The Clerical Characters of Robert Browning

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Browning felt that his function as a poet "was to give his reader portrayals of life and to fill them with such vitality that the reader would be stimulated by them to work out conclusions regarding their meaning for himself."[1] In Browning's quest to inspire his reader, portrayals of life through his clerical characters constitute a large portion of his collected works. My purpose in this paper is to discuss the development of Browning's clerical or religious characters as unique aesthetic creations which Browning employed to achieve his poetic purpose.

For Browning, religion was "an experience in conflict, an inspiration for one more retelling of the rhythmic everlasting struggle between faith and doubt or the exigencies of the infinite and the limitations of the finite."[2] In the clerical character and situation, Browning ascertained "elements which appealed to him as most apt to provide appropriate materials and a ready-made stage for his probing anatomies of interesting characters in revealingly critical situations."[3]

A clerical character must deal with pressures within himself, as well as his environment. As a man of God, he must be tied to the absolute ideal; as a human being, he must accept his actual accomplishments:

> This complexity creates the ultimate Browningesque situation of inevitable and essential discrepancy between the ideal and any human effort, where nonetheless success or failure, good and evil, are determined by the degree of commitment to the unattainable absolute ideal.[4]

Browning's use of the clerical character must be understood through its varying degrees: (a) the cleric as incidental; a prop, rather than an

integral part of the poem; (b) the cleric as integrated narrative device; (c) the cleric as a stereotyped personification of good and evil; (d) the cleric as *persona* for the poet; and (e) the cleric as a complex character interesting in himself, and as an integral part of the poem.[5] These categories are not absolute. Indeed, some clerical figures may fit into several of these divisions. It is the last category which I will deal primarily with; however, the other stages must be commented on in order to gain a fuller understanding of Browning's clerical characters.

In viewing the scope of Browning's work in this way, it is my contention that a development in his clerical characters will emerge, from the early occasional and incidental characters, to a culmination of full characterization in such poems as *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, and in the conception of the Pope in *The Ring and the Book.*

The Cleric As Incidental, or Prop

In 1835, Browning first mentions a clerical character in *Paracelsus*, Book III, where the disgruntled physician is reminiscing how he was called to a dying prince's bedroom. The physician recalls that he drove off several tormentors: an astrologer, an inefficient physician, and two monks. One monk "fumbled at the sick man's mouth/With some undoubted relic-a sudary/Of the Virgin." After the prince was alone with Paracelsus, and freed from his tormentors, he miraculously recovered. Paracelsus was captured and charged with being a sorcerer, and trying to take credit for what the hard-praying monks had accomplished. The prince made a large offering to the neighboring abbey and gave this gift to his people:

> The prince was pleased no longer to defer
> The burning of some dozen heretics
> Remanded till God's mercy should be shown
> Touching his sickness. (III.463–66)[6]

In *Paracelsus*, the clerical characters are notable only for what they

foreshadow in Browning's later poetry.[7] They are used here merely as a prop to support parts of the poem and are not essential to completeness of the poem.

The Cleric as Integrated Narrative Device

In *My Last Duchess* (1842), Frà Pandolf is an example of Browning's use of the clerical character as integrated narrative device. Why Browning invented a cleric to paint the Duchess' portrait has been strongly disputed. Perhaps Frà Pandolf was a prime cause of the Duke's jealously.[8] Norton Crowell suggests much the same idea when he speaks of the Duchess' "naive acceptance of the obvious flattery of Frà Pandolf, who calls the blush to her cheeks as much for perverse sexual pleasure as for art."[9] Crowell further states that the meaning of "Frà Pandolf's hands/Worked busily a day, and there she stands" (L1.3–4) denote that the Duke ordered "the painter [to] finish the portrait in a single day as a means of occupying hands suspected of dexterity in the art of love as well as of painting."[10]

However, arguments have been made to the contrary. Some critics believe that Browning made the painter a cleric in order to remove sexual implications from the poem.[11] Whether or not Frà Pandolf was sexually attracted to the Duchess and consequently, a rival for the Duke, will probably never be agreed upon. The pertinent fact to this paper is how Browning employed the character of Frà Pandolf as an integrated narrative device in *My Last Duchess*.

