The Grotesque Artist - Robert Browning

Oral Marguerite Hagerty
Loyola University Chicago

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THE GROTESQUE ARTIST - ROBERT BROWNING

by

Oral Marguerite Hagerty

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The Grotesque Artist - Robert Browning
# Table of Contents

**Chapter** | **Page**
--- | ---
Introduction | 1

I. Origin and Nature of the Grotesque Considered | 3
II. Reasons for Browning's Use of the Grotesque | 28
III. Browning's Treatment of the Grotesque | 50
   A. His Method - Grotesque Situation - Character - Treatment | 51
   B. Types of Grotesque Used - Noble - Fanciful - False Grotesque | 57
      1. Noble Grotesque - "Caliban Upon Setebos" | 58
      2. Fanciful Grotesque - "The Pied Piper" | 108
      3. False Grotesque - "Pacchiarotto" | 122

IV. Artistic Possibilities and Worth of Browning's Grotesque | 130
   Conclusion | 148
   Bibliography | 151
THE GROTESQUE ARTIST - ROBERT BROWNING

INTRODUCTION

The immense vitality and wide productiveness of Robert Browning demand classification. Optimist, realist, mystic, he is called; yet all the while these epithets touch only one side of his nature. His versatility defies compression into a phrase, yet, if we insist on knowing by whose side he is put, we shall find, I believe, his truest abiding place if we name him the great grotesque artist. Grotesqueness and humor tinged with irony are the most distinctive if not the most important elements of his genius. It is not an excrescence in his verse, an added ornament but the grotesque is an essential part of Browning's poetry.

When the Victorians took Browning into their hearts, in the seventies and eighties, they did so because they saw in him a teacher, and a moralist, rather than an artist. It is doubtful whether they ever discovered his genius.

It will be one of the aims of this paper to show that Browning was a man of original genius, one who cared not for prevailing literary fashion but created his own demand. Such a man in music was Wagner; such a man in drama was Ibsen. It was the striving to portray life fully and truly that forced Browning to embody the disagreeable.
It will be the purpose of this thesis, then, to show that Browning is the leading English artist of the grotesque and to point out that the discovery of the grotesque as a subject for literature and the use of a suitable art form for its expression constitute an original work with him. Ancillary to the whole of the study will be an investigation of the growing tendency of enquiring into the ugly and grotesque in art today and to point out the artistic worth of Browning's grotesque.
CHAPTER I

ORIGIN, HISTORY AND NATURE OF THE GROTESQUE

In considering the grotesque it will be necessary to find whether or not there be any consensus of opinion regarding the term grotesque. The word has been used with great indefiniteness and there is much varying significance attached to the grotesque by philosophers, artists and critics. Of first importance then, in this study, is an understanding of the origin and nature of the grotesque. It shall be considered historically and esthetically.

The word grotesque, from its origin in the Italian "grotesque", a kind of rough, unpolished painter's work, is a term applied primarily to art in its narrow sense - painting, sculpture, and architecture.\(^1\) The gargoyles of mediaeval cathedrals show the best examples of the grotesque. From this narrow use, the term has come to have a general significance, in fact, the whole world of the fantastic, all things top-heavy, lop-sided, sentimental or brutal may now be conceived to be within the realm of the grotesque as well as gargoyles, Chinese pots, caricatures and burlesques.

and contrast between things incongruous is at the root of our appreciation of humor, wit and grotesque. This quality was of slow growth among the nations. No doubt early man enjoyed his laugh but it was a different thing from the laugh of our day. Humor grew with the centuries and by the time that the Gothic style of architecture arose, appreciation of the ludicrous in general, (i.e., that which is without special reference to the established phase of thought), is traceable as a characteristic of at least, the Teutonic nations.¹

The gargoyles of the Mediaeval times have remained throughout the ages as the best known form of the grotesque and show one of the greatest expressions of humor in people. They came early in Gothic architecture from the practical need of eliminating corrosive rain-water from the foundation of churches. As the decorative value of these gargoyles was realized the quantity increased, until finally they became merely ornamental. One of these strange figures known as a grotesque gargoyle used for a water-spout is exemplified by Thomas Hardy in his book, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, in the description of the gargoyle on Weatherby Church:

The gargoyles were of the boldest cut that hand could shape, and of the most original design that human brain

could conceive. A beholder was convinced that nothing on earth could be more hideous than those he saw on the south side, till he went round to the north. One of the two on the latter face, was too human to be called a dragon, too impish to be like man, too animal to be fiend, and not enough like a bird to be a griffin. This horrible stone entity, was fashioned as if covered with wrinkled hide; it had short erect ears, eyes starting from their sockets, and its fingers and hands were seizing the corners of its mouth, which they thus seemed to pull open to give free passage to the water it vomited. The lower row of teeth were quite washed away, though the upper still remained. Here and there jutting a couple of feet from the wall against which its feet rested as a support, the creature had for four hundred years laughed at the surrounding landscape, voicelessly in dry weather, and in wet with a gurgling and snorting sound.

Another interesting grotesque is an old knocker at Durham Cathedral. This fierce grinning head with its Medusa locks becomes beautiful when its original purpose is known. Its eye-sockets were at one time filled with lights to guide the fugitive who was running to the Cathedral for sanctuary while in the little room above the door, some one always waited to hear the knocker and let the runner in.

Perhaps one of the best known of all grotesques is Lincoln's famous Imp. Little, impish and with a cloven hoof, he is carved in an exquisitely lovely choir of angels in Lincoln Cathedral, England. The old monk who carved him there, made the Imp because he had become so tired of angels, that he felt he must have a little relaxation.

In determining the nature of the grotesque, confusion has often resulted in distinguishing art which was intended to
be grotesque, from that art which was executed with serious or often devout feelings but for one or several causes persisted in a comic effect. Much Mediaeval Christian art has been confused with the grotesque and termed grotesque art but was never meant to be grotesque. Mediaeval art developed in its history, it is true, certain characteristics, as it passed through a small body of enlightened clergy who impressed dogma on the illiterate laity through the medium of art, especially ornamental art. Much of this art was most fantastic as well as intimidating. Early Irish and Saxon miniatures and the ornament of early and high Romanesque architecture throughout Europe, furnish examples of this. There are the lion, the asp, and the dragon, clutching mortals with teeth or claws. All this was the expression of Christian belief in sin and the power of Satan.

With the cultural and religious evolution during the Twelfth and Fourteenth centuries, the attitude of the artist and laity changed and gradually the element of instruction vanished and there crept in more of the purely fantastic and a great sense of humor.

It is only in the transition from dogmatic to grotesque ornament that the true grotesque is found. Details from choirstalls at Kappenberg Westphalia, will point this out. The wood-carvings there, show the last stage of the evolution
of the symbolic, where all dogma has vanished and the pure grotesque remains. Here may be seen the primitiveness of such craftsmanship as that of the Stendal artist who with disregard of anatomy and correct representation of the different species, created a Zoology to express his own grotesque imagination. Francis Klingender in his article Grotesque Ornament claims art can only be called grotesque if the artist consciously and intentionally uses the fantastic and uncommon as a medium to criticize his surroundings. He says:

Art can only be called grotesque if the artist consciously and intentionally uses the fantastic and uncommon as a medium to criticize his surroundings. Primitive or masterly in technique, slow and pedantic or full of temperament the spirit is the same, terror turns into laughter. The finale of the symbolic was the grotesque that reveled in the chaotic turmoil of the breakdown in Europe, still maintaining the old forms, but ridiculing the old ideas instead of teaching them.

There has been much that is merely semi-grotesque art that has been pointed out as the grotesque. Take for example, the Series of Capitals in Wells Cathedral, England, which represents in true picture play an attempt of a boy to steal some apples. These carvings tell the whole story; how the boy creeps up to the basket, seizes an apple, is pursued, caught, and properly chastised. Such art work is the result of the

Gothic builder who practically lived in his Cathedral and represented whatever he saw about him. There are to be found many delicate and realistic carvings those of the shoemakers with their lasts, gardeners with their spades, and women with their distaffs, as well as birds with prey, and every variety of leaf and flower. These builders used their eyes and imagination for variety and loved working out the story as Scott or Dickens might have in the weaving of their plots. A great part of such work, however, may only be called semi-grotesque and should never be confused with the real grotesque.

Much of the primitive art of the first centuries has also been designated as grotesque while it never was intended to be grotesque art at all. A woman traveler in Europe once visited a collector's shop and brought with her a picture which she had treasured for years. It was the Good Shepherd with the lamb in His arms, a crude copy of an old fresco of the catacombs. "I have an addition to make to your collection", she said, as she handed him the picture. The collector took the picture, studied it a moment, and then said without hesitation, "This is not the picture of a grotesque at all, it is crude, ugly, and interesting, but the painter did not intend to make it crude and ugly. He made it as life-like as he could. It is no more a grotesque
than a child's first picture.¹

According to Mr. Ruskin, whose chapter on the "Grotesque" in The Stones of Venice, which is probably the most careful study ever made of the subject, the grotesque is always composed of two elements - the ludicrous and the fearful, and as either of these prevails, it becomes sportive or terrible. Of these "the terrible grotesque" is the more noble, but there is jest - perpetual and careless in the most noble work of the Gothic period.²

The idea of ugliness is associated with the grotesque also, and rightly so, but the grotesque is not a mere synonym for ugliness. The grotesque is not, as is often exemplified, mere strong or satisfying ugliness. Ugliness as seen in such creatures as the Egyptian sphinx or in the strange mishapen creatures, repulse composites of beast, bird and fish found in some of the early French and English Gothic, such as those of the Notre Dame de Paris. It is not the hideous ugliness depicted in dogmatic art of Mediaeval times in the depiction of sin and evil through coils and contortions of serpents and monsters and it is not the crude unintentionally ugly as seen in


the simple art of primitives or early Christians. The grotesque, it is true, is the outcome of the northern mind and harks back to the Norse Myths and folklore. It is close kin to Ibsen's trolls and the great Bourg himself,¹ but the grotesque is not mere ugliness. The grotesque is not the opposite of beauty, either, but it seems to be rather a distortion of the fantastic combinations that produce beauty.

The highest and best example of "sportive grotesque" in art was developed by the enervated Romans, and was brought to the highest perfection, of which it was capable, by Raphael, in the Arabesque of the Vatican in Rome. The lower conditions of this type may be seen in the shape of nymphs, cupids and satyrs over the whole of Europe. In the study of the serious grotesque one will discover it always involves the true appreciation of beauty, though the mind that creates it may seem wilfully to turn to other images. In the exact proportion, in which the grotesque results from incapability of perceiving beauty, it becomes savage and barbarous. "The master of the noble grotesque knows the depth of all he seems to mock".²

Much of the grotesque has been the product of man's fancy and in its first development, for the most part, a product of his uncultivated fancy. However, when the mind is healthy and

² Ruskin, op. cit., p. 115.
vigorous in all its proportions, great in imagination, emotion and intellect, there the grotesque can exist in full energy. There is an infinite distance of course, between the best and worst grotesque. Perhaps the man of all the world representing the grotesque with the most perfect balance was Dante.

We have come to look upon the grotesque as the distorted and fantastic, combination. In this we see a relationship between caricature and the grotesque, since each emphasizes the element of distortion. In a *History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* by Thomas Wright is found a very interesting history of the art form signified by the grotesque. Art itself, Wright says, is in its earliest form merely caricature. A tendency to burlesque and caricature appears to be a feeling deeply implanted in human nature and it is one of the earliest talents displayed by people in a rude state of society. An appreciation of an a sensitiveness to ridicule, and a love of that which is humorous, are found even among savages and enter largely in their relations with other men. Before people cultivated art or literature, the chieftain sat in his rude hall surrounded by warriors, and they amused themselves by turning their opponents into mockery, in fact, caricaturing them in words which were calculated to excite laughter. When these same people began to erect buildings, and to ornament them, the favorite subjects of ornament were ludicrous ideas. The war-
rior, too, who caricatured his enemy gave a more permanent form to his ridicule, by rude delineations on bare rock. Thus originated caricature and grotesque. "In fact, art itself, in its earliest forms, is caricature; for it is only by that exaggeration of features which belongs to caricature, that the unskilled draughtsmen could make themselves understood. ¹

Early caricature accounts for much of the subject-matter used in the grotesque. One of the most natural ideas among all people has been to compare men with animals whose qualities they possessed. Thus a man was bold as a lion or cunning as a fox. It was out of this type of caricature that the fable arose. Mediaeval feeling toward animals was most interesting. The Pompeians, in common with all the people of antiquity, had a child-like enjoyment in witnessing representations of animals engaged in the labors or sports of human beings. Animal heads were placed upon human bodies. Dwarfs, deformed people, pigmies, beasts and birds were all depicted engaged in the labors of ordinary men. Early drawings show the grasshoppers drawing chariots and the ancient drawings of the pigmies on their goats and rams was a favorite subject and probably was suggested to many early people by Pliny's account of the pigmies when he wrote:

Mounted upon rams and goats and armed with bows and arrows, they descend in a body during springtime to the edge of the water, where they eat the eggs and young of those birds, not returning to the mountains for three months.¹

The mask has been associated with the grotesque from its very origin and this probably came from its being used in early comedy and religious processions. The Greeks and Romans were especially fond of parodies. The Romans had no taste for the regular drama, but they retained their love for the popular mimì or comaedi; players of the farces and dances. From the comic burlesque scenes of the theater, the mask passed to the popular festivals, such as the Lupercalia, Dionyfiac and phallic rites. Later the comic mask became distinctive of particular characters and was used by the buffoon for mockery, symbolic of all that was droll and burlesque. In Greek tragedy the chief actors assumed the disguise of satyrs, and fawns, covering themselves with goat-skins, and disfiguring their faces by rubbing them over with the lees of wine. Political and personal caricature came later. It was depicted by Aristophanes in such plays as Lysistrata and The Frog and also led to the grotesque. Caricature especially sprung out of the satire of religious festivals and led to the grotesque. The people of the Middle Ages were accustomed to seeing the effigies of monsters

carried through the streets on feast days in religious processions. The origin of such beliefs goes back to antiquity when the awesome phenomena of nature associated with fountains, springs, lakes or the sea were personified by some monster of horrible aspect. Most of the Cathedral towns such as Amiens, Rheims, Beauvais, Rouen, and Metz were famous for their processions. The most spectacular of the year's processions of monsters, was the great Feast of Saint Romain of Rouen. (Saint Romain destroyed the dragon who lived in the waters of the Seine), so the legend goes.

