps to meet him from every page. Vivid and vigorous, she is not a lay figure upon which to drape sentiment. Ethel Colburn Mayne says of her: "To me, Balaustion is the queen of Browning's women - nay, I am tempted to proclaim her queen of every poet's women."

Lucrezia, the wife of Andrea Del Sarto, is chosen as an example of the type of woman who can attract a man and hold him tangled in the charm of irresponsible sensuousness. The dramatic monologue is used throughout this subtle study of personality and by means of it there is a wonderful illustration of the tragedy of failure. The moan of a heart whose despair is hopeless is heard in these words of Andrea:

"Had I been two, another and myself, Our head would have o'erlooked the world!"

In "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, Browning

(N.B. All references to Browning's works unless otherwise indicated are based upon the Cambridge Edition, Boston, Houghton Mifflin & Co., Publishers, 1895.)
presents as the central character, Mildred Tresham, a girl of fifteen years of age, who has been reared in strange ignorance of the conventionalities of social life. She is exceedingly immature, and the immaturity is such that years do not seem capable of removing it. Comparing her with the modern type of girlhood, it is hard to understand her character. Naturally one would assign her to at least nineteen years, though she seems neither a child nor a young girl in the compromising situation which exists.

Mildred has been selected for discussion here to prove that Browning found material for character study in widely divergent types, and that his longing for variety of representation induced him to write of the original material of womanhood, of its strong and weak alike, and the weakness, folly, and contradiction of human nature. She is the only woman in Browning's works in whom timidity and shrinking are stressed, and she is the only one of his characters, also, in whom he does not portray his admiration for dauntless individuality. Browning's presentation of her innocence and her love is much weakened by the over-sense of shame and fear which replaces the natural courage of innocence.
The only defense she makes of her sin is found in these lines where she replies to the offer of aid presented by Guendolen and her brother: "I - I was so young! Besides, I loved him, Thorold, and I had no mother; God forgot me, so, I fell." This seems hardly the expression one would expect in such a situation. Frequently Browning fits emotions too mature and complex to his characters, but here he has passed to the opposite extreme. This childlike complaint of Mildred can only be explained by her immaturity and the blighting influence of her brother whose conduct is scarcely that of a rational being.

This is the only instance where Browning does not reveal his characters as they are but as others see them. His individual type is lost in the fog of this artificial atmosphere. What a portrayal he could have presented here, had he written in the mood native to his temperament.

Where the ideal tone of many other writers is at variance with their lives, it is inspiring to be so certain that Browning was as great in character as in genius. Christianity was the mainspring of his life and its influence is markedly present in

his characters especially at moments of intense emotion.

"Vengeance is God's not man's,  
Remember me! 1.

is heard from the lips of the dying Lord Tresham in "A Blot in the 'Scoutheon", and Mildred, in the same work says:

"And then God seems indulgent, and I dare Trust Him my soul in sleep." 2.

The callous Ottima in "Pippa Passes" cries out in her awakened soul:

"Not to me - to him  
O God, be merciful." 3.

Countless instances occur throughout Browning's works to bear out this assertion, and many of these present themselves to the reader in the thesis which follows.

2. Ibid., p. 226.  
3. Ibid., p. 133.
Before reviewing Browning's treatment of the chosen types, his life should be summarized briefly in order to show that he was influenced in his writings by his early environment and associates.

English by birth and ancestry, he belonged to the solid educated middle class. There is a tradition among his biographers which places his ancestors among the men prominent in feudal ages, but this is due perhaps to the fact that he used a seal with a coat of arms. Thousands of middle class men use such a seal merely as a curiosity or because it is a legacy, caring little for the condition of their ancestors in the Middle Ages.

F. J. Furnival, in his essay on Browning's ancestry, seeks to disprove a current opinion that Jewish blood coursed through Browning's veins, because of the latter's interest in Jewish matters. 1. The task of obtaining a clear account of his ancestry will be abandoned and an endeavor will be made to give what is more important - a clear account of his home and its influence.

The father was a man of great delicacy of taste and an almost exaggerated delicacy of

conscience, with numerous accomplishments of the higher kind, such as drawing and painting. His feeling for literature was fastidious and exact.

The mother was the daughter of German and Scotch parents. From his mother's training, he received a strong religious habit and a great belief in manners. Within the home in which he was born, equally well-poised conditions befriended him, fostering the development of his emotional and intellectual nature. From his father, was transmitted exuberant vitality, insatiable intellectual curiosity, and capacity, raised in him to an effective power. From his intellectual mother, he inherited a sensitive physique and strong aesthetic instincts. From her, too, he inherited the artistic sense so apparent in his writings.

Browning's education in a formal sense was reduced to a minimum, as one would expect under such conditions. Ordinary schooling was too puerile for this embryo poet's wide-awake wits. His education was largely conducted at home with, "instructors in dancing, riding, boxing, and tutors for French and music." With a course in Greek at London University, his formal education ended. If the matter is tested by the standards of actual schools and

universities, Browning appears to be the least educated of English writers, but if the value of his education is tested by the amount learned, he is, if anything, broadly-educated. In the atmosphere in which he lived, learning was a joy. He was a great admirer of Shelley, and this affection is evidenced in his poem, "Memorabilia". He calls Italy "his university", as he traveled much through this land and has placed many of his settings there. Here, too, a great part of his singularly happy married life was spent amidst brilliant landscapes, cultured friends and high and ardent intellectual interests.

In these ideal surroundings, the poet led a comparatively quiet life and laid the foundation of his slow but solidly-founded literary fame.

