

Browning's Vision of Life and Death in  
*Dramatis Personae* and *La Saisiaz*

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There is no denying the fact that one who is seriously interested in various facts of life becomes more or less an earnest seeker of ultimate truths about it. Robert Browning (1812-89), a representative poet of the Victorian age, was surely one of those seekers. In a sense Browning was more conscious of the problems of life and death than any other contemporary because he suffered the loss of his most beloved wife Elizabeth. *Dramatis Personae* published in 1864, which is the first collection of poems after her death, is a candid presentation of Browning's most acute feelings against and meditation of death and his becalmed yearning for eternal life.

To render the present study of Browning's vision of life and death as represented in *Dramatis Personae* and *La Saisiaz* more effective, a comparison with Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-92) his contemporary may be introduced.<sup>1)</sup>

Browning lost his wife Elizabeth at the age of 49. Tennyson also suffered a bitter parting with his best friend Arthur Henry Hallam when he was only 24 years old. Yet he did not bid an eternal farewell to the memory of his dead friend. He continued writing poems on serious problems which had come to occupy his meditative mind and persuade him to pursue their solution. It was 17 years after Hallam's death that *In Memoriam* (1850) first came out. Browning and Tennyson are very similar to each other in several respects. Each of them had to bear the loss of the closest comrade in his life, which was too much for his sentiment. After the death of Elizabeth, Browning almost shut himself from society for a time.<sup>2)</sup> Tennyson, leading a long secluded life, devoted all his energy

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to philosophical and metaphysical thinking and the composition of his elegy. In regard to their personal relationship with the dead, there is a similarity of situation between them. It is well known that Browning had a special reverence for his wife as a senior, excellent poet.<sup>3)</sup> He loved and accepted her whole personality with the exception of her eccentric liking for supernatural phenomena.<sup>4)</sup> He did not envy her talents; rather he praised them. An episode connected with someone's attempt to publish her biography immediately after her death shows what his attitude toward her was like.<sup>5)</sup> She was above all a fair assessor of his poetry, compassionate and sharp.<sup>6)</sup> As for Tennyson's attitude, a certain famous stanza of *In Memoriam* may be quoted:

My Arthur, whom I shall not see  
Till all my widowed race be run;  
Dear as the mother to the son,  
More than my brothers are to me. (IX, v)<sup>7)</sup>

There is a strong likeness between Hallam's position in the mind of Tennyson and that of Elizabeth in the mind of Browning. That is, Hallam is viewed by Tennyson as a spiritual wife. In his lifetime, Hallam was a wise leader, respectable both in character and intellect. He thought very highly of Tennyson's poetic genius. In addition to these resemblances, however, one should not overlook a striking contrast between the two. Whereas Hallam is much exalted, even half-divinized by Tennyson, Browning's response toward Elizabeth's death is somewhat more calm.<sup>8)</sup> Even if her dear figure lingered long in his mind, he would not indulge himself in a kind of retrospect alone. He is more interested in the way of leading a positive and practical life.

"Rabbi Ben Ezra" in *Dramatis Personae* is a very good example of the poet's deepened view of life and death. The speaker is an aged, experienced rabbi who, facing the approach of death, reflects upon his past and finds vital meanings in this life, death, and the next life. For one thing, this poem is a successor of "Saul."<sup>9)</sup> They have not only the same background, namely, Hebrew world, but also the same stream of thought. The intimate and trustworthy relationship between God and man is again

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emphasized in "Rabbi Ben Ezra". In this poem, however, the notion of it gets deeper than in "Saul." It is not part of the rabbi's whole idea; he concentrates almost all he has on this particular point. It gets a hold over the rabbi's mind and becomes an undercurrent of his exposition. This contrastive belief is set forth in the extended form of a metaphor: God as Potter and self as clay (xxiv). The exquisite metaphor employed here is reminiscent of the voices of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.<sup>10</sup> The old rabbi is troubled by the cold merciless treatment of the world. His achievement is not rated at all; he is even rejected by worldly people. He recognizes himself as thrown in a situation of banishment just as the prophets suffered in their times. But the Potter, whose creative hands control the fate of clay, has the tenderest care for even the slightest trait in each of his works. Browning must have naturally held such an idea because he himself was an artist. He could understand the delicate state of mind of one who creates.