Numerous subjects for caricature and the grotesque originated in the Mystery and in the semi-religious plays which were enacted outside the church to teach morality and to amuse the laity. In the Eleventh Century in church ceremonies such as the "Feast of Fools", a ceremony which came down from the Roman Saturnalia in which grotesque masquerade developed, we can see the child-like mind of the Middle Ages at play with the grotesque.

When the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages came, grafting of pagan symbols on Christian beliefs presented much incongruity and distortion. The Mediaeval artist copied blindly what he did not understand. He misapplied emblematical design giving it allegorical meaning to which it was not intended. The favorite subjects of caricature among the
Anglo-Saxons were the clergy and the devil. Demons and fiends were wrapped up in their mythology. Demonology resulted and the diabolical came from their love of the ludicrous and their superstitions.

Mechanical and constructive incompetency to embody ideas prevailed among most artists in the early ages. There was much copying of earlier work with great executive ability and strong perception of the humorous, but without respect to, or without knowledge of, its serious meaning. The use of symbolic representation, even when there was great skill caused ludicrous effects. Often a certain bias of mind would impel the artist to whimsical treatment which led to the grotesque. This may be seen in England in the bulk of early church masonry. The work was done chiefly by foreigners. Saxon churches were probably built by Roman workmen. Edward the Confessor brought back with him from France new French designs for the building of Westminster Abbey and doubtless he brought French masons too. Anglo-Norman is strongly Byzantine. Again the great work shop of Europe, where Eastern ideas were gathered was Flanders, Flemings were employed on English work. Italians also. The Angel Choir of Lincoln Cathedral is witness to this. The workmen who executed the finely carved woodwork of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, King's Chapel, Cambridge, and Westminster Abbey, in the Sixteenth century were chiefly Italian under the superintendence
of Torregiano, a Florentine artist, and fellow pupil of Michael Angelo, who was forced by Lorenzo de Medici to leave Florence in 1503. Early caricature which led to the grotesque then, was the result of the artist's limitations. The unskilled draughtsman was unable to portray objects save by the accentuation of certain characteristics, which resulted in distortion.

The transition from early art to that of the Middle Ages was not a decided one. The clergy and the evil one furnished the basis for most of the caricature of the Anglo Saxons. Christian caricature made pagan mythology into demonology by constructing demons who were ugly and more laughable than terrible. Such pictures presented to the unrefined perfect ideas of mirth. Even after the Middle Ages, demonology furnished the greater part of the material for the grotesque. It spread from Egypt during the Middle Ages and was grafted on the superstitions of Teutonic paganism.

Studying, then, the history of the grotesque we note several tendencies. Firstly, the grotesque is closely related to caricature, for both emphasize the element of distortion. Secondly, the grotesque is the ugly which embraces both the terrible and the humorous. Thirdly, the grafting of pagan symbols on Christian beliefs tended to incongruity and to the grotesque; and demonology, the product of the grafted symbolism, furnished much of the material for the grotesque. The artist's limitations and the incongruity resulting from an attempted com-

1 Wright, Thomas. op. cit., p. 4.
bining of clashing elements would, then, seem to create the grotesque.

The next consideration is the esthetic development of the grotesque. Can these conclusions drawn from the history of the grotesque be substantiated by the theories of the philosophers of art? The first conception of the grotesque was found to be akin to caricature and in the beginning much of it was more laughable than terrible. The second conception was that of ugliness. Since ugliness has often been considered a synonym for the grotesque, it is well to know the nature of the ugly, what its elements are and wherein the grotesque arises.

First, the ugly is close to the comic. As far back as Aristotle we find that he made a close kinship of the ugly to the comic. He was among the first to modify the Hellenic idea of beauty. We find that he made the laughable a subdivision of the ugly, further classifying it as the subject of comedy and as one of the fine arts.\(^1\) It is interesting to note that the most conspicuous headings under which comic effects have been gathered have been incongruity and degradation. When a tragic subject is treated bombastically or satirically it can be turned into amusement, the griefs will not be felt because contrary

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emotions have been aroused. On the other hand when humor becomes deep and really different from satire, it changes into pathos and passes out of the sphere of the comic altogether.

Second, the ugly has a close kinship to the sublime. Burke, in his essay, The Sublime and the Beautiful led up to the relation of the sublime to the ugly. When he recognized the sublime as the co-ordinate with the beautiful he indicated the beginning of a great aesthetic appreciation. He accepted ugliness as the opposite of beauty and said it partly coincided with the sublime. The sublime, he said, is outside the beautiful, for, while beauty brings ideas of pleasure, the sublime is referred to ideas of pain and danger. "Real distress and disaster, however, do not cause pure pain to the spectator, but fascinate and attract him". It is well to note also the relation of the sublime to terror. Subdued and objectified terror is what is commonly regarded as the realm of the sublime.

It is difficult to grasp just how the expression of evil in an object may be the occasion for the sublime or noble reaction of the soul but something analogous takes place in the other spheres where an aesthetic value seems to arise out of the


suggestions of evil or terror. Both in the comic and sublime we are carried away from ourselves, to become smaller in the comic, and to become larger in the sublime. The fact is, the line between the tragic and the comic is not very clearly defined. The descent from the sublime to the ridiculous is perilously easy. Even in real life, terrible illustrations are occasionally met with showing the close and neighborly relation between the emotions of the comic and tragic. There is an instance on record of an entire funeral procession being convulsed with laughter started by one of the mourners recalling a witty saying of the deceased.¹

In the graphic arts the comic finds its greatest expression in the mixture of the solemn and the ludicrous. G. K. Chesterton has remarked that caricature is a serious thing, it is almost blasphemously serious for caricature means making a pig more like a pig than even God has made him. Some of the greatest artists, however, have portrayed the serious with the frolicsome. This is evidenced in such great masters as Leonardo de Vinci in his sketches of his old funny stories of peasants at dinner. It is demonstrated by Saint John the Divine in his poem, The Revelation with its population of strange crea-

¹ Lotka, Alfred J. Art and Archaeology. June, 1921, p. 252.
tures, uncouth in their mixed anatomy. The serious motive is also found in the pen of Dante and Milton and in the brush of Doré and Blake. It is seen again in the work of Charles Dickens and his inimitable illustrator, Cruikshank.

Hegel has emphasized the relation between the sublime and the ugly also. He differs from the other philosophers in that he considers the grotesque to arise from inadequacy, rather than to be merely the product of the imagination. The sublime like the ugly, he says, is an attempt to express the infinite without finding in the realm of phenomena any object which proves itself adequate for this presentation. "He believes that distortion and incongruity cannot be beautiful but, in attempting to express the absolute in inadequate form, they have a certain analogy to the sublime". The origin of the grotesque arises according to Hegel then, from man's inadequacy, from his attempt to express the infinite through the finite. If man reaches out, struggles to remove his limitations, goes beyond them, he enters the unknown, the unordered, and the grotesque. It is this constant striving of the imagination to grasp the unknowable, the incomprehensible that creates the grotesque.

Rosenkranz treats the question of ugliness with consider-

1 Bosanquet, Bernard. op. cit., p. 355.
2 Ibid., op. cit., p. 356.
able insight. He supposes three regions that may be the subject of art; the beautiful, the ugly, and the comic. He arrives at a definition of the ugly and points out wherein the grotesque begins. He says the ugly is the negation of the beautiful, in-as-much as the factors which give rise to beauty are capable of being perverted into their opposites. It is possible for the ugly to be subordinated to the beautiful in a further and more complex phase of aesthetic appearance, viz., the comic. The comic, though close to the beautiful, does not form a species of it, but rather a continuation of its principle in a new shape after the rebellion of the ugly is overcome. Ugliness is identified then, with certain positive relations of the same factors that enter beauty, though we do not find it there, an affinity between the two is admitted. Thus the ugly bears a special relation to one or the other of the species generated within the phases of beauty. "Ugliness, is the transition stage between the beautiful and the comic".¹ "Beauty in passing through the sublime to the comic, comes very close to the ugly".² Thus the ugly in art has been dealt with largely through the comic and ugliness is identified with certain relations of the same factors that enter into beauty.

This leads now to the relation of the grotesque to the comic. The elements of the grotesque, the terrible, and the humorous, are very closely related, for the terrible finds its accomplishment in grim humor. If Rosenkranz regards the ugly as the transition stage between the beautiful and comic it must be, that the grotesque occupies the border-land between the ugly and the comic, partaking of the characteristics of both. The distorted figure was the primitive idea of mirth and in the mingling of the ugly and humorous the grotesque was produced. Therefore the ugly and the comic are very close, and have the same general characteristics, so that when the element of terror is accented and the picture falls more into the realm of the ugly than the comic, there is the grotesque and when the humorous element is emphasized, and the picture falls more into the realm of the comic, the result is caricature. Just as the ugly and comic find their point of contact in caricature, the ugly and the beautiful find their point of contact in the relationship of the grotesque to the sublime. The ugly and the grotesque are both more or less chaotic realms and when the artist attempts to portray the incomprehensible that lies beyond the beautiful, he enters the realm of the sublime, when he attempts to portray the outlying regions of the ugly, he enters the realm of the grotesque. The relation of the grotesque to the sublime and the ugly to the humorous is universally recognized.
The grotesque, then, when greatly conceived enters the realm of the beautiful. The modern trend in art has verified this fact for it has widened and enlarged the interpretation of the term "beauty" to include apparent ugliness and the grotesque.

Among the ancients the fundamental theory of the beautiful was connected with the notion of rhythm, symmetry, harmony of parts, but with the birth of the modern world, the romantic sense of beauty was awakened and there was more emphasis laid on the idea of significance, expressiveness and on utterances of all that life contains. In a paper that the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society preserves under the title, "The Aesthetic Theory of Ugliness", written by Bosanquet, is found the most comprehensive treatment of the ugly that has been made. He recognizes the grotesque as a partial revelation of the ugly, along with the sublime and beautiful. He says:

We are not to look for real ugliness in the sublime, the humorous or grotesque, or the rude, or the terrible, or the difficult; in short, in the partial of fine art. Ugliness is the self-contradictory as expressed for presumption or fancy. Beauty is too narrow a conception even for Greek art; the principle of fine art must be called by some such name as the "Characteristic", or the "true", and no subject matter must be excluded because it is ignoble.

The grotesque in the revelation of the ugly along with the sublime and comic has been recognized in modern art as novel

1 Bosanquet, Bernard. op. cit., p. 435.
beauty. Much that is extremely grotesque has been included under this term. Professor Santayana in his book entitled, The Sense of Beauty refers to the grotesque as the imaginative form of the ugly, or novel beauty. He says that all nature is beautiful and even imaginary forms differ in dignity and beauty. Art has to do with life, and in life it finds what it produces as ugliness, but the grotesque is novel beauty. He states that novel beauty is an effect produced by a transformation of an ideal type, exaggerating one of its elements or combining it with other types. The result is confusion but not absolute confusion, for there is an inkling of the unity and character in the midst of the strangeness of form. "Novel beauty is the grotesque, it is the half-formed, the perplexed and the suggestively monstrous".

What conclusions as to the origin of the grotesque may be drawn from this review of aesthetic theories? In the first place, the grotesque is generally acknowledged, it seems, as a partial expression of the ugly. Secondly, the grotesque would seem to originate in the imagination, while the ugly may be found existent. Thirdly, the relation of the ugly to the comic and the grotesque to the sublime is universally acknowledged.

1 Santayana, op. cit., p. 256.
2 Ibid., op. cit., p. 257.
How the expression of truth may enter into aesthetic forces, and give a value to representation which but for it would be repulsive has long been the theme of Realism. Much of the modern realism found in the drama and novel today shows this tendency. In an essay on Pure, Ornate and Grotesque Art in Poetry, Bagehot has given a most complete presentation of the mission of the grotesque which brings out this point. He contrasts grotesque art as that which takes "the type in difficulties" with pure and ornate art, which view a subject in the best possible light. He says, "Good elements hidden in horrid accomplishments are the special theme of the grotesque".¹

The grotesque according to Schelling is an ornamentation that arises not naturally out of the subject but is lost to the unnatural or to distortion in treatment.² Thus whenever the false is portrayed as true, or whenever an object is in itself or in its surroundings incongruous, the result is the grotesque. When the real and the ideal are confused or treated simultaneously the result is incongruity or the grotesque.