The Cleric as Stereotype of Good and Evil

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister (1842) is the first poem which Robert Browning set in a totally clerical environment.[12] Charles Thomas Phipps states that "the poem is a portrait of hypocritical malice and envy, and the monastery provides a bizarre, unusual setting...which renders the whole portrait more striking, more sharply focused and controlled."[13]

Brother Lawrence is the personification of the virtuous soul, and for Browning, extemporized virtue was an essential element of human good-

ness. The soliloquist, on the other hand, is another matter:

> The malevolent monk, with his obsessive concern for external religious observance and his free indulgence in a pettiness of spirit more diabolical than human, is in direct antithesis to Browning's philosophy and a striking example of the perversion which the poet habitually saw as a latent danger in the ascetic life.[14)]

The spiteful monk seems intent on carrying out his beastlike existence, and this is evident in the opening and closing "Gr-r-r" of the poem. He himself seems very familiar with his "scrofulous French novel" and imagines that a simple glance at it is enough to make Brother Lawrence "grovel" in sin.

Brother Lawrence is an innocent; his gardening is a symbol of the goodness of life. The soliloquist, in contrast, is caught up in empty ritualism; his every word and act is a refutation of life and a negation of the natural.[15)] The two characters are stereotyped personifications of good and evil, and perhaps may even gravitate toward caricature:

> The Browningesqe tension of this poem...is not derived from a highly personalized interior struggle, such as will typify the poet's later clerical characters. The conflict in the Spanish cloister is an essentially external one between two basically different human beings.[16)]

The Cleric as *Persona* for the Poet

In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* (1864), the poet finds an outlet for his own contemplative psyche; the Rabbi "is a totally subsumed *persona* for the thought of the mature poet."[17)] The Rabbi voices Browning's own deep-rooted ideas on religion and life. In stanza vi, the cleric expresses that doubt and pain are a part of attaining knowledge:

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,

Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

(VI,31–36)

In stanza xii, the Rabbi states, "Let us cry "All good things/ Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!" (L1. 71–72). Thus, the poet's belief is stated: flesh is holy, and it is not a hindrance to the soul's reunion with God. The body is a house for the soul while it is on Earth.

Browning expresses his feeling that God tresures man's aspirations more than man's success and achievements:

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:......

XXIII. 133–38)

"The Victorians, like ourselves, were convinced that they were living in an age of transition......The Victorian zeal did not necessarily rise out of their confidence, at least in religion and philosophy. If it was an age of faith, it was even more an age of doubt."[18] This doubt is seen by Browning's Rabbi and his realization that few people share his faith:

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

(XXII. 127–32)

We see a touch of Platonic philosophy in Browning's view of the temporal world versus the ideal world:

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.
(XXVII. 157–62)

Thus, the "Rabbi's philosophy......has strong resemblances to Browning's own ideas."[19] The cleric functions as *persona* for Browning, and through the Rabbi, we see the poet's views on religion and life.

The Cleric as a Complex Character

The cleric as poetic character interesting in himself is seen as a full-scale achievement in Browning's *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church* (1845).[20] The primary incongruity in this poem is the fact that the dramatic monologist is a Bishop, a man of God and "consecrated witness to the primacy of the spiritual, who is splendidly featured as the consummate sensualist."[21] Louis Friedland has commented on the poem's satirical success: "The sharp contrast......derives from the priestly faith in a heavenly immortality combined with a profound unwillingness to forgo temporal glory. No such......overtones would be involved in a comparable wish of a layman."[22]

In the first ten lines of the poem, we are given major hints that the Bishop has disgraced his occupation. First of all, the Bishop has broken his oath of celibacy and entered into a love affair. This element is added to the Bishop's hatred for Gandolf, his rival. Second, his nephews are in actuality his sons; and third, he is now trying to accept his own death:

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine......ah God, I know not! Well——
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it?......... (L1. 1–10)

The Bishop speaks of how "peace seems all./ Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;......"(LI. 13–14). However, in his next breath, he recalls how he "fought/ With tooth and nail" (LI. 15–16) to save his niche from Gandolf. Yet, his "niche is not so cramped" (L. 20) and the Bishop looks forward to an eternity in Saint Praxed's Church of peace, happy that he has surpassed Gandolf with his love affair, as well as with his conspicuous funereal niche. He gloats over the fact that his tomb will be intentionally placed so that Gandolf will be forced to look at the Bishop's grand tomb: "For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!" (L. 50).

He muses on "how I shall lie through centuries, /And hear the blessed mutter of the mass..." (LI. 80–81). He will "see God made and eaten all day long,/And feel the steady candleflame......" (LI. 82–83). Suddenly, he breaks from his beautiful vision of an eternity spent in bliss and states, "Evil and brief hath been my Pilgrimage" (L. 101). The Bishop knows that he has failed in his duties as a man of God, and he is terrified of this glimpse of truth. He immediately returns to his deceptive symbol of eternity: "All *lapis,* all, sons!" (L.102).

The poem ends with the rejected Bishop enveloped with pride that he has accomplished something: Even if an elaborate tomb is not built by his sons, he has successfully rivalled Gandolf in his illicit love affair:

And leave me in my church, the church for peace,

> That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
> Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
> As still he envied me, so fair she was!
>
> (LI. 122–125)

In the second thematic element, we find a more tragic situation, which would not be so tragic if the monologist was not a clerical character; the Bishop's nephews are in actuality his sons. They are unresponsive to him and he is insensitive to them, also. As he describes his grand tomb to them, he mentions, "those nine columns round me, two and two,/ The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands" (LI. 27–28). This image of Anselm at his father's feet suggests the Bishop's insensitivity to his sons. Additionally, this image implies a tragic flaw in the Bishop's inter-personal relationships with people: People are categorically the same as the *lapis lazuli*, and therefore, they are ornaments to be controlled and possessed.

The Bishop has been very generous to his sons; he has left them all of his material wealth. All he wants in return is an elaborate tomb. As the poem unfolds, the Bishop realizes that his hope for a beautiful tomb is in vain. He curtly orders his ungrateful sons to leave him: "For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude/To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! (LI. 114–15).

The third thematic strand is the element of death, and the Bishop's acceptance of it. He wants to immortalize himself with a beautiful niche; he slowly recognizes that his sons will not grant this. As his sons depart, he is left to comtemplate his death:

> The sons from whom he sought the fulfillment of his foolish dreams of eternal materiality now stand as executioners eager to inflict upon him the only "death" he has ever feared, a total and final physical ugliness. Earlier in the monologue, whenever the truth had threatened to destroy his egotistical delusions, the Bishop had instinctively focused his attention on stone as a symbol of hope and security. Now for the first time he has admitted to himself the vanity of all his plans......[23]

The Bishop finally recognizes his physical death as one of ugliness:

> Stone—
> Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
> As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
> And no more *lapis* to delight the world! (LI. 115–18)

Left alone, the Bishop's only solace is the memory of his beautiful mistress and Gandolf's envy.

The triumph of *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church* is due to Browning's gift for dramatic diction, his amazing imagery, and his persistent ironies. Yet, the poem's fullness would not be possible without the Bishop's status as a man of God. The clerical character and situation provided Browning with the perfect stage for unfolding the inescapable paradox between the unattainable absolute ideal and commitment of human effort to that which is unattainable.