The permanence of this union of many mingled strands of intellectual and emotional affections is shown by the frequent instances in which is noted the unmistakable accent of personal feeling when he presents a type of ideal womanhood as he knew it through his cherished wife. Stopford A. Brooke says of him in the "Poetry of Browning", "It is owing to his wife that the women he represents are finer and stronger in intellect than the men." 1.

"Prosopoe" and "My Star" are both resonant of her influence and in the poem, "By the Fireside", his allusion to his wife is plain:

"My perfect wife, My Leonor,
Oh Heart my own, Oh eyes mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path gray heads abhor?" 1.

Browning, inspired with a democratic inclusiveness, allowed his choice of subject matter to range widely, and his intellect sent messengers into fields seldom visited by other authors. Wherever he found latent possibilities of character, whether hero or knave, he strove to place that individual before his readers. He sees possibilities in "Caliban" the lowest type; his travel in Russia suggests "Ivan Ivanovitch"; an old yellow book containing a Roman murder story suggests the "Ring and the Book", and a painting in a Roman gallery is the inspiration for "My Lost Duchess." His scope of knowledge and admiration for individuality are evident in the diversity of characters found in the six types of womanhood discussed in these pages, in which though he sweeps from primitive to consummate types, his selection is by no means a haphazard choice.

It would seem that he was not content to group

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 186.
women in a few classes and deal with their universal traits, since generalizations are liable to contain but partial truth; but he takes each type separately and marks the points which differentiate her from—not those points which she shares with other women. Had he acted otherwise, he would have missed the endless interaction and variety that stamps his characterization as "Browningese."

Many of his characters express his own ideal of womanhood. Note the perfect type in Balaustion, every noble attribute of womanhood at its highest—the desire to be helpful, in Pippa—the strength of mind in Guendolen when she comes to the aid of Mildred Tresham. These are built up not only from his tender reticent worship of his wife's memory, but also from dreams of his own heart, the imaginings of the honor and affection that a good man feels for noble, natural and honest womanhood. It is the general consensus of opinion that no other modern poet has created women with such varied personalities as Browning. Motherhood, sisterhood, and wifehood are portrayed with clear truth, kind compassion, dignity of thought and feeling, and a strengthful embracement of understanding.

Within the scope of his womanhood types, we
find the quick individualities, extreme of resoluteness, signal self-sacrifice, timidity and daring, unstudied impulse, simplicity and sophistication. Stopford A. Brooke says of him, "that each man or woman he met suggested to him the thought - 'Here is a new class; what distinguishes it from the others?' That I shall ascertain." His longing for variety of type led him into unusual fields, and here he does not hesitate to select the types farthest removed from goodness and love, and sketch them with masterly stroke and with clear direct intensity.

He makes single pictures of these at isolated crises of their lives, and while he mingles good and evil, there is an invariable tendency displayed to cause good to conquer evil. Pompilia's vindication bears out this statement admirably.

No shade of patronage is apparent in his character delineation of womanhood; there is a frankness, a recognition of the individual, on a basis of merit and not of sex. No words are wasted in defining her position; she is not to gain in mental breadth on any but her own merits. Again and again do his women see the truth, and impress its value, on those around them. They are invariably strong.

and their influence is felt not always for the good.

Pompilia calls out the latent chivalry in Caponsacchi by her trust. Even Ottima is stronger in her wickedness than Sebald, her weak partner, and who can surpass the mental strength of Balaustion to mould the affairs of her loved Athens?

It may be mentioned in passing, that children seem to awaken no special sympathy in Browning, though compassion towards the weak and injured is not only part of the framework of his poems, but is also a notable characteristic of many of his characters.

The disappointed, the misinterpreted, those crushed by misfortune, are rendered immortal, as far as lay in the power of his facile pen to make them so; for example, Pompilia and Balaustion.

The zest with which offers of friendship may be fulfilled finds adequate expression in his poems.

It is a dangerous pastime to attempt to measure how far a writer's characters are a reflection of himself, but we are safe in saying that no single character of Browning's creation has divergent traits so harmoniously blended as he himself possesses. Grim honesty and exquisite fancy, quietude and storm, delicacy and passion, dark shadows
and subdued lights are blended with adroitness in his artistic invention. Landor writes of him:

"Since Chaucer was alive and hale, no man has walked along over roads with step so active, so inquiring eye, or tongue so varied in discourse."

In the value of human love, the poet shows that this feeling is not an impossible ideal, existing only in the realm of fancy, but a living religion bringing those who love nearer to God through the exaltation of this feeling.

1. Elizabeth Luther Cary, Life of Browning, Knickerbocker Press, London, p. 120.
Chapter I.

POMPILIA

Lovers of the beautiful in literature will always be grateful to the creative pen of Robert Browning for having presented a character so complete in spiritual development as Pomplia Comparini, the central figure in "The Ring and the Book."

He portrays her highly endowed with wisdom and possessed of an insight not dependent upon ordinary knowledge, but gained through the experience of her own personal sufferings. The keynote of her character is found in these lines:

"I knew the right place by foot's feel
I took it and tread firm there." 1.

In order to study her rare personality, her life story will be summarized in these pages as briefly as possible without sacrificing the unity necessary for clearness in character delineation.

Many years ago there lived in Rome, a respectable couple of the modest middle class, childless and comparatively wealthy, at least to the extent of possessing a house and land, and in addition to this, a suburban villa. Pietro craved an heir, and his wife, Violante, succeeded in purchasing from

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 539.
some poverty-stricken parents, an infant, whom she represented as her own child. She deceived even her trusting husband, who accepted the babe as a gift from God. As the child emerged into girlhood, Violante determined to secure for her a titled husband, and at the same time, the shelter of a palace for herself and husband in their old age. Count Guido Francheschini, the scion of a noble, but impoverished house, saw in the beautiful girl a desirable head for his home and a means of replenishing his empty coffers with the dowry that a daughter of the house of Comparini would naturally bring. Thus old Pietro's adopted daughter became the wife of Guido. Violante and her husband went to Arezzo, the ancestral home of Guido, hoping to enjoy the luxury of royal apartments.