Summarizing and considering all the varying theories of these critics, it is found they hold in common that the two

elements going to make up the grotesque are the terrible and the ludicrous. All but Ruskin makes the grotesque the product of the imagination, he alone considers it a product of fancy. Bagehot and Schelling represent the grotesque as existing in actual phenomena. All agree on the existence of contortion and unreality as features of the grotesque.

The grotesque is close to caricature in its origin, it came from primitive man's failure to comprehend that which he wished to portray sufficiently to adapt it to the laws of his art. The grotesque is created in the constant striving of the imagination to grasp the incomprehensible, the unknowable.

The grotesque is the imaginative form of the ugly. It is the partial revelation of the ugly along with the sublime and the humorous. When the artist attempts to portray the incomprehensible that lies beyond the beautiful, he enters the sublime, when he attempts to portray the regions that lie beyond the ugly he enters the grotesque. The grotesque occupies the borderland between the ugly and the comic partaking of the characteristics of both. The noble grotesque is always the result of strength. It involves the true appreciation of beauty. The fanciful grotesque is the result of fancy's creation in the realm of the ugly. The grotesque is not a synonym for ugliness; it is not the opposite of beauty, but it is a distortion or fantastic combination of the elements that produce beauty.
The grotesque is incongruity. Whenever the false is portrayed as the true, whenever an object is in itself, or in its surroundings incongruous, the result is the grotesque. Thus when the real and the ideal are confused or treated simultaneously, the result is the grotesque.

In order to depict the concrete manifestation of the idea in its totality, the grotesque was admitted into art as the portrayal of the ugly. It was in this manifestation that Browning found incongruity. It is as incongruity in this sense that the grotesque shall be treated in this study.
CHAPTER II

Reasons for Browning's Use of the Grotesque

The conscious use of the grotesque had been little known in English literature until the time of Browning. The idea that grotesque characters and incidents should be chosen as independent subjects and treated in the method adapted to them had not yet dawned upon previous English poets. Why then did Browning use the grotesque?

Browning combined in himself opposing methods of work, belief and art. He was subjective and objective, idealistic and realistic all at once. His mingling of subjectivity and objectivity is peculiar. Perhaps his method is best illustrated in his own Pippa Passes where he sees the whole world from Pippa's standpoint, yet in spite of the objectivity of this method, Browning sees it all, it is Browning's mind to which these things appear. In his Essay on Shelley, Browning divides all poets into two classes, the subjective and objective, or the Seer and the Maker. His own genius includes a large measure of both. The tragedy of life seemed at times to oppress Browning. The uselessness of life's tragedies seemed to come powerfully over him. He tried to find out how this tragedy would
become useful. He tried to attain the incomprehensible and to know the reasons for the existence of the facts but he could not, then he gave himself up to the picturing of the grotesque.

Browning was both realistic and idealistic. It was in this struggle between idealism and realism that he became the artist of the grotesque. J. W. Cunliffe in an article on "Browning's Idealism" points out Browning's philosophy of aspiration in achievement. It is loftiness of aim which distinguishes people as leaders and uplifters of humanity, no largeness of accomplishments. This doctrine is expressed in A Grammarian's Funeral, and Andrea del Sarto. In fact, this aspiration may be implied in connection with every field of human endeavor Browning has touched.

This idealism is the result of heritage and early training. Browning's people were not in accordance with the theological views of Oxford and Cambridge. He grew up with the idea that much in society is not right, owing as he thought, to the prevalence of low ideals. He appears to have lived in an atmosphere of art and to have believed that truth of art would supply the ideals wanting, and that art is not art unless it uplifts. Life's meaning was found in the spiritual nature,

which gives form and expression to the material world. The preeminence of the spiritual and its power over matter, in which it finds its revelation are doctrines underlying Browning's faith and tenants which continually find expression in his poetry. Browning was a man of the world, not blind to existant facts, yet he was a man above the world. Fotheringham says:

He has a strong hold on fact, a resolute aversion from fancies and illusions, keen and hardy thought and care for reality. His energetic curiosity has something of Bacon; his vigorous research an intellectual exploration something of Aristotle. He is not dominated by his practical bent nor by the world of facts, or over impressed by results of modern science. He knows the infinite significance that facts have for thought, and how this significance comes of the mind's own laws and depths. He is, in a word an idealist. Behind the energetic realism and strong grip of facts is a visionary power and sense of ideas.  

This idealism and also the love of the grotesque was in part a heritage, a heritage from his father who was a dilettante in art. His father's favorite among English painters was Hogarth. Hundreds of his sketches still survive. They are mainly illustrations of stories, grotesque groups with fierce expressive faces scowling out of fly-leaves of old books. Browning himself during school days was fond of drawing pen and ink

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caricatures. From his mother he received the tendency to mysticism, and a strain of the German philosophic mind. From his grandfather the tendency to Hegelian philosophizing and the questioning and speculative habit of mind.

The peculiar home influences exerted upon Browning in his early training play an important part in the formation of some of the creative powers that led to the use of the grotesque and we must stop to consider these. Browning received practically all his early education at home; of college life he had very little, but in his father's library, and among his father's books he read voraciously. It was in this way that Browning became very early familiar with subjects generally unknown to boys.

Browning's father was a man of great reading and encyclopedic memory. The Library in which the poet spent much of his early life contained six thousand rare and old editions, for the elder Browning was greatly interested in out-of-the-way learning, especially that pertaining to the Middle Ages. The poet once said of his father, "The old gentleman's brain was a storehouse of literary and philosophical antiquities". It is said his father knew all the bones and muscles of the human body by

heart, and was fond of drawing skeletons and skulls.

In the Browning Library there were great collections of astonishing anecdotes. Such books as Nathaniel Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World* and biographical dictionaries as the *Biographic Universelle* were readings for the young Robert. Perhaps no single volume of his father's collection played such an important part in stimulating his early love for odds and ends of learning, as *The Wonders of the Little World* by Wanley. In this book with its thousands of anecdotes illustrating prodigies of human nature, Browning first read of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Here he had a chance to steep his sensitive imagination in the wonders of the magician, Agrippa. Here he met Paracelsus, the Swiss physician, and the chemist John Halberstadt. It was in Wanley too, that Browning met with odd names, such as Schafnaburgensis which he later used for one of his *Garden Fancies*. His father was completely versed in Mediaeval legend and seemed to have known Paracelsus, Faustus and even Talmudic personages personally.¹

Among his father's books was a second edition of *The Art of Painting in All Its Branches* by Gerard de Lairesse. Browning read this book with more delight than any other and it was from this that he received his ideas of landscape de-

picted in *Childe Roland*. It abounded in references to paint-
ers and he received most of his early knowledge of the history
of art from it and from the Galleries of Dulwich which were
only two miles from his home. The book of the Flemish artist,
Groot Schilderboek probably furnished material for *Andrea del
Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi*. He read also *Vasari's Lives* and
memorized much data from dictionaries.

Mr. Gosse in speaking of Browning's later education says,
"He steeped himself between the years 1837 - 1840 in all liter-
ature, modern, ancient, English and exotic. Rabbinical lore
was particularly congenial to him. Among the Greek poets
Homer and Euripides were his favorites".

Browning's mother seems to have been even more influen-
tial in shaping the boy's character. From her he probably
received his highly sensitive and imaginative temperament and
love of music. She was an enthusiastic musician and imparted
her passionate love of music to her son. She was fond of play-
ing at dusk, and one evening when she was playing her little
son stole down stairs to listen, and when she had ceased play-
ing he flung himself into her arms, sobbing, "Play, Play".
His interest in music steadily grew until the days came when
he played the organ at Vallombrosa, charmed his intimate friends
with improvisations on the piano and wrote *Abt Vogler*, *Master
Hughes of Saxes-Gotha* and *A Toccata* of Galuppi's.
From his mother too, Browning learned to love flowers and to know the peculiar pleasure of making friends with all the small animals of the garden, as well as the larger ones of the home and stable. He was often bribed to take his medicine by the promise of a toad or a spider which his mother would find for him among her flowers. Mrs. Browning, we are told, had that extraordinary power over animals of which we hear sometimes. She would lure the butterflies in the garden to her, and domestic animals obeyed her as if they reasoned. Browning inherited of this power, and even in the closing months of his life his soft low whistle would entice the lizards as they basked by the roadside in the Italian sunshine, and his keen eye could still detect the tiniest inhabitant of the hedges.

As a boy Browning had numerous pets - monkeys, magpies, and even an eagle; his pockets were frequently full of uncanny creatures for which he had a fancy, such as frogs, toads, and efts. He had a favorite snake and hedgehog and in later years his pet owl and geese were not unknown to visitors at Warwick Crescent. One of his favorite haunts as a boy was the Royal Menagerie, a sort of arcade filled with foreign birds and beasts. This famous menagerie with its little rooms painted with exotic scenes and its dens and cages of lions and tigers was beloved

1 Griffin and Minchin, op. cit., p. 279.
by Browning. The pride of the collection was the magnificent lion, later described in his poem, The Glove.

Browning's half-holidays were spent lying under the elm-trees on the hill-top at Camberwell where he could look down on London. He would lie beside a hedge, or deep in meadow grasses or under a tree and give himself up so absolutely to the life of the moment that even the shy birds would alight close by and sometimes poise themselves upon his body. Pippa Passes was conceived and largely composed beneath the trees of Dulwich Wood, a favorite haunt of Browning from early youth.

Mr. Sharp relates the following in speaking of Browning's imaginative temperament and communing with nature:

I have heard him say that his faculty of observation at that time would not have appeared despicable to a Seminole or Iroquois; he saw and watched everything, the bird on the wing, the snail dragging its shell up the pendulous woodbine, the bee adding his golden treasure as he swung in the bells of the Gompula, the green fly darting hither and thither like an animated seedling, the spider weaving her gossamer from twig to twig, the woodpecker heedfully scrutinizing the lichen or the gnarled oak-hole, the passage of the wind through the leaves or across the grass, the motions and shadows of the clouds, etc. 1

Browning himself speaks of his great love of flowers in a letter to Miss Haworth:

Do look at fuchsia in full bloom, and notice the clear little honey-drops depending from every flower. I have just found it out to my own small satisfaction,

1 Sharp, op. cit., p. 96.
- - a bee's breakfast. I only answer for the long-blossomed sort, though - indeed, for this plant in my room. Taste and be Titania; you can, that is. All this while I forgot that you will perhaps, never guess the good of this discovery; I have, you are to know, such a love for flowers and leaves - some leaves - that I every now and then, in my impatience at being able to possess myself of them thoroughly, to see them, quite satiate myself with their scent, bite them to bits -- so there will be some sense in that. How I remember the flowers - even grasses - of places I have been.¹

Miss Francis Cobbe, who saw much of the poet in Florence

records:

When we drove out in parties he would discuss every tree and get excited about the difference between eglantine and eglatere,(if there be any), and between either of them and honey-suckle.²

In 1829 Browning abruptly left University College, London, and entered the lecture classes of Dr. Blundell's at Guy's Hospital. His great interest in the sciences connected with medicine, anatomy and physiology manifests itself in his poetry and often leads to the grotesque. In this he was like John Donne, whose rather violent metaphors were often taken from physiological processes. Numerous illustrations to physiological processes are used constantly by Browning and this type of grotesque expression was pleasing to him. In The Flight of the Duchess, we read:

1 Orr, - Life and Letters, p. 137.
2 Griffin and Minchin, op. cit., p. 40.
- - - - oh such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column

and in the **Prologue to Ferishtah's Fancies:**

And now it is made - why my heart's blood, that went
Trickle, but anon, in such muddy driblets, (trickle,
Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle
And genially floats me about the giblets.

He used constantly, illustrations from surgery, as

in this description of a boat in a letter to Miss Haworth:

The battered hulk turned round, actually looked
at us, and then reeled off, like a mutilated creature
from some scoundrel French surgeon's lecture-table into
the most gorgeous and lavish sunset in the world.

Great interest in astronomical knowledge often led to
the grotesque in Browning's poetry. Scientific knowledge evidently permeated his thought to the extend that the use of it
in his writing was natural to him. Letters and reports show
this use of scientific illustration. Descriptions of stars especially of the colors they gave are common in Browning's
verse. He wrote the poem he considered one of his favorites
and which he often wrote in response to requests for autographs

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1 [Browning's Complete Works](#), p. 360.
around the figure of a star. My Star is built round the figure of a star that gives out red and blue lights.