In *Bishop Blougram's Apology* (1855), we are given a vision of what to expect in the Pope's monologue in *The Ring and the Book*. There have been several approaches taken concerning the character of Bishop Blougram in Browning's poem.[24)] The traditional attitude has been that Blougram is a hypocrite and the personification of evil.[25)] A diametrically opposite interpretation has been stated by other critics; that the Bishop is a sensible man and basically honest.[26)] A third interpretation is seen by Rupert E. Palmer, who sees the poem as the "straightforward presentation of the views of a very complex man, who probably has felt the pull of faith but also has felt, and just as strongly, the desire for power, wealth, and luxury."[27)]

The fact that Blougram is a cleric is essential to the poem. Because he is a man of God, "the bishop shares the prophetic faculty which has been given to the Christian Church; he is living in the light of the Christian revelation, and that has illuminated his life and has restored his blinded vision."[28)]

The opening lines of the poem set the stage for the unfolding of the dramatic action: the monologist is a Bishop and he is speaking to Mr. Gigadibs. They have met to talk and "see truth dawn together......"

(L. 17). Gigadibs has had his turn and spoken his "home-truths" (L. 47) and now it is Blougram's turn.

The Bishop aggravates the situation by his attack on Gigadibs' idealism, and the defense of his own accomplishments:

> ......whatever more or less
> I boast of my ideal realized
> Is nothing in the balance when opposed
> To your ideal, your grand simple life,
> Of which you will not realize one jot.
> I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,
> I would be merely much: you beat me there.
>
> (LI. 79–85)

However, we see that Gigadibs has been deceiving himself with an "abstract intellectual play of life/Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws..." (LI. 92–93). The Bishop confronts Gigadibs' skeptical position, which can "accept no faith that is not fixed" (L. 162), with an expressive discourse which exposes its unproductiveness:

> ......Where's
> The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
> Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
> Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
> The grand Perhaps!
>
> (LI. 179–90)

As the poem unfolds, the Bishop is recognized as a unique and complex character. He knows what he needs:

> I know the special kind of life I like,
> What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
> Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
> In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.
> I find that positive belief does this
> For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
>
> (LI. 234–39)

For the Bishop, faith is his "waking life" (L. 245) and he allows his "heart, head and hand/All day" (LI. 249–50) to guide him in his life as a man of God. He still must live with the knowledge that his faith is of a contingent nature:

> You call for faith:
> I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
> The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
> If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
> By life and man's free will, God gave for that!
> To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:
> That's our one act, the previous work's his own.
>
> (LI. 601–07)

In the end, we learn that Blougram has succeeded in arousing doubt within Gigadibs. The Bishop's counsel has shaken Gigadibs' complacency and self-assurance; he has started for Australia with the light of his new knowledge. Thus, we see Browning's view exemplified in *Bishop Blougram's Apology:*

> The bishop's starting point is the same as Browning's: as a man, he is free to choose. For Blougram, the choice is God.......Man cannot escape uncertainties in either belief or disbelief....Bishop

> Blougram...knows his faith is hardly more certain than Gigadib's disbelief, but it is the only way for him. Furthermore, it meets the pragmatic test: it works.[29]

As William O. Raymond recognized in one of his essays, the Pope's monologue in *The Ring and the Book* is Browning's "most complete expression of his philosophy of life.[30] The Pope himself is one of the poet's greatest and superbly drawn characters.[31] Browning's Pope functions as an autonomous, complex character; as meaningful narrative device, sharing in the plot's action; and as a *persona* for the poet.

Until Book X, the Pope is pictured as a wise and truthful cleric, an infallible man among men. The emergence of the Pope in Book X takes the reader aback; the infallible Pope reveals himself to be a tired old man. He may not live very much longer; indeed, as early as line 23, he speaks of his "own funeral cyst."

The Pope recognizes his fallibility: "I take His staff with my uncertain hand" (L. 164). He realizes that he is a man, acting "in place of Him" (L. 167). Every judgement of his, or any other man is fallible: "Mankind is ignorant, a man am I: /Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin!" (LI. 257–58). God has given him the task of judging others. The Pope must not fear his decision, but stand on his integrity as a man of God. As the monologue unfolds, we realize that the Pope is troubled by a larger problem:

> All his doubts are, as it were, objectified by the relatively minor point of law concerning the legitimacy of Guido's claim of clerical privilege. In Browning's ethical system, it is imperative that no act be really trivial; successful living demands that man's whole self be a revelation of a total life. It is in this sense that the Pope's otherwise routine decision can become "the trial of my soul" (X. 1300), and thus an appropriate opportunity for reviewing the whole of his (and Browning's) criticism of life.[32]

The Pope is forced to view the nature of truth. Human knowledge is

limited; therefore, man's ability to know real truth is of a fragmentary nature. Words are "filthy rags" (L.372) and only distort what they seek to convey, because words alone are inadequate to express the truth. For every truth, there is a lie:

> ...Man must tell his mate
> Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
> Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think
> "He lies, it is the method of a man!"
> And yet will speak for answer "It is truth"
> To him who shall rejoin "Again a lie!"
>
> (X. 366–71)

In this faltering world of doubt and irresolution, only one question can be answered without indecision; our own presence and God's reality:

> After long time and amid many lies,
> Whatever we dare think we know indeed
> —That I am I, as He is He,—what else?
>
> (X. 378–80)

The Pope probes the evidence inch by inch, in a detailed review of the murder case (X. 398–1247). The Pope considers Guido's life in detail; he was a noble by birth, who could have been a man of God, yet purported priesthood for protection. Guido is a Judas, "irreligiousest/Of all mankind, religion's parasite!" (X. 452–53). Guido could have struggled to overcome his evil instincts, but he did not allow the "seed" of integrity to branch out. The Pope's condemnation of Guido comes only after long deliberation of the facts at hand. After his mind is made up concerning Guido, he begins to reflect on the foundation of his own faith:

> ......shall I too lack courage?—leave
> I, too, the post of me, like those I blame?
> Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,

To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
I am near the end; but still not at the end;
All to the very end is trial in life;
At this stage is the trial of my soul
Danger to face, or danger to refuse?
Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare?

(X. 1294–1302)

The Pope speaks of the great chain of being: each creature is linked to God and is a reflection of God. Any knowledge that we derive from life on Earth is only fragmentary. We can only know God's strength and intelligence, but not God's love. Divine perfection is viewed as an "isoscele" (X. 1361); its sides are strength and intelligence, and its base must be love that is unlimited:

> Thus the Pope "reasons" to the core-doctrine of Christianity, the Incarnation. The cosmic need of such a revelation of God's love "may be surmised"; its fulfillment he finds in a "tale" which he probes with his reason and pronounces internally sound, but which remains independent of any objective proof. Within the closed world of a subjectively conceived necessity he comes to the intuitive conviction that the Incarnation must be true because the alternative would be intolerable.[33]

Even though we have only partial knowledge, we must still choose our own path, based on fragmentary knowledge and intuition:

What could I paint beyond a scheme like this
Out of the fragmentary truths where light
Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
Shoots life and substance into death and void;
Themselves compose the whole we made before;
The forces and necessity grow God......

(X. 1754–60)

Since only partial truth is known, Christians have perverted their religion by a fraudulent sense of self-assurance. This "ignoble confidence" (X· L. 1842) dulls the spirit and unnerves Christians. They need to accept faith which includes doubt: "If Love is God, then one can accept the uncertainty of knowledge and the inescapable doubt within faith."[34] The Pope precariously hopes that doubt within faith will be accepted by future Christians and a new spiritual age will dawn:

> Unless...what whispers me of times to come?
> What if it be the mission of that age,
> My death will usher into life, to shake
> This torpor of assurance from our creed,
> Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring
> That formidable danger back, we drove
> Long ago to the distance and the dark?
> Till man stand out again, pale, resolute,
> Prepared to die,—that is, alive at last?
>
> (X. 1842–57)

Thus, we have come full-circle. The Pope ends his monologue with the decision of Guido's fate sealed and ratified. By questioning Guido's innocence or guilt, the Pope has meditated on the real questions within his own soul:

> We end where Browning always ends. Truth does exist independent of the observer, but it can never be apprehended in its purity upon this earth...Belief in God remains a matter of choice, not compulsion. Browning believes because he trusts the impulses of his inner being, just as the Pope must trust his intuition in pronouncing his judgments. Having examined every portion of the evidence, he still must step beyond fact into faith.[35]

Conclusion

In Browning's clerical poetry, there is a definite development from his early occasional characters, to a culmination of full characterization in *The Ring and the Book*. Browning was inspired by the built-in tensions and conflicts which are inherent in a man of God, who must strive for the absolute ideal, while weighing his actual accomplishments. Through clerical characters and their situations, Browning's unique imaginative creativity was allowed to soar and to flourish.