Through Ezra's utterances the significance of death is revealed. It is fundamentally rooted in the divine will in Creation. God's initial plan in his creation was to make the whole man without a single blemish. Youth and age are two halves of an intended whole so that they are both indispensable to the fulfillment of the divine will. Therefore Ezra thinks highly of fears or doubts which are characteristic of man especially in youth. God made various kinds of troubles in order to improve and perfect man. "In Browning's philosophy of life we have seen that he holds that all the obstacles and troubles of our existence are intended by the Creator to make true men and women of us."<sup>11</sup> It is not until one comes to age that one finally admits the Maker's splendid plan. If the will of God lies in the perfection of man, then death plays the role of his agent to complete age, while age itself can look back upon youth and say if it was right or not. Ezra finds great satisfaction in age as if it was a completed mirror which enables him to look at the whole.<sup>12</sup> Most important of all is that although it gives the impression that Browning thinks of the divine will as almost done on earth, his initial vision includes the Maker's plan which extends from this life to the next. For all his wisdom and accomplishment on earth, Ezra is not absolutely free from defects and

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imperfections. He sees himself as destined to be heaven's consummate cup serving God, which is the final goal of his earthly life. To achieve this end, he must confront death face to face.

Concerning the present life, there is another notable thing in Browning. Men are sufficiently "impressed" by divine hands so that each of them possesses his personal features. Every man is a unique pot shaped by the Potter. Such an idea of personality intended by a personal God, which is essential to his vision of man, inevitably leads to a notion of a perfectly personal new existence in heaven. This notion may point to Browning's basic interpretation of eternal life. Alfred Tennyson also stresses exactly the same idea in *In Memoriam*<sup>13)</sup> They both have a very personal relationship with the Creator.<sup>14)</sup>

If "Rabbi Ben Ezra" represents the poet's view of death in close relation to life, "A Death in the Desert" conveys his no less deep idea that life should not be appreciated without considering the meaning of death. This contrast, though subtle, becomes all the more effective in the similar dramatic background of both poems. While the speaker in the former is an aged rabbi, in the latter it is the dying St. John, Christ's last living apostle. A characteristic element of the poem is that Browning's immense interest in the Hebrew world is revealed more clearly and decisively than ever before. Such a background allows him to deliver a freer speech from a Christian point of view. Throughout the poem there is a constant echo of old John's emphasis on Christ "the Word of Life." Christ is grasped as God endowed with both Power and Love. These two attributes which are one in Christ are the basic keys to solve the problems on earth. St. John, who saw the life and death of Christ, teaches:

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
"And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend—  
"Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,  
"How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;

(p.506, 11.35-38)

But John confesses that he himself was tempted to doubt the truth of God and hits on a further truth that love is necessary "to pierce the o'er-stretched doubt". The problem of doubt about one's faith is also an important theme

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in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson was almost excessively annoyed by waves of doubt about God's love and man's immortality. Once and again he utters his troubled spirit in a cry like this:

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;

(LV, ii)

But Tennyson gradually comes to realize the importance of love in overcoming doubt. A drastic change of mood is here:

Not all: the songs, the stirring air,  
The life re-orient out of dust,  
Cry through the sense to hearten trust  
In that which made the world so fair.

(CXVI, ii)

Tennyson believes in God as Creator and Love. So does Browning. As for the role of love, Tennyson attributes its main cause to the weakness of man's reason but Browning goes one step further, noticing the possibility of a fallible truth without the help of love. He has the strictness of a logician in facing the problem of truth. From this point of view, Browning's attitude in "A Death in the Desert" is undoubtedly in line with his intellectual comprehension of the danger of mere knowledge in *Paracelsus* (1835). Browning at a mature age, and having gone through the saddest human experience, has got a firmer belief in the working of love in life. Too much knowledge is very dangerous in a religious sense, too. John is seriously concerned with the meaning of death for the soul. According to him, it means to accept the word of God and then to deepen one's doubt about it; in other words, after receiving Christ's love, one rejects it. Thus knowledge alone may possibly become a way of destruction to man, namely death.