It was not long before they realized that they had been deceived in turn. They were much disappointed in their new home, which proved to be a sepulchral mansion. They longed for their old home and their daily feast of good food. Four months of this purgatory was unendurable, and they departed for Rome, leaving Pompilia in a most unfriendly environment.
Old Violante, sorely disappointed in the result of the marriage she had arranged, partly through a desire for revenge on Guido, at whose hands she had suffered, with perhaps, a second motive, contrition for her deception, confessed that Pompilia was not her child; therefore, Guido need expect no such dowry as the agreement called for. Guido, naturally, took the view that all this was done to cheat him, and resolved to revenge his fancied wrongs on Pompilia. He deemed no torture too great to inflict upon her.

Now indeed was the child-wife at the mercy of the cynical, mocking man of the world. His very soul is disclosed, a man whom life has disappointed, stung into fury; his hypocrisy, maintained until now, slips from him because his hatred for his blameless wife is too deep for that hypocrisy to cloak.

Against this vividly contrasted background of lust, greed, and hate, Pompilia's soul shines in clear relief. Uneducated, untrained, her natural goodness renders her spiritual penetration more than an equivalent substitute for a merely educated intelligence. Her clear sense of truth enables her to detect the threads of the net which imprison her,
and the means of escape from its meshes for herself and her unborn child, for whose safety no risk is too great.

All of Guido's household are in collusion with him, and together they devise a plan to cause suspicion to fall upon the unfortunate Pompilia. To attach the stigma of marital infidelity to the young wife seems the most feasible plan, and a young cleric is named as the object of her affections. Guido's discovery of her base birth has increased his aversion for her and he resolves to rid himself of her in such a way as not to forfeit any pecuniary advantage which might be derived from their union. Lust of money has turned him into a veritable beast of hate. His vindictive fury spends itself upon the defenseless Pompilia, who at the age of fifteen had become his wife, ignorant of the responsibility that marriage entailed upon her, ignorant as well of the cruel fate in store for her.

The base husband now completes the intrigue by producing forged letters of incriminating nature in which Pompilia tells the Abate, Guido's brother, that her parents have advised her to find a paramour, carry off the valuables from her husband's home and burn it down.
Hard beset, the suffering woman looks for aid to Caponsacchi, who as man, and much more as priest, was bound to help weak innocence. Caponsacchi befriends her in her hour of direst need. No qualms of conscience disturb her determination to enlist his aid, nor is she troubled as to her inalienable right to escape from her husband's cruelty and insure the safety of her unborn child.

Though estranged in soul from the unworthy Guido, her attitude toward him is inevitable, she submits to his cruelty until Providence provides an avenue of escape in the aid of the chivalrous young cleric, who arranges for her flight from the home of Guido. She accepts her suffering for the sake of the final supreme good and feels the assurance that good will come at last, even to those who have worked the evil.

The course Pompilia takes, though strange, is justified for life and honor's sake. In this, the world sees nothing but the simple fact of flight - a defiance of its conventional code - and, it must be admitted, a situation hard to explain.

Caponsacchi yields to Pompilia's piteous entreaty to take her to her parents in Rome, but strength fails her ere the journey's end is reached.
and the priest is obliged to seek shelter for her at an inn fifteen miles from Rome.

Secure in the blessedness of relief so near, she falls asleep in the care of the kindly old inn-keeper's wife, who sits all night by her bedside.

At the first gray of dawn, Guido and four companions burst into the little room where the child-wife lay wrapped in dreamless sleep. Aroused from her slumber by Guido's strident voice, Pompilia stands erect, face to face, with her tormentors. The hidden powers of her soul are called into action by his aspersion of her womanly honor, and her physical courage here is equal to that of Caponsacchi. Seizing a sword, she brandishes it; but the wretches close around her. Vainly Caponsacchi pleads that justice and mercy be accorded her who trusted him to take her to Rome to the kindly old couple who loved her.

Police convey Pompilia and Caponsacchi to Rome, where the court finds nothing to punish in either. The former is allowed to go to the Comparini home, where soon after a son is born to her. Hearing of this, Guido resolves to avail himself of her unprotected position to seize the child and its inheritance and put his wife and her foster parents
to death. The triple murder follows, and the murderers, caught red-handed, are cast into prison.

Guido and his accomplice are executed soon after. As the wretched Guido dies, he lays bare his soul in his cowardly prayers for life. Against this unstrained outburst, the image of Pompilia's natural saintliness is lifted and enhanced: "Let him make God amends, - none, none to me." Step by step, she goes over all he did and even finds excuses for him. She speaks with spiritual power of the forgiveness of Eternity for Guido and the eternal reward merited by the knightly priest, who rises when occasion demands, to a reverential height. Gaponsacchi recognizes here that the true service of God is the answering of the individual woman's need:

"I am a priest.  
Duty to God is duty to her." 2.

Granted that he may have seen in the spiritual nature of Pompilia, a possible ideal, there is no ground for other than a base mind to attribute to their flight any unworthy motive. Life and hope are extended by Gaponsacchi, and Pompilia silently accepts the outstretched hand. No need for words; both are true to God and to their higher selves.

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 524.  
2. Ibid., p. 498.
"We two are cognizant o' the Master now." 1. They trust each other and realize without speech the central worth of their souls.

Love for purity, the eternal infinite desire, masters Caponsacchi; his soul stands clear, divine in its birth.