Browning's use of the spectrum as a figure is a favorite one and leads often to the grotesque. The breaking up of white light into colors seems to have had a particular fascination for the poet. He has used this illustration in many poems such as Sordello, Christmas Eve, Fifine, Deaf and Dumb, The Ring and The Book. It is the basis of the entire poem of Numpholeptos. The colors produced by chemical processes were also attractive to Browning and often led to grotesque figures. In The Two Poets of Croisic the color coming from a burning piece of wood brings forth the following description:

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk,
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with - ask the chloride's name. 1

Sulphuric and phosphorescent light colors are many in Browning's pictures. In Sordello he speaks of the sulphur-
Spume, in La Saisiaz of a phosphoric fame, in Fifine of putrid-
ity that's phosphorescent.2 Stopford Brooke, in speaking of
Browning's love of color, said it increased in him when he went
to live in Italy. "Italy where the light is so pure, clear, and

1 Complete Works, p. 113.
2 Ibid., p. 107, also 942.
brilliant that color is more intense, and at dawn and sunset more deep and delicate than in any other land." 1 Sometimes it was not color but conflagration that appealed to the poet. But wherever color was, whether on the edge of a cloud, on the back of a lizard, or in the veins of a lichen, it strikes Browning's verse. "He sees the wild tulip blow out its great red bell; he sees the thin clear bubble of blood at its tip". 2

Much of Browning's grotesque is a reflection of the scientific age in which he lived. His life extends over the years 1812 - 1889. By the middle of the century, when his poetry was coming to the maturity of his powers, the world of science had made almost unbelievable progress. In 1774 Dr. Priestley introduced man to the element of oxygen. In 1845 discoveries of La Grange and Laplace had confirmed the Newtonian theory and enlarged the knowledge of the area of the Solar System, while the discovery of the spectrum analysis and the invention of the spectroscope supplied data for the foundation of the science of stellar chemistry. Volta, Oersted and Faraday laid foundations for our knowledge of electricity. Perhaps the greatest fields of development were in biology and

2 Ibid., p. 81.
geology in the Nineteenth Century. James Hutton’s History of the Earth, 1795 and the Lyell’s principles of geology appeared, then came Darwin’s Origin of Species. By the middle of the century the question of Evolution had become one of major argument. As Browning was always interested in the progress of the soul of man, a theory such as this challenged some of the old religious beliefs and caused much unrest and pessimism, and could not fail to leave some impression on his work.

Browning’s idea of Evolution is inherent in the story of Paracelsus. The eagerness of "this seeker of knowledge" to understand the relation of man to the universe led him to a study of the Kabala and the Kabala taught that the universe was incomplete until man was created. Because of the relation of man to all forms of the universe, Paracelsus expects to find God revealed in the physical world and fails. He attains only when he finds God revealed in the soul, and thus Evolution continues, with Paracelsus into the spiritual life of man.

The sweeping synthesis that the dawning of scientific theories brought into the intuitional life of man brought the grotesque into Browning’s works. The conflicting ideas made thinking difficult. The intuitional life of man was far more important according to Browning’s attitude of science than reasoning and he felt that the scientists were encroaching upon the things of the spirit that were far dearer to him than the things
of the world. The material drawn from the world of facts as a means of expression for the world of the spirit made for incongruity. The realist and the idealist conflicted in the physical facts and the spiritual implications of the new ideas.

The love of the Romantic and the love of the Renaissance often led to the grotesque in Browning. He stood for the assertion of the individual, his rights and his liberties against the conventional order of the centuries. He preached the gospel of freedom from all restraints that hinder the growth of natural restraints. It was the typical soul that interested him whether struggling to emerge from the confining bonds of the mediaeval system, or expanding amid all the intricate complexities of modern life. This same Romantic spirit accounted in a large measure for his love of crude ornament and color. It produced in part his love of the psychological, and it led to his love of strange excursions, adventures, battles, pursuits, retreats and discoveries of the soul.

Browning showed the natural gifts and excellencies of the romantic poet. His endless and impassioned curiosity, always finding new worlds of thought and feeling into which to make dangerous and thrilling voyages of discovery led him to new methods of expressing old thoughts, new ways of treating meters and to strange and startling word combinations in which to clothe the strange things he discovered in human nature. The
swift variety and intensity of the intellectual and social life of the Renaissance movement interested him. He was naturally interested in the arts and he represented them in the way in which the main elements appeared to him. The changes and incongruities of this period led him to depict the grotesque.

Browning had an amazing imagination and he used it not only in the communion with birds and beasts, as we have noted, but it extended much further into all phases of life and led him to his great character studies in the grotesque. With his background of modern, ancient, English, exotic and Rabbinical lore, with his great travels, and with his instinctive dramatic impulse Browning often found satisfaction in out-of-the-way subjects and situations that led to the grotesque. To Browning the most fascinating of all studies was the human mind and he was able to analyze it and describe its experiences as only a mental anatomist could. So instinctive was the dramatic impulse in Browning and so great were his powers of imagination that we see even in Pippa Passes, Pippa represented as finding her greatest joy in spending her one holiday of the year in imagining herself to be several people in turn. With Browning the dramatic impulse, though imperfect remained life-long.

Browning's characters are presented with a completeness of psychological analysis which makes them of paramount interest. The impressionistic psychology of Ibsen reaches its pinnacle in
the character portrayal of Browning. It was this triumph of imaginative expression that led him to create Karshish, the wandering Arab physician and it was this same vivid imagination that portrayed the state of mind of Lazarus after his return from the dead to live among men again.

It was the clash of opposing tendencies in the mind, the almost paradoxical co-existence of conflicting characteristics making conflict that led to the grotesque in Browning. The warring elements could be described as the mystic and the poet in action.¹ The outcome of this conflict of the actual and ideal led to revolt. This attempted reconciliation of fact and truth made revolt.² Revolt against hypocrices and sham of men's lives. This revolt expressed itself in satire and the grotesque. Browning gave himself up to the picturing of the grotesque, the revealing of the unknowable, to the depicting of the revolt against God and man and nature which he observed in others and with which he sympathized. The grotesque, seems necessarily to involve momentary pessimism. In Browning it is not an ultimate one, but merely presents one side of the soul conflict which finds its victory in optimism. This conflict

is a necessity to a true optimism, and in this most triumphantly optimistic of all poets we find the greatest conflict.

This conflict is the result of a powerful intellectuality in Browning. The intellectual element is present in every one of his poems. His faith is not a mere emotional attitude; it is often rather a reasoned belief. Love is the greatest thing in the world to him because through it a nature finds its complement, whereby it is made perfect. Religion, even, takes shape for him through intellectual conflict. The result of this intellectuality in Browning is that all of his work has a deeply thoughtful foundation, and that in much of his poetry the intellectual element predominates over the emotional. It is in this very predominance of the intellectual that Browning's poetry as poetry finds one of its limitations. The poet of the intellectual is the only one who can attempt the treatment of the grotesque. He is, indeed, the only one to whom the greatest grotesque is possible. It is therefore, natural that, the greatest poet of conflict should be the poet of the grotesque, for the grotesque is a product of the intellect. Miss E. M. Naish, in her *Browning and Dogma*, has emphasized this fact in her discussion of *Caliban*. She says: "The attraction peculiar to the grotesque in any form is here present in a marked degree; an attraction frequently stronger than that exerted by the purely beautiful, involving as it does a more direct in-
tellec·tual appeal; since grotesqueness, whether in nature or in art, does not usually denote simplicity". 1

This far Browning has been considered as the poet of conflict, between the subjective and the objective, the real and the ideal, the optimistic and the pessimistic, the intellectual and the emotional. In that he was the poet of this conflict he was found to be the poet of the grotesque. It was found that this conflict was the source of his greatness. A close study will further show, that this conflict was also the source of his limitations.

Browning's viewpoint was evidently a broad one. He included in his poetry the lowliest and ugliest of characters and the most horrible of situations. Yet the conflict of idealism and realism brought to Browning from this very breadth a tendency to idealize the real. As a result, Browning is prone to do just what the realist most often does. In his attempt at justice he becomes unjust; in his attempted breadth of view he becomes narrow. Browning took the facts of life for his subjects, and he included even the ugly facts; but the question arises, did he not neglect the common-place things, which after all, constitute reality? In sounding the depths and

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ascending the heights of the soul he gained breadth of view, but

did he fail in this in a comprehensive view? Did he accentuate
these depths and heights to which few can penetrate? And per-
haps this is the cause of the lack of universality in Browning.

Furthermore, this tendency to idealize and generalize
from extreme realities, not only limits the comprehensive view,
but to a certain extent it makes it untrue. Realism itself is
inclined to generalize from abnormal facts. Realistic novels
always have unsatisfactory endings, while in real life things do
not always turn out wrong. In this the so-called realism is
unreal. Browning chose the abnormal and the neglected and truly
portrayed them; but they are merely individuals, not types. He
has, therefore, chosen the less significant facts and has given
them the significance due only to generalities. Accordingly,
in his treatment of the grotesque, Browning has often made the
abnormal seem normal, facts seem generalized truths, and hence
unreal things seem realities.

In order to express his thoughts Browning had to fight
for words. It was as though ideas were enveloped in words,
through which they tried to find expression. They tried in one
way, then went back and tried another, and, not yet finding
adequate expression, explanations and parentheses had to be re-
sorted to. His resulting style is peculiarly adapted to the
grotesque, and, by the accident of its suitability, it enhanced
the value of Browning's grotesque poetry. Yet in all Browning was a conscious poet, conscious in his choice of subjects, conscious in his style, and conscious of the conflicting elements of his nature. He believed in the artistic possibilities of all nature's objects. He knew his own struggle with pessimism and he recognized his triumphant optimism.

Browning's humor often led him to the grotesque. Browning being an intellectual poet, his characteristic subtlety led him to a keen sense of humor. He could tell a story for pure delight as the Pied Piper will testify. His peculiar humor had a special source; the suggestion of a double point of view, that of form and fact together, and the sense of the incongruity between them. He saw instantly the world of form, and his imagination swiftly appeared into the depths of fact. He shows us both at once. From this contrast between form and substance spring two great branches of humorous art - the grotesque and satire. It is in these branches that Browning is master. His place is with Cervantes rather than Dickens, with Swift rather than Mark Twain.

Browning inherited perfect health and this had much to do with his enjoyment of life. His boyhood life was happy and


2 Ibid., p. 214.
harmonious, free from the poverty that has burdened so many poets. He often took delight and showed real hilarity in things an average person found tedious. Browning's mind was perfectly wholesome but the grotesque was a trick of his temperament. There was often a quality of buffoonery in his humor. In this he was more Elizabethan than Victorian.

Browning's conception then of poetry involved the grotesque. For him the poet is not apart. He is an observer and interpreter of life. He draws his inspiration from contact with people. Over and over again this idea is formulated. It appears in his first poem Pauline.

And then thou saidst the perfect bard was one who chronicled the stages of all life.

It is stated in The Glove:

For I, so I spoke, am a poet
Human nature, behooves that I know it.

It is described by the poet in How It Strikes a Contemporary:

Stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee roaster's brazur, and the boys
The volunteer to help him turn its wunch
We have among us not so much a spy,
As a recording chief inquisitor,
The town's true master, if the town but knew.
Browning is seeking to give complete and accurate expression to what is within him. Accordingly the incongruous from the artistic point of view, he does not prune away; these are needful for the true and complete expression of mind. It is possible that the choice of a vehicle of expression which was forced upon him by the time of his birth promoted the attraction toward the grotesque. Had he lived in the age of Shakespeare, his genius which was essentially dramatic might have taken the bent of Shakespeare or if he had begun to write a half century later, after the development of the Psychological novel, he would very possibly have chosen it to express himself. The democratic realism of the century and romanticism, the force vague but vital, which ever seeks the individual, dwells on the startling, craves the abnormal and incomplete; the scientific spirit, with its curiosity; all these causes, blending into one, are responsible for Browning's instinctive attraction toward the grotesque. Browning had a Gothic mind and his style is Gothic with a curious infusion of Italian Renaissance. Ruskin speaking of Browning's Mediaeval temper in the poem, The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church says that Browning has


2 Scudder, Vida, op. cit., p. 215.
captured the spirit of the Renaissance, its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, and love of luxury better than he has in all his chapters on the Renaissance in *Stones of Venice*.¹

In explaining Browning's use of the grotesque then, we must remember that his zest for the bizarre, the eccentric, was connected with his passionate belief in ordinary men and women and was also a part of his genius. It was a perfectly serious artistic love and he enjoyed working in it as a Chinese potter might enjoy making dragons, or a mediaeval mason making devils.² It was an organic part of his structure.

¹ Scudder, Vida, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

CHAPTER III

Browning's Treatment of the Grotesque

The first thing to consider in viewing any poet is to know what his function as an artist is. Mr. Chesterton said the serious use of the grotesque was Browning's. The neglected but nevertheless existent ugly found through Robert Browning its means of expression.

Browning, though not the sanest, is ranked among the broadest of English poets. His subjects are chosen from the lowest as well as the highest classes. No character is too despicable or too low in the intellectual or moral scale, no incident too trivial or too horrible, for Browning to make it the subject of his art. Browning will take even those characters cast off by their own class. Browning's breadth of view includes, also a grasp of the beautiful and the power of rising to the heights of beautiful conceptions, and his breadth of treatment enables him to treat the beautiful and the sublime as we find them in Saul or Rabbi Ben Ezra. He merely differed from the majority of artists in not finding there his limitation.

In his poetry Browning embodied the grotesque in three
He uses grotesque situations in his poems consciously just as many others use them unconsciously. Wherever the keenest tragedy is found, there must be some element of the grotesque. Professor Schelling says that Browning is grotesque in the mere choice of such a character as Caliban, chosen not as the foil for beauty but for its own sake. A mere reading of the titles of Browning's poems brings one to a realization of his extremely grotesque choice of characters. That Browning should make Caliban and Mr. Sludge, "The Medium", the mouthpieces of deeply philosophical views of life will be remarkable to one unfamiliar with Browning. Browning did not make them mouthpieces for his own views of life, for he did not impose on these characters views from without. He only found after studying them how things must appear to them.