At the same time, however, it seems that Browning has not depreciated the value of man's reason. Conversely, his developed confidence in love guarantees the right operation of reason:

"I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ

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“Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
“All questions in the earth and out of it,  
“And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

(p.509, 11. 37-40)

Further, Browning makes John avow the real and valuable significance of man's existence in the following terms:

“While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
“Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
“And in this striving, this converting air  
“Into a solid he may grasp and use,  
“Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,  
“Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,  
“Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

(p.510, 11. 73-77

p.511, 11. 1-2)

John's view of man as a being on his way to perfection is clearly a companion of Ezra's belief in “A man, for aye removed/From the developed brute; a god though/in the germ.” Moreover, in “A Death in the Desert,” the emphasis is laid on ‘the pact of creatureship,’ which is the culmination of the poet's notion of a strong tie between God as eternal artist and man as an imperfect yet advancing one. This is the idea already shown in “Fra Lippo Lippi.” Using the metaphor of an artist here, Browning makes a distinction between God who can mould living flesh and make it live and a man endowed with artistic skill to deal with flesh-imitating clay. This is a symbol of falsehood. But man can get to real flesh (truth or life) in the future because of the special gift by God, namely, the ability to know the truth. It does not mean that he can become God himself. If this were possible, it would bring man instant death. In Browning's mind, there is always a consciousness of God and man as totally different beings. He is very sensible of the serious danger into which man is liable to fall. His unchanged conviction is that man's role on earth is to serve the Creator and be made to live. This seems to be the simplest and most fundamental of Browning's ideas of earthly life. In this poem, the poet's interest in the problems of death and eternal life is somehow less shown

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than in "Rabbi Ben Ezra." Main stress is put on how to live an actual life. It is quite an interesting contrast that, on the one hand, a living healthy old man reflects upon the meaning of death and, on the other, a dying man is intent on the way to live. In either case, the opposite notion is also a very important factor.

"Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "A Death in the Desert" can be seen from a single viewpoint: here is Browning at the height of his faith in God and love of man, which are based, as Dr. Berdoe says, on "the love of God manifested to the world in the person of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup> Both poems are as it were twin brothers complimentary to each other from a contrastive aspect (view of death in relation to life in the former poem, and view of life in connection with death in the latter). Yet the common thing is that in each poem, Browning's ultimate concern is still in this life. This is also an unchanged phenomenon from his youth.

Despite this consecutiveness detectible in both poems, however, at a deeper level, death definitely comes into view. Death is here meant not so much in a physical as a spiritual sense. Browning does not fear physical death as shown in "Prospice" but shudders at the possibility of the soul's decay or non-motion.<sup>16</sup> From this time on, his anxiety about the death of the soul becomes more and more predominant.

#### *La Saisiaz* (1878)

Robert Browning saw at least two shocking deaths before his own eyes: those of his wife and Miss Ann Egerton-Smith, an intimate friend of his and his sister's. Mrs. Browning passed away very peacefully in his arms. Her death, after a long period of illness, was not wholly unexpected.<sup>17</sup> Browning was in his forties and still vigorous enough to get over the tragedy. He succeeded in retaining his composure and setting to work with more vitality than before. By contrast, the sudden death of his friend in the autumn of 1877 was a tremendous blow to a man with more or less declining strength. He was 65 years old. He was finally forced to consider the problem of death in his own case, however distressing it might be. So he confesses in the poem. Of course, this is not the first time for him to grapple with the problem. In *Dramatis Personae* his attitude is very serious but still directed in the main toward this life. There are natural

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outbursts of feeling in "Prospice" and controlled passions in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" or "A Death in the Desert." It gives the impression that feeling has slowly come to be equal to or more than intellect for Browning. Yet in *La Saisiaz*, he seems to have partly recovered his youthful trait: superiority of intellect, as best shown in *Paracelsus*. His approach to the problem of death through questions and answers impresses a reader with his power of reasoning. But the whole poem is, at the same time, an experience of his own. Particularly in the beautiful descriptions of landscape and friendship, one cannot but feel the affectionate character of the poet. There is a clear combination of intellect and feeling in the poem.