Pompilia's character is made alive by the author, and the loveliness of Heaven is reflected in the undaunted spirit of this maid of tender years. Innocent and simple hearted, she influences those who minister to her needs in her last days of life. Even Guido, in his death agony, calls upon her name that she may intercede for him:

"Abate,-Cardinal,-Christ,-Maria,-God... Pompilia, will you let them murder me." 2.

No matter how deep hidden the good in those about her, it responds to the touch of her gentle influence. Witness the effect of that first meeting with Caponsacchi, her womanly intuition of his real character, her penetrating through the worldly veneer to the real manhood beneath. His indifferent worldly spirit is replaced by disgust for the uselessness of his life, and he is filled with a desire to be all that his God-given vocation

2. Ibid., p. 594.
demands:

"I will live alone, one does so in a crowd, 
Lent ended,- I told friends, - I shall go 
to Rome." 1.

Natural goodness renders her spiritual penetration more than an equivalent substitute for an educated intelligence. Her clear vision enables her to detect the threads of the net with which she is surrounded in the evil intentions of Guido's brother, and the efforts of the maid who acts under Guido's instructions. She seeks means by which she may be freed from their plots. Through all these trials, her fortitude is unbroken, her courage never deserts her.

Resolute in self-rescue, happy for a brief space in her motherhood, she dies in full faith and love of God, after a troubled life.

Lovers of the nobility of spiritual beauty will always be grateful for this character. Lying on her deathbed, she looks adown the troubled years of her short eventful life and speaks words of forgiveness for all. Thus do those who stand at the brink of life, see life's vicissitudes softened and bettered. Of her husband she says, "Let him make God amends, - none, none to me." In the weakness of approaching death, the bliss of spiritual

tranquility and the love of new-made motherhood are equal in ascendancy. Ethel Golburn Mayne says of her: "Who would analyze Pompilia, would tear a rose to pieces. Pompilia is no heroine, no character; but indeed, a rose gathered for the breast of God."

Pompilia's character has been portrayed here more through Caponsacchi's speech than through her own actions. This is a favorite device of Browning and a device which best portrays his characters.

Never has author showed the beauty of maternal love more pathetically than here where the expectant mother deems no sacrifice too great, that the child, whose advent she longs for, may be protected.

1. Ethel Golburn Mayne, Browning's Heroines
Chapter II.

OTTIMA

As far removed from Pippa, as night from day, stands Ottima, the wife of Luca, magnate of the silk mills - Ottima, the bold, over-confident Italian, with all of the callousness and patience of her race, strong in her individual and national traits, a bold sketch of character, painted in splashes of ungraded color.

She first appears in the summer house on the hillside at dawn's first light. She and her lover, Sebald, have caused the husband's death. The blood-red beam through the shutter's chink arouses fear of discovery in Sebald, but not so in the cold, deliberate Ottima. She meets his demands, to throw off the mask and acknowledge their guilt, with an invitation to forget the deed. She offers him wine, which he refuses:

"Here's the wine; I brought it when we left the house above."

With astounding patience, due to her callousness, she makes no comment, but again offers him wine.

This racial attitude of unchangeableness remains markedly present until the critical moment,

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 131.
when he urges her that they must not show in public any indication of their guilty secret, her marvelous patience gives way, and with a tirade of ironic rage, she flings upon him the frenzy of reminiscent hatred and treachery she has ever cherished against her dead husband. Seizing Sebald's hand, she deliberately replies:

"Now he is dead, I hate him worse...
I would go back and hold
His two dead hands and say,
I hate you worse, Luca."

Sebald's hysteria reaches its climax here; he flings her from him. Restored to her wonted calm by his repulse, she displays an even greater depth of hardness in her next remark, when she asks him to help her remove the body of her murdered husband from his home.

Her deliberate criminality is in sharp contrast to his deepening horror of the deed they have together accomplished. It is not so much the killing, as the fact, that he has betrayed the man whose bread he had eaten, and who had rescued him from starvation. Browning here proves his theory, that the good of human life more than outweighs the evil; that all the incidents of life may become opportunities for growth of soul. Here, Ottima

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 132.
might have changed the aftercourse of their lives
by acknowledging the crime and making what atone-
ment was possible; true to her character, she re-
sents his base blaming of her alone and reveals the
whole of her nature—callous, courageous, proud,
and passionately cruel in its utter sensuality.
Then, with the honesty that attends simplicity, in
Evil as well as in Good, she replies, forcing him
to look at her as she makes the avowal, that she
loves him better even for the crime. Glorifying in
her recall of her accomplice, she bids him remember
her, his queen, and forget all else. Just at this
moment, Pippa's song floats through the latticed
window and arrests the full tide of passion within.
Ottima cries to her to be still and orders Sebald
to raise his voice as well, but the Voice from
Heaven has ruled; the hour has struck. He turns
upon her with words of hate that sear her soul:

"Wipe off that paint! I hate you.
I see what I have done,
Entirely now! Oh I am proud to feel
Such torments—let the world take credit
thence—
I having done my deed, pay too, its price!
I hate, hate—curse you! God's in his
heaven." 1.

She pleads in her piteous answer that he speak to
her and not of her. Relentlessly he pursues the

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 133.
unhappy Ottima, with his cold analysis of baffled passion's aspect. Goaded to natural anger, by his insolent accusations, she overwhelms him with a torrent of reproach and invectives; appellations of coward, ingrate, liar. In contrast to her flaming fury is his cold dissection of her. Weakling as he is, he flings the worst of blame on her, who had been for him all that she knew how to be, and crying that he paid the price of his deed, he stabs himself. Here Browning shows what he intended from the first to do; that Ottima is the stronger spirit of the two.