Notes

(1) Donald Smalley, ed., *Poems of Robert Browing*, Riverside ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), xx. All references to Browning's poetry, unless otherwise indicated are from this edition.

(2) Charles Thomas Phipps, *Browning's Clerical Characters* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1976), p.72.

(3) Ibid., p. 75.

(4) Ibid., p. 76.

(5) See Charles Thomas Phipps, p.135 for a discussion of (b), (d), and (e). See p. 80 for details on (a) and (c). I have incorporated the two groups together for my paper.

(6) See T.R. Lounsbury, *The Ear.y Literary Career of Robert Browning* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911) pp. 29–44 for a full account of Paracelsus and its reception.

(7) It is interesting to note here that Browning's information on clerical life stemmed primarily from his childhood, his vast reading, his residence in Italy, and his wife's influence. During his earlier poems, as well as his later poems, Browning's relations with Catholics, clergy or lay, were mostly fo an indirect or of a secondary nature. He was an outsider observing a foreign scene, but with incredible perceptiveness and creativity. For a detailed account of this subject, see Phipps, pp. 7–54.

(8) Edward Berdoe, *The Browning Cyclopaedia*, 2nd ed. (London: 1897), p. 282.

(9) Norton Crowell, *The Triple Soul: Browning's Theory of Knowledge* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1963), p.172.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Louis Friedland, "Ferrara and 'My Last Duchess,' "*Studies in Philology*, XXXIII (October, 1936), 65–84.

(12) Perhaps this poem coincides with Browning's first visit to Italy in 1838, where he could have been inspired by daily opportunities to see monasteries and friars. See William C. DeVane's, *A Browning Handbook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton, Century, & Crofts, 1955), p.113.

(13) Phipps, p.96.

(14) Ibid., pp. 96–97.

(15) Thomas C. Kishler, "A Note on Browning's 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,' " *Victorian Poetry*, I (Jan., 1963), 70–71.

(16) Phipps, p. 96.

(17) Ibid., pp. 114–15.

(18) E. LeRoy Lawson, *Very Sure of God; Religious Language in the Poetry of Robert Browning* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 14–15.

(19) Smalley, p. 520.

(20) Browning's sources for this poem stemmed from his knowledge of history (for this poem, the Italian Renaissance): his visit to S. Prassede Church in October, 1845; and the contemporary religious climate, particularly the Tractarian conflict. See Phipps, pp. 141–42.

(21) Phipps, p. 146.

(22) Friedland, p. 665.

(23) Phipps, p. 157.

(24) Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman was probably the inspiration for this character. See H.A. Clarke, *A Study of English Influences, in Browning* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1908), pp. 322–50.

(2) See, for example, Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1951), p.201.

(26) F.E.L. Priestley, "Blougram's Apologetics," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XV (Jan., 1946), p. 139–47.

(27) Rupert E. Palmer, "The Uses of Character in 'Bishop Blougram's Apology,' "" *Modern Philology*, LVIII (Nov., 1960), 108–18.

(28) William Whitla, *The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Robert Browning's Poetry* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1963), p.40.

(29) Lawson, p.116.

(30) William O. Raymond, *The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1950). p.137.

(31) The creation of the Pope as a character was based on the poet's knowledge of history; he incorporated details of real biography and general ecclesiastical history of the 1690's. See Phipps, pp.276–297 for a detailed account.

(32) Phipps, p.304.

(33) Ibid., p.305.

(34) Lawson, p. 125.

(35) Ibid., p.127.

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