*La Saisiaz* is, in a sense, a deliberate answer to the young poet in *Pauline* (1833). That is to say, at the starting-point of his poetic career, Browning almost predicted that he would have to deal with the problem of death in future.<sup>18)</sup> After Mrs. Browning's death, he became utterly conscious of it, especially that of the soul ("A Death in the Desert"). In *La Saisiaz* he has got to a certain summit of his thought about life and death. Dr. Berdoe, putting a high value on this poem, comments: "...In his long poem, *La Saisiaz*, we have the result of the poet's musings on death, God, the soul, and the future state..."<sup>19)</sup>

Browning's philosophical contemplation in the poem shows a contrast to that which Tennyson employs in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson is often absorbed in fancies of enjoying spiritual communication with the dead.<sup>20)</sup> But Browning prefers rather objective reasoning. He almost tries to exclude anything fanciful as much as he can. It is necessary to make a distinction between mere fancy and feeling. Browning in the poem is against fancy in opposition to reason, which, in his way of thinking, is most valid and useful with the assistance of love. Therefore, his conception of reason has something to do with warm feeling. It is not proper to define him as a cold man of reason.

Tennyson is desirous of meeting Hallam's spirit on earth.<sup>21)</sup> For all its metaphysical and contemporary implications, *In Memoriam* is essentially a personal elegy.<sup>22)</sup> On the other hand, the theme of *La Saisiaz* is not so much a sorrowful consideration of Miss Egerton-Smith's death as an earnest inquiry into the meaning of his own death. For this reason, it is



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not unreasonable that the poet sees the problem from the detached view-point of a logician.

The poem consists of two contrasting parts as a whole: portrayal of friendly love and metaphysical, logical speculation. The latter part, however, includes most of the crucial points concerning Browning's vision. To him, joy in life is a fact which means something won by his own experience, therefore, reality. Yet he realizes that such a fact could be easily threatened by its natural opposite, such as evil. If his joy is grounded on God's love in his creation, the existence of contrary realities should be explained in some way or other so that divine love may be proved. Browning never turns away from the dark side of human life. He knows and feels that on earth the power of evil is apparently triumphant and man is more or less imposed burdens. Man is an imperfect being, not God. Life is full of paradoxes. Then what is the solution of man's various problems? Browning cries:

I have lived, then, done and suffered,  
    loved and hated, learnt and taught  
This—there is no reconciling wisdom  
    with a world distraught,  
Goodness with triumphant evil, power  
    with failure in the aim,  
If—(to my own sense, remember!  
    though none other feel the same!)—  
If you bar me from assuming earth to be  
    a pupil's place,  
And life, time,—with all their chances,  
    changes,—just probation-space,  
Mine, for me.

(p.1126, 11. 49-55)

The meaning of earthly life is not to be clarified by itself. Life full of sorrow can be rightly grasped only in its relation to the heavenly condition. Only the next life promised by God can interpret the paradoxical life on earth. Browning rates man's free will high, which is none other than a gift from the Creator. Man is capable of choosing his way of living. It

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depends upon his will whether he leads a good, fruitful life or not. But he must be responsible for his choice because the next life relies on it. In this respect, the earthly life becomes a preparation for heaven. Here is the true severity of life. Thus as Brooke sums up: "They suggest, and in Browning's belief they proved, that this life is but the threshold of an infinite life, that our true life is beyond, that there is an infinite of happiness, of knowledge, of love, of beauty which we shall attain....."<sup>23)</sup>

At this stage, one fully understands that Browning's faith in heaven is the basic source of his characteristic joy. The joy of a young man on the basis of divine creation has got a profounder significance in his age.<sup>24)</sup> Besides, there is a shift of his main stress from earth to heaven. Here death intervenes. Death is regarded as a necessary condition of entering into heaven. It is the darkness through which man comes into light. Or, it is explained as a "Voluntary passage from this life to that by/change of scene."<sup>25)</sup> It must be noted that to Browning death is abominable in so far as it means the soul's death. Tennyson thinks of the soul's decay not only as a denial of God's grace, namely, immortality of the soul and rebirth of the body, but also as an eternal good-bye to Hallam's loving spirit.<sup>26)</sup> According to Browning's comprehension, it also denies the value of human life. The possibility of the soul's death is quite contrary to Browning's fundamental vision of life grounded on the divine purpose.