Vainly she seeks to wrest the dagger from his hand. She would die, that he, forgetting her, might live. "I always meant to kill myself. Lean on me, don't love me." She is willing to sacrifice even her sense of womanhood. Pippa's song has awakened the dormant wealth of beauty in that darkened human soul, that had always been there awaiting the need, to call it into action. Pippa's song has revealed the true courage of Ottima's soul, her instinctive love for truth, repressed by her callousness.

Browning clearly shows in this dramatic experiment the keen study of womanhood that enables

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 133.
him to depict so clearly the changing mood of the
passionate, strong-willed Ottima, whose spiritual
element is developed in a decidedly criminal en-
vironment. In her, he portrays a character invest-
ed with a spiritual interest, that at the hands of
one less experienced in the delineation of woman's
character, would present to us only morally loath-
some corporal beauty; yet here is a significance
beyond what belongs to her actual deeds. Here is
a study in the unlimitedness of human character.
Temptress and instigator of murder, made fouler by
the ingratitude involved, she nevertheless shows
possession of potentialities for good.

A germ of good appears in her, which properly
nurtured, might have grown to cast out the mass of
impurity and callousness, instinctive desire for
truth, leaps for one moment to the height of self-
abnegating love. Egotism and sensuality give place
to the womanliness in the cry: "Not to me, to him,
O God be merciful." She would assume all the res-
ponsibility for the crime. Here the moral darkness
of the poem is illumined for an instant by a flash
of moral light. Passion seems to purify itself by
its very strength. The pictorial effect of light
and shade, a blending of ethics and art; passion
just at the moment of death separates itself from the baser elements of selfishness.
Chapter III

"Pippa Passes", was evidently written more to please the poet's own fancy than were many of his other poems. It seems, too, that realizing that Sordello was not comprehended by the general public, Browning determined to use his powers in a simpler fashion and please the common folk.

There are many characters found in "Pippa Passes", excellently drawn and varied from one another. Some are placed in too unnatural a situation to allow their womanly nature full play, as is illustrated in Phene, coached for her part by the wicked Natalie. Their womanhood appears, as it were, not a whole but in scraps. The two outstanding emotional states - religious enthusiasm and the natural world of womanhood - cross and recross each other. These conflicting emotions are elaborated with merciless analysis by this student of womanhood's character.

In these characters, torn by simultaneous contending emotions, Browning shows us an infinity of characterization, instantaneous flashes, now
obscuring, now revealing these vividly contrasted states where a step to right or left might place in jeopardy, the spiritual basis of the soul.

In Pippa, the Asolan girl, we have an example of the dimly conscious medium through which the good forces act in the world. Passing by as an angel, she touches with the wings of her happiness, events and persons changing them to good. Unconsciousness of her natural genius adds to the charm of her personality. She has only one day in the year for her very own, and she resolves to use each moment of it, according to the plan she formulates, as she dresses herself on that bright New Year's morn. She thinks of the four persons in the town whose lot she considers is happiest and resolves to imagine herself each in turn.

Her early morning song:

"All service ranks the same with God
With God, whose puppets best and worst
Are we; there is no last nor first." 1.

contains the philosophy of the play - human lives are inextricably entwined, and all are dependent on the will of God.

Up at dawn, she looks from her window upon the sunrise; next, she wanders upon the street in sheer

indolence. Stopping to gather flowers in the intervals of her singing, she affords us a beautiful deification of an unconscious influence, a message that tells how people of whose very existence we are ignorant may be eternally affected for good or evil by our most thoughtless words and actions.

In an obscure village among the hills of northern Italy, Browning creates for his readers, Pippa, the Asolan mill girl, replete with grace of soul, unconscious of the influence she exerts on New Year's day, as she passes through the streets of the town, her very soul clothed in holiday garments for the day. She wishes, just for the day, to be something in the lives of the four people in the village whom she believes to be the happiest; to touch them for help and company:

"I may fancy all day - and it shall be so -
That I taste of the pleasures, am called by the names
Of the Happiest Four in our Asolo!" 1.

She is familiar with every phase of the world of Nature, sees all that is beautiful therein, rejoices in it, and grasps the matter of thought that underlies its beauty:

"Oh lark, be day's apostle." 2.

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1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 130.
2. Ibid., p. 144.
Accompanying this joyous brightness of disposition is a deep seriousness of imagination, natural piety, and instinctive purity:

"I will pass each, and see their happiness, And envy none being just as great, no doubt, Useful to men, and dear to God, as they!" 1.

In her unconsciousness lies the secret of her charm. Only one day in the year is hers for her very own, and for that day she creates a personality for herself; a mingling of the ideal and the real, ready to speak to everyone, desirous to get at the soul of Nature and Humanity.

As she passes down the street, she speaks to the sunlight and to the flowers, proving that however isolated from society she may be, she is never alone. She glances toward the home of the haughty Ottima, and fancies her possessor of all that the wealth of the magnate, her husband, can buy. She little knows that the betrayed husband lies murdered by the faithless Ottima and her accomplice, Sebald, who already regrets his treachery to the man at whose table he sat as guest. Ottima is telling him that she loves him better for the crime, and as she caresses him, the voice of Pippa is heard singing without: "God's in His Heaven."

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 130.
The conscience-stricken Sebald starts guiltily, and as his accomplice tries to reassure his fears, he realizes fully the enormity of his crime, and with a mistaken idea of atonement takes his own life. Likewise to her guilty soul comes the consoling thought that "God's in His Heaven." She begs God's mercy for the dying Sebald, and asks that all the punishment be meted out to her. In the self-immolation, her redemption begins, and to Pippa's influence is due the conversion of both.

The morning passes, noon approaches, and through Pippa, a second good work is wrought. Jules forgives Phene and resolves to awaken the moral sense in her soul and make that soul bright with life. Pippa's song has effected the reconciliation.