The grotesque character may be fashioned in Browning's own mind, fashioned from normal elements into abnormal shapes; or it may be a character actually possessing a grotesque nature because of its conflicting elements, a character whose view of life as expressed is necessarily grotesque.

1 Schelling, op. cit., p. 17.
A work may also be grotesque in treatment, and in this grotesque treatment of subjects Browning again excells. First, in mere setting, he is grotesque in the placing of his ugly characters. His view of nature is of an unsympathetic nature, a self-existent nature, very often in contrast with men's moods rather than in sympathy with them. Browning's view of nature is that of a minute observer. His descriptions are those of a naturalist and yet of the impressionist. He sees all the details, but he only describes the distinguishing details, and the impressive ones. Though nature is to him unsympathetic or at least uncommunicative, yet it always fits in with the tone of things, sometimes fulfilling its mission by being in harmony with life, sometimes finding its appropriateness in its very lack of harmony.

Browning's style was peculiarly adapted to his treatment of the grotesque. His poetry is rugged, and it had to be rugged to fit his grotesque subjects. It was because of the peculiar appropriateness of his natural style to his grotesque pictures that he became the master of the grotesque.

Browning's genius includes two realities, and two subjects; life and thought, the dramatic and the metaphysical. They are not considered apart and he has one point of view and one manner of treatment. He conceives of each man as placed on the earth with a purpose of probation. Life is given him
as a test of his quality. He succeeds or fails toward God, and his real end and aim, according as he is true or false to his better nature. He is not to be judged by the standards of worldly success or unsuccess.

The poet, in Browning's view of him, is God's witness and must see and speak for God. He must therefore conceive of each individual separately and distinctly. Browning's drama is an interior one, a tragedy or comedy of the soul. It is an introspective drama, which reveals the individual. It sees how each soul conceives of itself. Browning's study is character.

The poetry of Browning is chiefly situation. He selects a character, no matter how uninteresting in itself, and places it in some situation, in some crisis of conflict or opportunity. Instead of a grouping of characters which shall act on one another to produce a certain result in action, he uses a grouping of events useful or important, only as they influence the character or the mind. In this way, by making the soul the very center of action, he is enabled, (thinking himself into it), to bring out its characteristics, to reveal its very nature. If he is attracted by some particular character or by some particular act, he winds his way into the heart of it, or he picks to pieces the machinery. He begins then to reconstruct the whole series of events, the
whole substance of the character, but turned inside out.

The drama of the interior then is Browning's mental attitude and his special method. It is the psychological analytical method. He has a special instrument for delineating this dramatic method. It is the monologue. To conceive a drama, to present every side, phase and feature of it from a certain point of view, to condense all its potentialities of action, all its import into a few hundred lines has been the work of Browning's monologue. In presenting his dramatic methods of psychology, Browning has adapted the monologue to various treatment. He uses it in colloquial conversation, dialectical argument, discourse, and reminiscence, casuistical argument and soliloquy.

Browning usually treats the grotesque through contrast. He resorts to many odd devices which produce these contrasts:

The humorous is mingled with the serious.

Sudden transitions are made from the sordid to the sublime.

Contrasts are produced by changes in attitude of mind and mood.

Unnatural conventions or eccentricities are framed into tragic-comic form.

Characters are used whose ideas expressed contrast strangely with their positions in life.

Contrasts are produced through different forms of rhyme, versification, allusions, figures of speech.
Contrasts are made through mingling colloquial and stately diction.

A double-edged quality is sometimes used through which any objective event may be set in light of contrasting human moods or points of view. (The canticle in The Heretic's Tragedy creates a double meaning.)

A direct way of introducing scenes and conversation by throwing remarks into illustrations of points being made, calls attention to different personages. Quotations are frequent and call attention to changes.

Abrupt beginnings, sudden endings which surprise and shock are used. Browning has the power of flashing a situation or a thought into a few words, that often trick or sting into wakefulness and evoke sudden contrasts.

Letters, postscripts and notes supply variety in setting and suggest contrast.

Numerous adaptations of meter are made. Blank verse is the usual medium of variety. Meter is used to express the pulse beat of one character in contrast with another. Close to the meter is the length of the line. The Iambic foot more than any other is used to express controlled passion, the Trochee suggests bursts of feeling.

One of the greatest evidences of the grotesque in Browning is his choice of themes. In the studies that follow, it will be the attempt to group the themes around some of the grotesque tendencies of Browning, in order to see just where Browning's talent lies, in working with the grotesque. The themes will be used in the following categories:
Group I  Grotesque Character - Psychological and Casuistical Studies

Caliban and Setbos

Mr. Sludge, "The Medium"

Bishop Blougram

The Inn Album

The Ring and The Book

Grotesque Tendency - Clever Analysis.

Group II  Situations of Some Occult Eccentricity of History or Legend

The Heretic's Tragedy

Holy Cross Day

An Epistle, Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician

Christmas Eve

Grotesque Tendency - Love of Quaint Recondite Knowledge.

Group III  Characters set in an Environment of Some Historical Epoch - The Renaissance

Fra Lippo Lippi

A Grammarian's Funeral

The Bishop Orders His Tomb

A Toccata of Galuppi's

Group IV Fanciful Grotesque

The Pied Piper
Numpholeptos
Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Game
Grotesque Tendency - Symbolic Imagery.

Group V Whimsicalities of Wit and Rhyme

Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis
Pacchiarotto

Group I Grotesque Character - Psychological and Casuistical Studies

Grotesque Tendency - Clever Analysis
Caliban and Setebos

In the first part of the paper there was a tentative division of the grotesque into three classes following somewhat in the line of Ruskin's thought; the noble or inevitable grotesque, the purely fantastic grotesque, and the artificial grotesque. The inevitable or noble grotesque is the class of grotesque in which Browning is master, and the majority of his gro-
tesque poems will be found to come under this class. This is the natural grotesque with its conflicts of ideal and real, its revolts, its picturing of the incomprehensible, and its revealing of the shams of life. The most perfect type of this natural grotesque found in Browning is *Caliban Upon Setebos*, a poem grotesque in situation, character and treatment.

*Caliban and Setebos* is a dramatic monologue, the art form which is so peculiarly associated with Browning and so specially adapted to his work, the analysis of the soul. The sub-title of the poem, *Natural Theology in the Island* indicates what Browning intended to be its theme, the religion of the natural man, the unevolved and uncivilized man. *Caliban* becomes in the hands of Browning a philosophical, as well as a physical grotesque. It was a bold and masterful stroke through *Caliban*'s primitive yet acute reasoning to parallel with absurdity, the reasoning of more civilized and perhaps less acute, because more conventional thinkers. Taking the Caliban of Shakespeare's *Tempest* as a basis, Browning added thought to emotion; intensified even the mere feelings of the first Caliban; and by giving him a soul, made perfect both an intellectual picture and a soul analysis.

*Caliban* with instincts and intelligence of an early savage, has in an hour of holiday, set himself to conceive what Setebos, his mother's God is like in character. He lies down
in the "cool slush" to have a good "think" regarding this God, setebos. A strange occupation, indeed, for a creature so much of the earth. He visions Setebos as a hideously grotesque God, living in the cold of the moon, which is less powerful and more uncertain than the sun, creating the world to amuse himself, and vent his spite at his own impotency, making a man as Caliban makes a clay bird, and marring him as ruthlessly and irrationally as Caliban twists the pincers of the beetles and the crabs.

The grotesque is heightened in this poem in the form of presentation. Caliban's language is as grotesque as his idea of himself. He hides himself in the earth, talks to himself, (the truly primitive way of thinking of God.) He speaks in the third person, as if it was not he that spoke hoping in that fashion to trick his God. He has not yet risen to the dignity of the consciousness of the ego. He does not use the pronoun "I", or the possessive "my". His verbs are impersonal, "will sprawl", - and he continually uses the verb, "thinketh", without any subject, making a profound meditation of such a creature with all elements of "natural theology in the island". Many pauses and breaks in the line give the blank verse an effect of formlessness greater than stanzas could have done.

The setting of the poem is artistically almost perfect in its placing of Caliban in the midst of nature's most repulsive forms and in its revealing of Caliban's lack of harmony with nature's Ruler by his lack of harmony with nature in its
larger manifestations.

Browning's descriptive power is never better shown than here in the impressionistic picture of:

Yon otter, sleek wet, black, lithe as a leech;
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam;
That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue
That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants; etc. 1

Caliban himself, half-man and half-beast, yet neither man nor beast, one of the cast-off creatures, is introduced by a wonderful description:

Will sprawl, now that the heat of the day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh;
And while above his head a pompion-plant,
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch -
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
And recross till they weave a spider-web
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
Touching that other, whom his dam called God. 2

The description of this creature is not so great as the picture of the unformed soul here given, the soul that has not yet attained to self-consciousness, the soul that only wonders,

1 Caliban,
2 Ibid., p. 392, lines 1-16
and fears and hates. Caliban represents not only the Darwinian natural man, but also the rugged nature of every soul and reveals the depths that are never completely civilized.

The choice of such a grotesque character as Caliban is unusual, but it is powerful. The refinements of civilization prevent revealing of soul-depths, such absolute ruggedness and strength of passionate feeling in a conventional man.

Caliban knows the power to be over him but he hates this power, the God, Setebos. He sees in Him envy, spite, injustice, qualities not tempered by kindness. Yet Setebos has power and power alone makes Him, God. In Setebos Caliban sees another Caliban made all powerful.¹ He plays with this idea of himself as God, and he curses Setebos. Then in the midst of his taunts and revilings and terror, he cries:

What I hate, be consecrate
To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate
For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?

seemingly thinking to avert thus the wrath of Setebos; and in this cry the high-water mark of the grotesque is attained.

There is only one gleam of hope for Caliban, the hope that there may be "the Quiet", some power above Setebos who may

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² Caliban. Lines 267-268.
end Setebos' rule by an eternal existence of his own. This hope is not to be encouraged, for Setebos the author of evil, must be supreme, else the Creator had made his creatures strong to withstand evil. Yet evil may grow into good, or it may be overcome by good.¹ These thoughts go rapidly through Caliban's mind. But he is punished. Setebos has heard, and

What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once! Crickets stop hissing; not a bird - or, yes, There scuds His raven that hath told Him all: It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move, And fast invading fires begin! What blaze - A tree's head snaps - and, there, there, there, there, His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him! Lo! Lieth flat and loveth Setebos! Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip, Will let those quails fly, will not eat this moth One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape.²

No greater plea for the power of the noble grotesque in art can be made than the reading this poem affords, for everything contributes to the grim humor of the scene, that humor which is the most terrible part of the grotesque.

Mr. Sludge, "The Medium"

Mr. Sludge, "The Medium", is a poem showing a slightly different type of the grotesque, yet the minds of Sludge and

¹ Naish, E. M. Browning and Dogma, p. 21.
² Caliban. Lines 284 - 295.
Caliban are not far apart. Their theologies, natural in both cases, have common principles, though Caliban is slow and primitive, Sludge under the stress of his age, is alert, ingenious, and sophisticated. Here Browning has shown his extreme realism. In Sludge is portrayed an existent character, a Mr. Home, whose popularity as a spiritualistic medium was raging at the time Mr. Browning wrote the poem. Mr. Sludge is a poem of revolt against the shams of human life. It is not a portrayal of the apparent inconsistencies of the divine rule as in the case of Caliban and it is not an attack on spiritualism but more universally an attack upon shams and hypocrisies.

Here again Browning used the form of the dramatic monologue in his work of laying open the soul of Sludge. As in Caliban the choice of Sludge as a poetic subject is here grotesque in itself, for Sludge in the process of his self-revelment proves a subject not to be chosen by any other poet. Browning portrays Mr. Sludge just at the time when his hypocrisies have been found out and he is being forced into banishment. At first Sludge attempts self-justification. He has only done what he has done because it pleases his victims, because by so doing he gives them what they want. They desired falsehood, and he satisfied their desire. But from a coolly intellectual justification of his deeds, Sludge is roused to intense passion, of self-defense; and his language becomes wild, his argument
unsound. Alternately fawning upon and snarling at his accuser, alternately daring and fearing his discovery, he presents a picture of purely grotesque art. It is at the close of the poem that, as in Caliban the sham of it all is most plainly seen. Sludge, seemingly all resolved into gratitude and love, has let his persecutor depart; but, the accuser well out of sight, Sludge repents that he has not himself turned accuser. In a fit of anger he reveals all the hatred and malice back of his whining and whimpering, and in chaotic mutterings of anger and vengence the poem would close, save that in the last lines there is a new turn of thought, a saner thought, which seems merely to say that such is the way of the world and that the thing for Sludge to do is to go elsewhere, not trying to rid the world of one fool, for he would accomplish nothing.

Sludge's early life was one of hardship. He received little education or training of any kind - its most active part, in fact, being picked up in the streets, in which men struggle for existence and sharpen their wits. His spelling, even when inspired was bad and his reading only fed a superstitious fancy. He had read the Bible and the miracles pleased him. He liked the crude mystery, the pure caprice, and individualism of the older thought. This is the key to Sludge's character. He is clever, but crude as Caliban; active and observant, but shallow.
He has no curiosity of mind and does not understand knowledge. He is grotesque in that he has no sense of the relation or proportion of things. To him as well as Caliban the bearings of all things are arbitrary. He is keen to see and quick to use all points that make to the advantage of Sludge. He has no soul but much faith in spirits. With such crudity of moral and mental conditions, he has taken certain ideas into his mind. The idea of spirits is one. He tells they are out of the Bible. He has brought back the supernatural which used to hold the foreground in primitive religion.