The heavenly state, attainable after going through a long dark passage of death, is described as follows:

Any moment claims more courage when,  
by crossing cold and gloom,  
Manfully man quits discomfort, makes for the provided room  
Where the old friends want their fellow,  
where the new acquaintance wait,  
Probably for talk assembled, possibly to  
sup in state!

(p. 1129, 11. 43-46)

A similar way of applying the metaphor of a banquet to heavenly life is noticeable in *In Memoriam*.<sup>27)</sup> Joy and repose in heaven are all the greater for the coldness of death. Whereas Tennyson needs Hallam's strong guid-

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ance to pass the gloomy passage, Browning goes alone, trusting in God's help.<sup>28)</sup> Such a difference of attitude does not eliminate the affinity between them. They are both interested in how to live patiently, waiting for their reward in heaven. In *In Memoriam* death holds a key to all truths. Browning also knows well that there is no solution of evil on earth. It is in heaven that every paradox is dissolved and man achieves perfect wisdom.

Then death becomes something other than loathsome. It is not a bother but a determinate factor which makes the poet reflect upon present in view of future. This positive role of death in Browning seems to have been rather neglected by critics.<sup>29)</sup> The reason may be that life and delight are so outstanding in his poetry. But one cannot deny the active role of death by whose gloom the general colour is made brighter. Thomas Rain, although admitting the importance of the problem of immortality in Browning's works, does not consider the equal importance of death, without which the problem cannot be treated.<sup>30)</sup> Browning gives some kind of positivity to death by combining this life and the next. He considers that death plays the role of an honourable gate to eternal bliss in heaven, which in turn makes his earthly life all the more meaningful.

As regards Browning's vision of life after death, some interesting comparison may be made with that of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89). Hopkins is a great late-Victorian poet who is to some extent influenced by Browning.<sup>31)</sup> Browning's method of looking through death to both lives (earthly and heavenly) finds a parallel in Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In this poem Hopkins is a deeply meditative poet, pondering over the meaning of the disaster of the ship. He interprets it in the light of divine providence and acquires hope of eternal life. The unexpected tragedy of many people, and five nuns in particular, provides him with an occasion to consider life and death. In this respect, both poets have many things in common. Yet, contrast is also apparent. Hopkins attributes the cause of new life to the remission of man's sin by Christ, while Browning hopes for the perpetual life of man as a realization of the divine will in Creation. In his case, the genuine Christian view of eternal life is less marked than in Hopkins.<sup>32)</sup> It may be pointed out that Browning's faith in eternal life is a modified one; he is more concerned with the problem of

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the immortality of the soul. This is a view considerably influenced by the Victorian notion of progress. But Browning's position concerning the problem of eternal life is more fixed than that of Tennyson. Though not precisely in accordance with Biblical doctrine, Browning is far from doubting God's love as first manifested in Creation, next throughout his youth and mature periods, and finally at the end of his life. It is no exaggeration to say that his whole life utterly depended upon his trust in the fulfilment of the divine will, in the completion of an incomplete creature as a man and an artist.<sup>33)</sup>

Browning seems to have come to a satisfactory conclusion about the problems of death and immortality in *La Saisiaz* as he feels contentment and relief in its epilogue.<sup>34)</sup> From this time onwards, his mind is turned to a still higher and most important level. In a word, it is the problem concerning the way of putting into practice his love for men and thus returning thanks to the Creator.<sup>35)</sup>

#### Notes

The primary source in this article is *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, ed. by Augustine Birrell (1907; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1912).

1) All the quotations are drawn from *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, Longman's Annotated English Poets (London and Harlow: Longman's, 1969).

2) For the details about the poet at that period, see W. Hall Griffin, *The Life of Robert Browning*, ed. by H.C. Minchin, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (London: Methuen, 1938), p.227.

3) Browning's devotion to her memory is given by Griffin and Minchin, *The Life*, p. 293.

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 202-6.

5) Edward Dowden, *The Life of Robert Browning*, Everyman's Library, No. 701 (London: J.M. Dent, 1917), p. 229.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 218.

7) Among various poems of Tennyson, quotations are restricted to *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850).