Evening comes. Luigi is discussing with his mother, a plot to kill the emperor. Pippa passes singing: "No need the King should ever die." Luigi recognizes a warning from God, and resolves to go away. His pursuers fail to find him; his life is spared.

Night closes around Asolo. A plot is maturing to entrap the unsuspecting Pippa. Already,
the ecclesiastic has hastened to the temple, when
Pippa passes singing her happy song, ending with
the refrain: "Suddenly, God --took me." Conscience
awakes and the villains are arrested; the base
crime is prevented.

Weary of the day's pretense, Pippa returns to
her humble chamber, wondering how near she has ap­
proached the people of her fancy to render them a
service, and as she falls asleep, she murmurs:

"All service ranks the same with God,
With God, whose puppets, best and worst!
Are we, there is no last nor first." 1.

Pippa, the silk girl, had a mission to convert
Ottima, Sebald, Jules, and the Bishop. She sings
in the lightness of her heart, and the line of her
morning hymn is the Arrow of God to two sinful
souls. Her sadness at the close of her day, over­
come by her trust in God, makes her more dear. She
is one of a band of women, the salt of the earth,
who, by merely following the dictates of their
clear womanly intelligence, effect good in the
world by being what they are, sympathetic, pure and
devout.

Browning reveals here most beautifully his
splendid optimism in showing the nearness of God

1. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 145.
to man in conscience. God's love, in Browning's mind, is shown in the Voice that warns man of the dangers that await, even though He stands apart, that many may have room to work out his own destiny.
Chapter IV

B A L A U S T I O N

Browning never proved his literary power more than when he created Pompilia and Balaustion, viewed in contrast but at harmony in their spiritual depths of womanhood.

Balaustion is the central figure of "Balaustion's Adventure," in which Browning presents his heroine as a young Greek maiden of fascinating personality. No greater contrast can be imagined than that between Pompilia at seventeen and Balaustion at fifteen years of age. The latter has all the Greek capacity and a thorough education of Athenian type. Passion, intelligence, and natural genius render her influence threefold; she sweeps her kinsfolk into patriotic agreement with her; subdues the sailors and captains to her will; and from her post beneath the mast, she sings the crew to energy. When wearied sailors lag upon their flagging oars, with finely-balanced judgment, she decides moral and intellectual questions with justice, yet with mercy to the wrong opinion and the wrong resolve, because her clear intellectual breadth makes her tolerant and forgiving.
Her personality dominates men, and her latent powers flame with decision and revelation in the poetic genius with which Browning endows her. Nor does he give her this alone; he clothes her also with a spiritual genius that secures for all posterity, the intellectual record of Athenian life and the images, wrought to vitality of Athens' wondrous men.

In the Athenian days, poetry was a potent factor to cement friendship, to make enemies into friends, to build lands where many nations were welded into one.

Under the blue sky at the temple's steps, Balaustion tells the story of Alkestis, and is wooed and won by the young Sicilian, who takes passage with her when she is sent back to Athens. There the lovers see Euripides, and tell him how his play has redeemed Balaustion from captivity.

After her marriage, she again tells the story, commenting on the personages and their acts. Her inserted words are character-revealing; love of poetry, of beauty, the delicate exact distinctions are shown in these comments. Her humility in spite of an embracing self-knowledge, can not fail to impress the reader, as he follows the historic tale
in which she figures.

Besides the romantic touch that the story gains by the creation of this lyric maiden, there is a special fitness in making the dominant personality a woman, since Browning analyzes so well the self-communing thoughts of womanhood.

All the Grecian gladness, intelligence and passion, with no alloy of sensuality, radiates from this vivid presentation. Her wonderful strength of character enables her to meet sorrow when troubled days appear, and in this contact spiritual strength is born, the possession of which enables her to become a prototype of Joan of Arc, to her own people. In the light and color of Greek environment, she is exalted to a heroism unlooked for in the contest between Athens and Syracuse. Here the poet recognizes no sex in soul; he does not place its power in womanliness, but in the poet nature which is a rapid transit from one mood to its opposite - a burst of sun-warmth for an instant through enveloping clouds.

From happy girlhood, untouched by sorrow, to mature and experienced womanhood, she is the teacher of truth and love and history. Passionate in her patriotism, she is the life and support of all
who are with her, when at the tender age of fourteen, the news arrives that the Athenian fleet has been destroyed and the captured Athenians are driven to labor in the Syracuse quarries.

Balaustion, though but a mere girl, cries to all who would hear, begging them not to throw off Athens for Sparta's sake, nor be disloyal to all that was worth calling the world at all. She entreats them to take passage for Athens. Many respond to her impassioned appeal and accompany her on the perilous trip. Pursued by pirates, and driven by adverse winds, they make for the island of Crete to seek safety. To encourage the rowers, Balaustion springs upon the altar by the mast, crying to the sailors to free their wives, their children, and their temples.

Amidst the terrific storm, the boats press on, the oars, "churning the black waters white." Soon they see land, but to their dismay, Sicily and not Syracuse. Out comes a galley from the shore, demanding whether they be friends or foes. It was explained to the exiles that they could not land lest their presence would affect the quarry captives. The captain pleads to spare the innocent. Then the enemy demands a song from Euripides, and Balaustion

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is carried to the temple steps, where she sings her country to freedom. "Balaustion is born with that genius which has the experience of age in youth and the fire of youth in age," and from the same author: "Balaustion is the finest creature Browning ever drew - so clear in judgment that she sees the right even when it seems lost in the wrong."