He thinks nothing can be explained, and that these hints are occult, and arbitrary, and so he resorts to primitive thought. If there be no order of reason in things, the right way to tract then is by chance, which is somewhat divine, by a mere trick it maybe -. His devices expose the triviality of his ideas. Life, law, and the whole system of God are infinitely small in the name of a religion, without morality or wisdom, and in which God is only the highest point and chief factor of self-interest.

But Mr. Sludge finds a society with uses and encouragements for himself and his notions and so Sludge consoles himself that his ability to communicate with the spirit world is an established fact, and it is true that all spirits are eager to
respond to his summons. Yes, Mr. Sludge operates by means of so-called spirit-rappings, table tippings, writings in sympathetic ink, tricks with glass balls and dim shades conjured up in darkened rooms. But this is only a means of communication and the only authentic spirit language. Why should Horsefall, his patron, who has seen one of the tricks fail, doubt it? Why all this talk of exposure?

Sludge's plea is a long and ingenious one extending from this particular instance of crookedness to chicanery and fraud in general. There is cheating everywhere, not only in spiritual seances, but in literature, history, philosophy and religion. Men encourage lying and cheating pretending all the time to look askance at it.

Sludge's intellectual powers include a penetrating observation of humanity's foibles, and a wide acquaintance with the philosophical thought of the century, in many directions. But he has the knack of twisting any philosophical or religious opinion he knows into sophistical arguments in defense of his own practices which result in his saying many things which are true in themselves, but which in his application of them become false. There's always the doubt, he says. Are rules infallible? Certainly not, no more so than your scientist's rules. Take the case of two farmers, one of whom was a "wiseacre in his own conceit", and after studying the seasons, rummaging almanacs,
quoting dew-points registering the frost, prophesized confidently that the next summer would be dampish. Yet contrariwise it proved a drought. The other farmer, not so scientific observed that his brindled heifer stiffened her tail of evenings late in March, and, taking it for a sign of ensuing drought, managed to save his hay and corn. There is a mysterious something though, which he cannot comprehend and he argues: Is there no use whatever in lying or cheating? Take this instance and see. Sludge frightened could not walk a plank between windows, a hundred feet above Beacon Street, but to beget the necessary courage to do so, pasted paper on each side of the plank, swore the paper-cheat was pavement and walked the plank whistling.

Couldn't Sludge do without cheating, and if so, why doesn't he condescend to do it? Well for one reason, because:

There's a strange secret sweet self-sacrifice
In any desecration of one's soul
To a worthy end. 1

Besides he makes life more of a success for people. He does not cheat any more than the poet, who romances of Troy and the Greeks who only have a fictitious existence in Homer. "He acts, they write". Sludge shows his utmost degradation in his final attitude to his patron:

1 Mr. Sludge. p. 299, lines 10-12.
B-R-R, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp! I only wish I dared burn down the house And spoil your sniggering - Oh, what, You're the man? You're satisfied at last? You've found out Sludge? We'll see that presently; my turn, sir next! I too can tell my story: brute, - do you hear? You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag, In just such a fit of passion: no, it was -- To get this house of hers, and many a note Like these -- I'll pocket them, however -- five Ten, fifteen -- ay, you gave her throat the twist Or else you poisoned her! confound the cuss! Where was my head? I ought to have prophesized He'll die in a year and join her: that's the way I

The colloquial and dialectical style of this monologue only add to the uniqueness of Mr. Sludge's character. Browning has used many of his odd devices in this poem which add to the humor and dramatic effect as a whole. We see one of these introducing supposable scenes and conversations in illustration of the points made in the argument in the scene where Mr. Horsefall, the patron, is supposed to take Mr. Sludge's place and try some spiritualistic feats upon Humgriffin, and fails. This proves of course, that Sludge has supernatural powers, for if they detect the spurious character of the writing in one case, they should detect it in the case of Sludge, as a lady present in this imaginary scene is represented as observing, and to whom Sludge replies outside, not inside, the scene. The device of

1 Mr. Sludge, p. 412, lines 45 - 58.
using quotations aid here in creating the dramatic effect.

Sludge is speaking:

Now, lights on table again! I've done my part,
You take my place while I give thanks and rest.
"Well, Judge Humgriffin, what's your verdict, sir?
You, hardest head in the United States, -
Did you detect a cheat here? Wait! Let's see!
Just an experiment first, for candor's sake!
I'll try and cheat you, Judge! The table tilts:
Is it I that move it? Write! I'll press your hand;
Cry when I push, or guide your pencil, Judge!"
Sludge still triumphant! "That a rap, indeed?
That, the real writing? Very like a whale!
Then, if, sir, you - a most distinguished man,
And, were the Judge not here, I'd say - - - no matter!
Well, sir, if you fail, you can't take us in, -
There's little fear that Sludge will!"

Won't he, ma'am? 1

As a piece of analytic portraiture Mr. Sludge would be
difficult to surpass. It is certain no more characteristic
expression could be found for Sludge than the colloquial monologue. Dialectics are purposely used for showing up Sludge
through his manner of turning argument to account. The lan-
guage is full of slang and hints of allusions, - "very like a
whale", "picker-out of pearl", "canthus of my eye", "fiddle-
fugues", "apple-pips", "V-notes", "wiseacres".

The poem is fertile in points of dramatic and intellect-
ual interest and the dramatic interest goes with another - the
humor of the poet. This is seen in the details and externals
of the man, but it is most of all felt in the conception and
breadth of treatment, the type and the justice done to it. The

1 Mr. Sludge, "The Medium", p. 398, lines 36-50.
strange play of truth and error, of doubt and belief, of reality and delusion, of audacity and cowardice, of cleverness and crudity, of lying so deep as to have become self-deceptive in sheer inability to say how much is false and how much true whether in soul or conduct.

Besides the humor in the subtle and free appreciation of the type, there is a fuller humor in the large and subtle suggestion through it of a world-wide comedy in which we are all engaged. This man is a sneak, a liar, and an egotist with hardly enough sound matter in him to keep him alive; and yet the poet not only brings him within the sphere of dramatic but moral interest. When you have seen this picture of the soul, you not only see how this man came to be, but you are startled by points of sympathy of men and opinions around you, and with principles and temptations in your own soul.

Then there is the great question that runs through the whole poem - that of the supernatural, and the bearing of the poem on it. Minds like those of Sludge degrade all they touch, and the notion of the "unseen order", after Sludge has handled it, may seem no better than a poor superstition. Sludge is grotesque in this. He fails to distinguish between a wide application and an egotistical application of the truths and mysteries of the universe. The poem is as lifelike in its insight into the mind of a supple cheat as it is a brilliant
bit of literature in fantastic play with argument, clever analysis and intellectual discourse.

Bishop Blougram

Sometimes a mere title in Browning's work gives a touch of grotesqueness to a serious poem. One looks more than once at a poem discussing shine and shade, happiness and misery in life, if it be entitled "A Bean Stripe also Apple Eating". In a poem discussing vital questions of faith and doubt, Bishop Blougram advises Mr. Gigadibs to

--- try the cooler jug,
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice.

Meanwhile:

Mr. Gigadibs, the literary man,
Played with spoons, explored his plate's design
And ranged the olive stones about its edge.

Closely related in subject to Mr. Sludge, "The Medium", is the casuistical monologue of Bishop Blougram. In this poem Browning deals again with the sham-life, a life here carried on by a bishop of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the poem is not intended as an attack on any creed. The grotesque is in the nature of satire, and reveals the same philosophical and
analytical methods as are observed in many of the grotesque poems of Mr. Browning.

Caliban was found to be the study of a crude and simple nature, a primitive mind; Blougram is that of a complex and cultivated, a powerful modern mind; yet both are dealing with the same problem, both are studies of the sources and process of man's conclusion from his experiences to the system amid which he finds himself, and the quality of the law that rules over things. There is an interval of life and thought between the two. Yet there are deep instincts in common. Caliban has doubts, and talks his theology in the most natural of theories. Blougram is full of doubts, and of a sense of possible revolution in the whole mode of thought. The instinct and idea of the savage are however in the argument in which the Bishop measures his mind and creed against those of Gigadibs.

The poem has two concentrated characters as well as views of life, and it is dramatic not only in its swift and forcible casuistry to the two persons of the poem, but in its study of the process of conviction itself. The Bishop is not setting forth his belief as Caliban, it is his position, his theory of life rather that he justifies against the criticism and theory of Gigadibs. The Bishop is not a theologian, he is a realist, a man of the world, masterly and shrewd, and values life highly and all its goods. He met Gigadibs, the dealer.
in words and views, the idle critic. He does not really prove
his case for he hints at a deeper argument in reserve; but as
Gigadibs never asked for it, we don't get it, and may doubt, not
of the Bishop's ability to give it, but his own interest in it.
The conflicting elements in the Bishop's character make him gro-
tesque. He taught the very things he could not believe. His
view of life - man growing by constant striving between God and
the devil, God pulling one way, Satan pulling the other is gro-
tesque.

Bishop Blougram, a man of sixty years is represented in
an after-dinner conversation with Mr. Gigadibs, a young man of
thirty. In the conversation he attempts to justify his own
attitude toward the Church whose doctrines he teaches while at
the same time he does not believe these doctrines. Here is
presented a concrete picture of Browning's philosophy, the
struggle of realism and idealism, realism in the person of Bish-
op Blougram justifying itself to idealism in the person of Mr.
Gigadibs. It may be noted too, that realism is represented in
the experienced man, idealism in the young man.

The simile of comparing life to a voyage and adapting
our luggage to our cabin space is used throughout the poem. We
are all crossing the world's ocean in the ship of life, and have
only a very limited space allowed us. Into that space we can-
not put all we might wish for comfort or higher uses. What
then? Shall we rebel against the limits and throw all overboard because we cannot take all, or choose and take what we can? Men of sense take what the space permits and let the rest go. If we fling all away because our ideas cannot be carried out, we only make ourselves absurd and our voyage miserable.

The Bishop argues his cause well. He cannot be other than himself. He cannot be a Napoleon, a Shakespeare, a Luther, or a Strauss, just because there would be no need for a mere repetition of their work if he could do it. He makes here a strong plea for individuality, the need and the necessity for it so often taught by Browning.

In this apology there may be traced three distinct elements. First, there is a substratum of truth; then there is an application of these true principles to his own case and conduct, and finally there is the man as he is.

(a) Sheer unbelief is as hard to keep as sheer belief. Blougram proposes we throw faith overboard.

All we have gained then by our unbelief is a life of doubt diversified by faith, For one of faith diversified by doubt. 1

(b) We are not altogether helpless in the matter of whether we believe or not. Man may choose to say:

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1 Bishop Blougram, p. 351. lines 40-43.
I absolutely and preemptorily believe. ¹

(c) Doubts will come. But doubt is not wrong or inconsistent with faith.

If you desire faith - then you've faith enough. ²

The poem has woven into it some of the threads of Browning's best philosophy. The good service done by evil in the world.

The main thing - "to wake, not sleep";
I say, faith is my waking life;
One sleeps indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us. ³

The good of the struggle within a man is set forward in the grotesque and quite unforgettable picture of God pulling upward on the man and Satan pulling downward, and so man grows (we might say they stretch him by their pulling).

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something; God stoops o'er his head
Satan looks up between his feet - both tug -
He's left, himself, i' the middle; the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life;⁴

1 Bishop Blougram, p. 351, line 84.
2 Ibid., p. 355, line 19.
3 Ibid., p. 459, lines 8-11.
Bishop Blougram is utterly incapable of truth for truth's sake, incapable of the struggle for an ideal which cannot be attained. His sin, as Browning portrays it, is contentment. He is content with such insignificant things - mere bodily comfort, friends, culture. To the poet of strife toward an ideal this satisfaction with the attainable is terrible, and the overcoming of the ideal, must have been grotesque.

The language and meter as usual are in accord with the spirit and thought. In Mr. Sludge there was the dialectical, and much slang. In Bishop Blougram, there is the cultured man. His language is full of references to history, art, and literature. "Correggio's fleeting glow", "Terni's fall, Naples' Bay and Gothard's top". There are many sentences which are a mixture of Latin and English and the allusions are mostly to Shakespeare which is quite in keeping with the character of the Bishop.

In his criticism of belief the poet has given ample analysis of its psychological elements, and forcible proof of their quality and extent. The large impression left by his method, is though much of faith is only subjective plausibility, and though none, can turn the whole of faith to rational thought, yet faith is essential as reason itself, and deeper things of thought and art, are the truer for this, that they never explain
because they cannot exhaust the facts of experience, or the powers and realities of man's spirit, with which they have real contact and significant communion.

Such poems as Caliban, Mr. Sludge and Bishop Blougram raise the full question of the value of man's thoughts about the final matters of belief. They are grotesque in that they attempt to expound ideas and aspirations in forms of self deception as data gotten from instinct, and argument quite unchecked by verification.