8) For example:

And if along with these should come  
The man I held as half-divine;  
Should strike a sudden hand in mine,  
And ask a thousand things of home;

(*In Memoriam*, XIV, iii)

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9) "Saul" in *Dramatic Lyrics* written in the forties is outstanding for Browning's definitely intensified faith in the Creator and himself as creature in close relation to God.

10) Quotations from the Old Testament prophets are made in *Select Poems of Robert Browning*, introd. and nn. Rinshiro Ishikawa, Kenkyusha English Classics (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1939), II, nn. p.173.

11) Edward Berdoe, *Browning and Christian Faith* (London: George Allen, 1896), p.213.

12) A similar notion is found in the Bible. cf. I Corinthians 13.

13) In Section XLVII, for instance.

14) This is an inevitable result of the poet's faith in a personal God. See Berdoe, p. 20.

15) Berdoe, p. 168.

16) Thomas Rain, *Browning for Beginners* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1904), p.130.

17) Griffin and Minchin, *The Life*, pp. 220-22.

18) Young Browning's interest in death is shown in *Pauline*, p. 8, 11. 29-38, for example.

19) Berdoe, *Christian Faith*, pp. 3-4.

20) The most elevated mystical trance in *In Memoriam* is presented in Section XCV.

21) For instance, Sections L-LVI and LX-LXV.

22) Tennyson himself hopes that this collection of poems will be read as an elegy:

If these brief lays, of Sorrow born,  
Were taken to be such as closed  
Grave doubts and answers here proposed,  
Then these were such as men might scorn:

Here care is not to part and prove;  
She takes, when harsher moods remit,  
What slender shade of doubt may flit,  
And makes it vassal unto love: (XLVIII, i-ii)

23) Stopford A. Brooke, *The Poetry of Robert Browning* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902), pp. 117-8.

24) Browning's particular joy in this life is most vividly represented in the poems written before *Dramatis Personae*, namely, *Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Men and Women* (184-, 185-) and so on.

25) A similar idea is expressed in *In Memoriam*:

If Sleep and Death be truly one,  
And every spirit's folded bloom  
Through all its intervital gloom  
In some long trance should slumber on;

(XLIII, i)

Browning's idea is that death means a change of scene from this world to the

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next. This is grounded on his belief in life as an unperfected play. cf. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene vii.

26) *In Memoriam*, Sections XLI, XLII, LI, LX, LXIV.

27) *Ibid.*, Section LXI, in which the poet imagines that Hallam is exalted among "the circle of the wise".

28) *Ibid.*, Section CIII.

29) This may probably be one of the reasons why *La Saisiaz* has been comparatively unnoticed.

30) Rain, p. 122.

31) For the relationship between Browning and Hopkins, see W.H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, 2nd ed. rev. (1948; rpt. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

32) Browning is not indifferent to the problem of original sin. The problems of sin, punishment, and mercy are treated in such poems as *The Ring and the Book* (1868) and "Ivan Ivanovitch" in *Dramatic Idyls, First Series* (1879).

33) To quote the comments by a few scholars on this point:

Browning argues that the incompleteness of man, his imperfection taken in view of his ideals, his possibilities and his aspirations, make for the reasonableness of our hope of a future state of existence and for the immortality of the soul...Life would indeed be a failure were this life all, and so "there needs another life to come"; otherwise, as Paracelsus says, "its a poor cheat and stupid bungle." (Berdoe, pp. 106-7)

...Heaven is that state in which we shall practise what we have learned on earth. The heavenly period is to perfect the earthen. (Ibid., p. 206)

So, having worked towards perfection, having realized that he cannot have it here, he (the poet) sees at last that the failures of earth are a prophecy of a perfection to come. He claims the infinite beyond. (Brooke, p. 126)

34) Quoting from the Epilogue:

And since I found a something in me would not rest  
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of the chain,  
—Here it lies, for much or little! I have lived all o'er again  
That last pregnant hour: I saved it, just as I could save a root  
Disinterred for re-interment when the time best helps to shoot.  
(Epilogue, 11. 29-33)

35) Browning's practical idea of love is represented in "The Sun" in the following terms:

Man's part  
Is plain—to send love forth,—astray,  
perhaps:  
No matter, he has done his part.  
(11. 78-79)