Summing up the outstanding characteristics of Balaustion, as the author presents her from happy girlhood to mature and experienced womanhood, she is a deliberate picture of genius, her life, her soul, its growth and strength, are laid before the reader. No coarseness shows a trace of itself in her exquisite personality. Her nature is revealed in her "seeing eye, her delicate distinction, her mingled humility and self-knowledge." To her spiritual imagination is added keen moral judgment. Mrs. Sutherland Orr says of her: "She sees the justice in the doom of Athens, and desires justice to have its way."

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2. Ibid., p. 389.
3. Ibid., p. 369.
Chapter V.

LUOREZIA

In Luorezia, the wife of the artist, Andrea Del Sarto, Browning furnishes a new type. Cold, unsympathetic, but wonderfully beautiful, she is the model for many of her artist-husband's pictures.

By her indifference and sarcasm, she chills the outwardly successful life of the painter, and thus adds new torture to his soul, wrung by a deep inner sense of failure.

Contemporary with Michael Angelo and Da Vinci, Del Sarto works in an atmosphere freighted with agony of spirit, induced by the remorse attendant upon those who set up their own will in opposition to that of the Almighty, and then accept the fetters as though they were imposed by God Himself.

The faithless Luorezia first appears in their studio in Florence. It is the twilight hour, and the artist soul of Del Sarto responds to the gathering darkness with deepened depression, as he endeavors to bribe his wife by gold to accord him some semblance of the love he lavishes upon her. He is weary of his work, but never weary of
Praising her beauty.

Pitiful is the tragedy of this faultless painter's life. To him fell the lot to love a faithless woman, at whose unworthy shrine his life, his art, and his honor were offered. He is saddened by the realization that he is but a shareholder in the affections of his wife, who neither understands nor takes any pride in her husband's work, though she consents to pose for him as a model for his Madonnas. In this she finds new food for her vanity.

The element of generosity does not enter here. Jealous and overbearing, wearied by his impotent passion, she endured him only that he might furnish her with wealth and pleasure. We can find no single redeeming quality in Lucrezia, who is devoid of heart and intellect, save her faultless, soulless beauty; the perfect body, but no soul, as seen in the Madonnas of Del Sarto, all of which are modelled from his wife. No regret finds place in her hardened heart, but friends are betrayed, and parents starve through her baneful influence. There are no qualms of conscience at his wrong doing for her sake; a broken life means naught to her, if it will bring more wealth, more jewels, more
pleasures. Through her importunity, she causes her husband to forsake his higher ambitions of art, nay more, the common ground of honesty; her home is purchased with King Francis' purloined gold.

Vain and sordid, fashioned of commonest clay, no noble instinct guides her; she absorbs the opportunities and gifts of her husband in her own useless life. Her utter selfishness and lack of interest in his work starve his affections, render his perceptions less keen, and fetter his wonderful impulse and capability. The dishonesty of his financial relations with the King has robbed him of his friends. The charm of Lucrezia's irresponsive sensuousness, a sensitive appreciation of her faultless material beauty, with no hold on her thoughts and desires, is all that is given Del Sarto in exchange.

Edward Howard Griggs says: "Andrea, the wild bird, rises to beat its breast against the inexorable bars of the cage; then fresh-wounded, it droops helpless to the floor."

Faithless, jealous, overbearing, demanding that he abandon his parents and adopt hers in return, this artful, fascinating woman, immutable in her determination to have her own way, so

dominated the soul of her weak-willed husband that he accounted it a pleasure to serve her, though fully aware of her base marital infidelity. Edward Berdoe says: "No woman ruined his soul; he had no soul to ruin."

One feels, however, that this criticism permits of modification. The fact that Andrea Del Sarto realizes that he has sacrificed his moral, and in a certain degree his artistic conscience, to a woman who does not return his love is shown in these lines:

"A common grayness silvers everything,
All in a twilight, you and I alike --
You at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know) -- but I at every point;
My youth, my hope, my heart, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole." 2

He sees he is but a half man, working in an atmosphere of "silver gray", his sensitive nature is responsive to the sensuous appeal. His soul-reach ever falls short of the artist's dream. Lucrezia calls him down.

2. Browning's Complete Poetical Works, p. 346.
Chapter VI.

**MILDRED TRESHAM**

In "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon", the plot revolves around Mildred Tresham, a girl of tender years, who has been an orphan from early childhood. She has been reared in strange seclusion by her brother Thorold, who has proved himself a monomaniac of family pride and conventional morality.¹

So exaggerated is his pride of ancestry that he considers the wreck of all things else as of little moment compared with any stain on the family honor, or even any question of his own reputation.

The morbid spirit of chivalry which is expressed in the play is characteristic of the Eighteenth Century, the time in which Browning places the setting of this work.

A neighboring earl has fallen in love with Mildred, who through a mistaken fear of her brother, consents to carry on a clandestine courtship. Earl Mertoun, her lover, is deterred by a mysterious feeling of awe for Mildred's brother, from formally presenting himself as a suitor for her hand. Realizing too late the compromising

¹ Edward Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopedia*, Macmillan Company, Chicago, p. 82.
situation which has resulted, he is anxious to repair the wrong and attempts the late reparation. This is frustrated by the hasty act of Mildred's brother, who brings down on both a terrible retribution.

The climax in this tragedy of sin and misunderstanding is precipitated by a faithful old retainer of the family who tells Earl Tresham that Mildred entertains a secret visitor. Thorold, in great mental distress, hastens to question his sister regarding the matter. She admits the circumstances but refuses to divulge her lover's identity. Overwhelmed by the convincing proofs of his sister's degradation, Thorold rushes madly from her presence and wanders about the grounds until midnight, when he sees the lover preparing to enter Mildred's room. Beneath the signal light which Mildred has placed in the window, the two men fight, and Earl Mertoun falls mortally wounded.