Studies in Evil

Browning often portrays grotesque characters through the study of evil. One may discern in Browning's study of evil a real connection between his way of thinking and the success he achieved in the portraiture of the psychology of evil. Browning having something of the mystic about him as well as that of the mental mechanic needs not only to let perceptions of ideas float into him through the eye of the soul, but he also needs to handle mental things with the hands of a craftsman. One of these dispositions in him, the mystical, receives its satisfaction in the mental sights of the beautiful. The other gets satisfaction
in the grotesque.¹

The Inn Album

The Inn Album is a study in evil. The characters of the poem are four, all unnamed; a young, polished snob, an impoverished middle-aged nobleman, a woman, whom he had wronged, and who is now married to a clergyman; and a young girl, her friend, who is betrothed to the younger of the two men.

The elder man is one of Browning's most finished studies and morally one of his most grotesque characters. He is bad, clever and cynical. He prides himself above all things on his intellect, and he has had power to shape his course and sway others. At fifty he knew himself to be a failure. The cause he traces to a certain crisis in his life, when he won only to abuse and abandon, the affections of a woman, whose splendor of soul he saw too late. After four years he unexpectedly meets the woman and the good and evil in him blaze out in a sudden and single flame of earnest appeal. In general he has never viewed his conduct as a crime, a wrong to the woman, but a mistake on his part; and his attitude is not one of remorse, but of one who has missed a chance.

Miss West, in her *Browning Studies*, says that this character belongs in Browning's class of evil characters showing potentiality of good, however, good, so faintly and transiently in operation as barely to indicate there, its existence. The tragedy of this life lies in the clear vision of the heaven between which and himself, a great gulf has, by his own act been set. He is sincere just in that moment when he reverts to his past experience when a flash of human passion revealed truth to him, when

Either I lost - or, if it please
You found

or when

I see, slowly, surely creep,
Day by day, o'er me the conviction here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained and then let go.
That with her - may be for her - I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all of the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take.  

The true grotesque here is in the antithesis of the man's passionate mood which is rare and transient, over the

1 *The Inn Album*, p. 780, lines 4-5.
2 Ibid., p. 781, lines 21-27.
steady uniform cynicism and malice that have grown to be habitual with him. Also in the fact that he was alive to a sense of the ludicrous. He finds exquisite amusement in the wielding of his power over his simple-minded comrade, the young man, and amusement in his cynical self-analysis.

The character of the woman in the story is less complex. Like the man, her development has been arrested by the cause which made him a wreck. Yoked to a soulless husband whom she has married in despair her nature has frozen. The subtlety and grotesqueness of the picture lies in showing what she is now, with what she was. She is not pathetic but terrible, in the confession to the young man that loves her, in that the ease provided for her has been intolerable agony.

In Browning's doctrine of the waverings and balancing in human natures between good and evil, she is the symbol of the better life he might have attained. As the parson's beautiful daughter without her seducer, the woman would have vegetated on "lily-like" through some ordinary lot of life, never attaining the sorrowful grandeur of soul to which the ruin of her peace raised her.

Pathetic beside its outer comedy is the figure of the rough foolish youth. He has found in the woman he loves the very woman whom his "friend" has wronged. Such a character in
its very absence of subtlety must have been a grotesque to Browning.

The only spiritual illumination that comes to such a dark psychological study is Browning's principle of the good worked by evil through personality. Browning implied society made the individual and all the great crises, all the turns of evil or good in the lives of men were traced to the soundness or unsoundness of their relation with others. In The Inn Album a social wrong works to the ruin of the man sinning, but to the glory of the woman sinned. Browning says, it is through strife that the moral being rises to peace. We are taught love by hate and temptation is a blessing, to those who are able to face it. We saw Bishop Blougram speaking of the "blessed evil".

The Ring and The Book

Browning took some of the ignoble passions envy, jealousy, hatred, base fear, despair, revenge and made them into subjects of poetry. There is no closer image in literature of long suppressed fear breaking out into its agony of despair than in the lines which seal Guido's pleading in The Ring and The Book:

Life is all:
I was just stark mad, - let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from! I am yours,
I am the Grand Duke's - no, I am the Pope's!
Abate - Cardinal - Christ - Marie - God --
Pompelia, will you let them murder me? 1

The element of the grotesque is present, inevitably, in _The Ring and The Book_, the longest and perhaps the greatest poem of Browning. In this twelve-fold telling of an old Italian crime the grotesque is found in the quick characterization of some of the people in the first of the twelve books. There are touches of it too, in _Half-Rome_, _The Other Half_ and _Tertium Quid_ as well as in Guido's story. There is none in Caponsacchi's account unless we accept his denunciation of Guido, almost too terrible even for a grotesque. Guido's death would be simply:

A spittle wiped from off the face of God. 2

There is absolutely none in Pompilia. The grotesque would be out of place in the story of the "soldier-saint" or in that of the "snow white soul that angels feared to take untenderly."

But the lawyers are decidedly grotesque. Browning must have chuckled as he wrote their lines. Their accounts relieve the tensity of the stories told by those more really concerned,

1 _The Ring and The Book_, p. 594, lines 11-17.
2 Ibid., p. 503, line 9.
Guido, Caponsacchi and Pompilia. At the same time their pedantic prosiness emphasize the beauty of Pompilia, and their smug self-satisfaction, deepen the darkness of her tragedy. Their very names are grotesque, Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelia, and Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius. Guido's lawyer, Hyacinthus, the procurator of the poor at Rome.

Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law
let us see "the manner of the making of a case".

He wheezes law in phrases, whiffles Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank.

A bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there. 1

He is full of pride in his small son, whose birthday feast he smells cooking as he turns his Latin phrases. He regards the case as a special act of providence for his benefit; all this was working for his good. He has no more thought for Pompilia than for the rabbit which Gigia is juggling with sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips. He composes his speech with half an ear and eye and three-quarters of a mind turned toward the kitchen, and the result is a strange mingling of Latin, law, and cooking.

1 The Ring and The Book, p. 535, lines 30-34.
Man

Derogate, live for the low tastes alone,
Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
Absit such homage to vile flesh and blood.
May Gigia have remembered nothing stings
Fried liver out of its monotony
Of richness, like a root of fennel chopped

---

Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
Come, I must go myself and see to things:
I cannot stay much longer stewing here.
Our stomach - - - I mean, our soul is stirred within,
And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
Fall under such a censure, we?

Bottinius is more pompous, more cold-blooded, less likable than his rival lawyer, and less grotesque.

Group II Sculpturing Single Situations of Some Occult Eccentricity of History or Legend.

Grotesque Tendency - Love of Quaint Recondite Knowledge

The Heretic’s Tragedy

Professor Schelling described the grotesque as a revival of the Mediaeval, and Browning, the poet of the grotesque often

1 The Ring and The Book, p. 530, lines 15-21
2 Ibid., p. 537, lines 13-19.
turns to the Middle Ages for his subjects. Of all Browning's Mediaeval poems, The Heretic's Tragedy is the greatest. His power of sculpturing single situations is seldom shown in finer relief than in those poems in which he has seized upon some occult eccentricity of history or legend like The Heretic's Tragedy or Holy Cross Day, fashioning it into some tragic-comic form.

The Heretic's Tragedy, Symons is inclined to rank even higher than Caliban in grotesque poetry. He says, "if I say that it is perhaps the finest example in English poetry of pure grotesque, I shall fail to interpret it aright to those who think the grotesque is a synonym for the ugly and debased". Its special note is indescribable for there is nothing with which we can compare it.

The poem finds its historic origin in the burning of Jacques do Bourg-Molay, the grand-master of the order of the Templars. The event of 1314 was the culmination of the persecution of the Templars, the order which had been purged by oppression, and whose leaders finally stood as martyrs, persecuted as they themselves had persecuted the Turks.

The poem opens with the pre-admonishing of the abbot, then becomes a taunting song from one of the by-standers. The close of each stanza is marked by the one-line song of the church.
Browning introduces here one of his original devices in the use of this canticle. It is indicated that the organ solemnly sounds the Plagal Cadence and the song is answered back in a double meaning. It is weird and almost blood-curdling in its mocking echoes.

And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive
(And wanteth their grace of lute or clavicithern,
Ye shall say to confirm him who singeth)
We bring John now to be burned alive.

The Abbot's speech is of infinite mercy and infinite justice. The song of the onlooker is a recounting of Molay's sins, a telling of the grotesquely horrible incidents of his punishment, and exultation over his misery. The horrors of burning this so-called heretic, who had so often condemned others to such a fate, the mockeries and revilings present a picture of an intensely grotesque nature.

How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there?
Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound? 1

The vary fact of the judges being called to judgment, of the persecutors being brought to persecution, shows the grim-

1 The Heretic's Tragedy, p. 280, stanza IV.
humor so characteristic of the grotesque. This horrible humor finds its climax in the description of the Martyr's finding of the rose in the service of Him whom he had called the Rose of Sharon:

Ha, ha, John plucketh now at his rose
To rid himself of a sorrow at heart;
Lo, - petal on petal, fierce rays inclose;
Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew the bosom boils;
And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
Of a coal-black giant flower of hell.  

There is an atmosphere of burlesque surrounding this scene of the Fourteenth Century in all its religious ferocity. The inconsistencies of burning a man for the heresy of holding God was good and merciful, in order to re-establish the contrary infinitives of God's justice and menace, come out in the indirect structure of the poem and in the sardonic absurdity that it all is to modern thought, and the much relished hit it all was to Mediaeval thought.

There are unusual figures and striking phraseology used throughout the poem which add and build up the grotesque throughout the poem.

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith;
Billets that blaze substantial and slow;

1 The Heretic's Tragedy, p. 281, stanza I.
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pitch;
Larch-heart that chars to a chalk white glow;
Then up they hoist me John in a chafe
Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing Baudes and bid clap-to-the torch.
Laus Deo — who bids clap-to-the torch. 1

The grotesque here is not only of form but of situation and character. The conception is too sublimely terrible for whimsicalities of rhyme.

No English poet, save Shakespeare, has spoken of the Jew with such compassion, knowledge and admiration as Browning. The two poems in which he most fully enshrines his views of human life as it may be in the thought of God, and as it ought to be conceived in us, are both in the mouths of Jews, Rabbi Ben Ezra and Jochanan Hakkadosh.

Holy Cross Day

Holy Cross Day is also a poem that professes to give some explanation of the self-respecting pride of the Jews in the face of all their suffering. How they were respected in

1 The Heretic's Tragedy, p. 281, Stanza IV.
the days of Filippo and Buti, Barnabas, Job and Solomon, and raised far above their semi-pagan persecutors by the consciousness of being reserved for greater things. **Holy Cross Day** is a mass tragedy rather than an individual one. The poem gives the picture of the Jews on the occasion of their forced weekly attendance upon Christian services. One of the victims, recognizing the grotesqueness of the situation, describes it with bitter humor. The poem is merely a half-chaotic murmur from the Jews against this practice, which enforced hypocrisy among them. At first a mere muttering against their condition, it becomes a definite reviling of the Bishop, then a tracing of the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Christians.

Fee, fau, fumi bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Stinking and savory smug and gruff,
Take the church-road for the bells due chime
Give us the summons - 'tis sermon-time.

The recounter sees themselves as rats in a hamper, flies in a sieve, and His Grace, who is to preach the sermon, as an acorned hog. The twelve doomed by lot for conversion get no sympathy from him, for five of them are thieves, and seven are beggars; they deserve no better fate.

1 Holy Cross Day; p. 281, Stanza III.
There is a sharp and striking contrast between the bitter mingling of savage humor with the sordid pathos of the first part, the sudden transition to the sublime and the steadfast song of death, of Rabbi Ben Ezra, is a solemn and impressive arraignment of their tormentors.

Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed, Who maintain thee in word, and defy thee in deed. 1

Nothing more sardonically mirthful has perhaps ever been written than the first few lines of this poem. The meaning of the summons to church is almost hidden in the unmeaning chaos of words. Yet this very jumble of words give an impression of the hurrying, pushing, muttering crowd. The grotesque is most skillfully used in these poems. It is heightened with pity, indignation and solemnity in Holy Cross Day and reaches sublimity in The Heretic's Tragedy.

Karshish

The creation of An Epistle - Containing the Strange Medical Experience of the Arab Physician, Karshish, suited Browning's humor and his quaint play with recondite knowledge.

1 Holy Cross Day. p. 282, lines 5-6. stanza XVII.
It is a companion piece to Cleon, who represents the western and skeptical mind, Karshish, representing the Eastern and believing attitude of mind. The grotesque here comes in our point of view, our attitude toward his medical wisdom. For us a touch of the grotesque lies in the solemn salutation:

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not incurious in God's handiwork
This man's flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space.
That puff of vapor from his mouth, a man's soul. 1

Karshish, the Arab physician, writes from Syria to his master at home, "Abib, all sagacious in our art". He sends this master three samples of true snake-stone and is ready to divulge a cure for falling sickness, - "five spiders sprinkled with mottles on an ash-tray back, dropped in," but lack of confidence in his Syrian messenger, (whose ailing eye he has treated by a sublimate blown up the nose), deter him.