Here one can not refrain from remarking that had this tragedy resulted from the mistake of one wholly innocent, it would jar the sense of right and therefore could not be considered legitimate art. This irony of circumstances is the motive of art's truest tragedies and the source of earth's saddest discords. As Lord Mertoun dies, the Earl
sees the mistake that his too hasty and too chivalric desire to avenge any blot on the family honor has led him to commit. He realizes too late that he is the murderer of Henry Mertoun. He resolves to end his own life by poison, thinking that he will thus make some atonement for his rash deed.

Browning's fondness for concentrating attention on high places in emotional experiences is shown in the triple tragedy that follows the discovery of Mildred's degradation. The Earl is mortally wounded; the proud hasty brother dies of self-administered poison, and the broken-hearted Mildred realizes her full guilt and its consequences to her family. The weight of calamity is too great for her feeble strength to bear. She too dies, forgiving her brother and blessing him.

Deep moral and artistic justice are shown in the fact that the fatal crisis is—although apparently the result of accident—the natural consequence of wrongdoing.

The emotions which thrill Mildred's sensitive frame are depicted with intense truth and delicate art, and the author proves himself determined to show no more of body than is needed to show soul. Here is a vivid flash that is soul revealing of
Mildred's remorse:

"My sole prop
Against the guilt that crushes me, I say
Each night ere I lie down, 'I was so young -
I had no mother, and I loved him so!'
And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
Trust Him my soul in sleep." 1.

The presentation of Mildred's character, in
despite of the pathetic beauty of the last scene, is
cheapened by the utter foolishness of the trespass,
and the total lack of adequate temptation. There
is nothing to prevent the marriage that the two
lovers desire if they follow the broad plain path
of virtue. An overwhelming reverence for Lord
Tresham has kept the Earl from asking the hand of
Mildred in marriage:

"How good
Your brother is! I figured him a cold -
Shall I say, haughty man?" 2.

Mildred blunders in trying to shield her lover and
sees no way to retrieve her blunder. She refuses
to give his name when questioned by her brother:

"But do not plunge me into other guilt!
Oh, guilt enough! I can not tell his name." 3.

This overstrained effect in Mildred is accentuated
by the contrast with Guendolen, her cousin who is a
woman of the world yet not worldly, full of exper-
ience, just and strong. She is a type of high
hearted womanly common sense. Note her quick

2. Ibid., p. 221.
3. Ibid., p. 224.
decision when Austin, her betrothed, urges her to leave Mildred:

"What and leave Mildred? We? Why where's my place
But by her side, and where yours but by mine?"

In spite of the weakness of the two lovers and the confused clashing of family pride, innocence and remorse, the whole action is full of genius and passionate pathos. It holds within itself a true and tender source of interest for the reader. George Willis Cooke pronounces this drama, "the simplest, the most direct in method, and the most pathetic" of the great author's works. The work deals with sin and its punishment in an abnormal and inexplicable situation. The characters are over introspective and they actually dissect themselves as they die. They call down on their own heads the consequences of their wilful rashness. Not until the final scene is Mildred's frightened simplicity replaced by womanly courage when she speaks thus:

"As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain.
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven."

Here Browning's optimism rings through Mildred's speech in joyful peal.

SUMMARY

In a general survey of Browning's work, as he deals with the six types chosen for discussion here, he is found consistent with his first preoccupation - the study of mind.

His range, and his mental vigor are shown, not more in the number and variety of his characters than in the variety of their portrayal. The same optimism, the same truth, and goodness are repeated, but the scenery, the situations, and the characters are never alike.

This analysis of mind is inspired by one ethical impulse, to preach discontent with low ideals. After scrutinizing his characters, he translates his thoughts into their tongues. His theory of life glides into the portrayal of each character. Pompilia's words of faith, gratitude and forgiveness are reflections of his religion and optimism. The dormant good in Ottima's sensuous soul awakes and rises to an exalted height. Here the author shows us that Ottima is the stronger nature of the two.

The immensity of his scope is seen in the widely divergent types of Pippa and Balaustion. The child-like simplicity, the sweet humanity, the seriousness of imagination and the unconscious
influence of Pippa on her little world of Asolo is set in contrast with Balaustion, Browning's deliberate picture of the steadying power of genius. This genius is intensified by rare intellectual power. Browning's depth of knowledge is shown here when he creates these two characters in vivid contrast, yet in their depths in harmony; both equal, yet widely apart, in noble aspirations.

Browning's love of truth and hatred for deception are seen in his delineation of Lucrezia's faithlessness, for whom one feels a keen dislike as the story proceeds. Even in her, his theory that each soul possesses a germ of good, is upheld when he reveals her solicitude for the welfare of her parents. Mildred Tresham is presented in an unusual situation - individuality is absent - as she first appears, but at her lover's death she somewhat retrieves herself and regains a measure of courage. In this invented situation, Browning shows his intellectual ability to advantage.

His characters are chosen as a man culls flowers on a wayside walk, here and there a big subject - which the literary world expects to be treated - is chosen.

He repeats his theories but he does not repeat
his types. His freshness of invention renders each character an individual with truth and goodness, in some degree, a note in each. Throughout his works, Browning's wonderful power of seeing and presenting the same limited group in so many different lights, his ability to grasp and transmit to the reader the varied standpoints from which men of different types view the same tragedy, is impressed upon the reader. This variety of views is fittingly exemplified in the "Ring and the Book."

His wonderful verse may be compared to the poetry of motion seen in the graceful swing of the skater's stroke, every line is full of strength, poise, and beauty.
The following works have been found helpful in the preparation of this thesis:


Clark, Helen A. *Browning's Italy*. Baker and Taylor Company, New York, 1907.