This epistle tells Karshish's experience with a man who has caught a glimpse of eternity, and whose sense of the spiritual values was not that of any other man's. The Arab is bewildered at the case and attempts to diagnose it. He writes his master that it is merely a case of mania, subinduced by epilepsy and attempts to turn from such trivial matters to more

1 Karshish, p. 338, stanza I.
drugs and cures. Yet he is haunted by his memory of this man Lazarus.

In this poem Browning’s great imagination is at work. We see it in the scientific caution and technicality of the Arab physician, his careful attempt at a statement of the case from a purely medical point of view, the self-reproachful uneasiness at the strange interest in the man’s story. The creation of Lazarus is even a greater conception of the poet’s imagination. The problem - how to express the condition of a man’s body and soul, who having for three days according to the story, as Browning conceived it, lived consciously in the eternal and who has come back to dwell in this world bring out the type of metaphysical strangeness that led Browning to seek the grotesque. The special point in the tale of Lazarus which has impressed Karshish is that:

The man cured regards the curer, then,
As - God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
- Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was -- what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith - but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue - flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange 1

Browning made the picture of the weird evening fit in with the quaint tone of the whole. We are placed in the dreamy village of Bethany, we hear of its elders, diseases, its flowers, its herbs and gums, and of the insects that may help medicine and how the country-side is all on fire with news of Vespasian marching into Judea. Then Karshish comes up the flinty pass from Jericho; he is attacked by thieves, twice beaten, and wild beasts endanger his path:

A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear,
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls;
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone

and then at the end of the pass he met Lazarus:

I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek-teeth, out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots,
Multiform manifold, and menacing;
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
the man and I.

The whole poem is a strange mingling of the grotesque details of mediaeval superstitions and glimpses of the very glory of eternity.

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2 Ibid., p. 340, lines 52-56.
Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve is a poem in which we would least expect to find the grotesque. Nothing could be more novel than the union attempted and achieved of colloquial realism and grotesque humor with imaginative vision and solemn earnestness found here.

Christmas Eve is a serious and reflective poem or vision of religious life. It professes to be the narrative of a strange experience lived through on Christmas Eve in a little chapel on the outskirts of a country town in St. Peter's at Rome, and at an agnostic lecture hall in Göttingen. There is a vivid sketch of the little chapel and its flock, and a picture of the professor and his audience at Göttingen, with its searching and scathing irony of merciless logic. The poem begins with a humorous description of the crowd gathering in a village church on Christmas Eve, a motley collection of folk:-

It came the flock; the fat, weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whale bones; then with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough)
-Round to the door, and in, - the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced peaking sister - turned mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, and its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry
Of her draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping,
Already from my own clothes' dropping
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on:
Then, slooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest. 1

Then comes the beauty and wonder of the vision, and
while the religious ecstasy is still on poet and reader, the
scene changes back to the little church, with the same congrega-
tion, and the service concludes with the doxology.

The language and meter of the poem, as usual, is in
accord with the spirit and the thought. They too, are sublime
and grotesque. No poem could offer greater contrast in diction
than the description of the gathering of the congregation and
the description of the double lunar rainbow merging into the
vision.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven
Deep in the West; while; bare and breathless,
North and South and East, lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood ready.

1 Christmas Eve, p. 316, lines 52
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colors chored,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In triumph of purest white,-
Above much intervened the night
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequencies,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, Flushier, and flightier,-
Rapture dying along its verge,
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On the keystone of that arc?

Group III  Themes Dealing with Characters Set in an Environment of Some Historical Epoch - The Renaissance

Special Tendency - Temper and Time of the Renaissance
Love of the Arts.

Fra Lippo Lippi

Some of Browning's poems are as startling in their mingling of the grotesque, and as glorious as The Second Shepherd's Play, where the shepherds tire with tossing Mak in a

1 Christmas Eve, p. 319, lines 3-32.
blanket, lie down to sleep, and are wakened by the angel's song. Some poems are equal blendings of the two elements, others are primarily serious, having the seriousness emphasized and deepened by the grotesque.

Fra Lippo Lippi belongs to Browning's art poems. Browning's art monologues all illustrate different periods in the growth of art. Old Pictures in Florence depicts early Christian art. Fra Lippo Lippi is the realist in revolt against Christian art. Andrea del Sarto is the formalist, Pictor Ignotus the idealist. In The Bishop Orders His Tomb we see the movement of the Renaissance in its utmost grossness with all its sensuous love of beauty.

Fra Lippo is an artist monk who escapes from his lodgings by means of a curtain, counterpane, and coverlet, and tells his story to the police who seize him.

Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture - a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun. 1

The jovial tone of the poem, its hearty humor and high spirits, and the breathless rush and hurry of the verse picture the story of a scape-grace painter in a position anything be-

coming to a Friar. Caught by the civic guard, past midnight, in an equivocal neighborhood, quite able and ready to fraternize with his captors this unsaintly Friar is willing to pour forth his rough and ready ideas and adventures.

For three weeks Lippo has painted saints, and saints, for Cosimo in the Medici Palace, but now the time of blossoms has come. Florence is now awake at night, the secret of Spring moves and he desires to paint things as he sees them. (Lippo has become a monk by chance not vocation, he was taken as a starving boy from the streets of Florence.) Through the choirs of angels and martyrs and the scenes of the gospel Lippo was forced to paint, the modern life began to glance. Natural, quaint, original faces and attitudes appeared; the angels smiled like Florentine women, the saints wore the air of Bohemians. The Friar and all the representatives of the conservative element were troubled for they feared the break from the old Christian art to that of the realistic.

The contrasts in the poem are vivid and quick. Within ten lines Lippo turns:

From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends, -
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot, 1

1 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 343, lines 77-99.
to the Christ:

Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passions of a thousand years. 1

The abruptness of transition between the two elements
is nowhere more apparent than here:

- - - - Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed now,
Your cullion's hanging face? 2

Lippo tells of the "Saint Lawrence" he has painted so
successfully that they tell him

Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the deacon off his toasted side,
But 's scratched and prodded to our heart's content, 3

The next moment he describes his masterpiece that is
to be "The Coronation of the Virgin". He will paint,

God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery, angel brood,
Lillies and vestments and white faces, 4

1 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 343, lines 103-104
2 Ibid., p. 345, lines 19-22.
3 Ibid., p. 345, lines 51-53.
4 Ibid., p. 345, lines 77-79.
With beauty he sees himself as a grotesque note,

I caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round. 1

The grotesque is not out of place here, Fra Lippo con-
sciously and deliberately introduces the grotesque himself.

A Grammarian's Funeral

A Grammarian's Funeral in which the pursuit of Grammar
is conceived as the pursuit of an art is another poem depicting
a phase of the beginning Renaissance, that love of higher learn-
ing, scholarship for scholarship's sake. The grotesque in this
poem, is seen in the mingling of the humorous and serious.

The central figure is but a Grammarian. He pursued
critical knowledge not beauty. He was endowed with graces of
face and form; but he had become cramped and withered. He
would eat up "the feast of learning to its crumbs". He bent
over his books, tussis (bronchitis) attacked him, still he re-
fused to rest. He despised what other men learned of life,

and so consoled himself with

Leave now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever. 1

The Grammarian is seen even in the death struggle, "grinding at grammar".

The grotesque in this poem is not only found in the character of the Grammarian but it is felt in the weird haunting of the rhythmic spirit of the Funeral Procession. As the students carry their master's corpse to the high platform of the mountain whose high place they have picked as a fitting place to bury him, they chant their dirge and the lines of the poem move to the steady climbing rhythm of their feet:

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared-for till cock-crow:

The stages of the journey are shown, and the procession indicated by the broken lines. Browning creates the plain, the encircling mountain, the cloudy peak, the city on the hill-top:

1 The Grammarian's Funeral, p. 28, lines 1-2.
Here's the town-gate reached; there's the market place 
Gaping before us. 1

In another place he cautions:

cautions redoubled,
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly; 2

Into the midst of this flows the intensity of the 
scholar. Dead as he is one feels him alive; never resting, 
pushing failure beneath his feet. He pours it into the stu-
dents who rejoice in the death of their master.

This man decided not to Live but Know 
Bury this man there?
Here, here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form 
Lightnings are loosened, 
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm, 
Peace let the dew send! 
Lofty designs must close in like effects; 
Loftily lying, 
Leave him - still loftier than the world suspects, 
Living and dying. 3

All through this funeral procession and chanting of 
the dirge we get the beginning Renaissance with its insatiable 
curiosity and zest for scholarship.

1 The Grammarian's Funeral, p. 279, lines 73-74.
2 Ibid., p. 280, lines 8-9.
3 Ibid., p. 280, lines 56-65.
The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church

Just as A Grammarian's Funeral gives the nobler and earlier spirit of the Renaissance, The Bishop Orders His Tomb At Saint Praxed's gives the later and grosser Renaissance. We are placed in the full decadence of the Renaissance in this poem. Its total loss of religion, its pride of life, its luxury; its semi-paganism, its imitative classicism; its inconsistency; its love of jewels, fine stones and rich marbles; its jealousy and envy; its pleasure in the adornment of death; its delight in the outside of things; its loss of originality; its love of scholarship; its contempt of the common people; its utter exhaustion is here.

The grotesque is felt in the entire situation. In the subtlety portrayed in the Bishop, by combining human nature with its passions, hates, and envies and in his churchly training breaking out in pious exclamations from time to time and in the jumble of Greek and Christian art he wishes to have on his tomb. The grotesque is intensified too, in that we sense at the end that the Bishop is not going to get his tomb.

The Bishop is dying and his greatest anxiety is regarding his monument. He thinks of this purpose of his life, and his whole character reveals itself. We perceive his old jealousy and envy of a former Bishop, and the very thought of his Predecessor causes sudden transitions and agitations in the
dying man's mind. We discern his love for the beautiful is a sensuous admiration not true love of art. He speaks frankly of his sins, his pompous and egotistical likings.

Browning's power in concentrated writing is shown here. He has given in a few strokes an understanding of the grossest period of the Renaissance. Throughout the ramblings of this Bishop, the temper of the time is revealed.

Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace: 1 He breaks into business:

And so about this tomb of mine. 2

The expression of his hate is seen in "Old Gandolf cozened me", though he fought tooth and nail to save his niche.

He graced his carrion with God curse the same, 3

He accepts the result, and feels that his niche is not so bad.

One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side 4

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1 The Bishop Orders His Tomb, p. 348, line 6.
2 Ibid., p. 348, line 20.
3 Ibid., p. 348, line 20.
4 Ibid., p. 348, line 22.
Then he tells the great secret of his life, how he has hidden a great lump of — — — —

— — — — — — lapis lazuli
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape, ¹

and where it can be found to place between his knees on the monument. In this he shall have great triumph over his enemy.

For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst ²

Then he resumes back to his conventional whine:

Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years. ³

He turns with a sudden change to his tomb again:

Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black
'Twas ever antique - black I meant! ³

Amid the gloom he will even laugh over the bad Latin of Old Gandolf, the "elucescebat" of his inscription, and demands that his epitaph be:

1 *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, p. 349, lines 43-44.
2 Ibid., p. 348, line 51.
3 Ibid., p. 348, line 52.
4 Ibid., p. 348, lines 54-55.
Choice Latin, picked phrase, "Tully's every word". 1

A Toccata of Galuppi's

This phase of the Renaissance may be closed by A Toccata of Galuppi's. It is one of Browning's Art poems, giving a special picture or a piece of music. It is in complete contrast to the rough humor of Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha and is one of the daintiest, most musical, most witching and haunting of Browning's poems. Certainly it is one of his master-pieces as a lyric poet. It is a changeful dream of images and thoughts that came to Browning as he was playing a Toccata, a piece of Eighteenth Century Venitian music. In the dream there is a sketch of that miserable life of fruitless pleasure into which society had fallen in the Eighteenth Century. The pride, irreligion, the immorality, the desire of knowledge and beauty for its own sake had brought the wisest, noblest and most useful city in Italy to one of idle pleasure. We see here the end of a society such as that drawn in The Bishop Orders His Tomb.

The poem is ghastly in the suggestion of impending change, doom, and death. There is much that is ironical and

1 The Bishop Orders His Tomb, p. 349, lines 24-25.
enigmatical. The Venice evoked from the shadowy Toccata is witching and haunting in its visions of the worldly life, when

Balls and masks began at midnight,
    Burning ever to midday. 1

Contrasts are brought into the music when the lover and his lady break off their talk to listen while Galuppi

Sat and played Toccatas stately at the clavichord. 2

There is a note of irony and haunting sadness, "for we must due", that creeps throughout the gaiety of the poem:

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket,
    Creaking where a house was burned;
Dust and ashes, dead and done with,
    Venice spent what Venice earned. 3

The poem is opened by the speaker addressing Galuppi as to the meaning he perceives in his music. He has become a scientist, and the Toccata awakes slumbering echoes, a vision of old Venitian life - deeply interwoven with the latent passion for beauty. He is forced to the conclusion that these lives are wasted. "O, the pity of it". He takes up his learned

1  A Toccata of Galuppi's, p. 175, line 11.
2  Ibid., p. 175, line 2.
3  Ibid., p. 175, lines 36-37.
treatise on which he is engaged, triumphs o'er "a secret wrung from Nature's cold reserve", but he is still thrilled by the weird music - "Dust and ashes - dead and done with". We see also Galuppi, the musician. His music has lived to breathe the message to human hearts, but not so with the gay pageants of Venice. The hollow taunting tone of the maestro as he accuses the scholar of taking mathematics as a pastime is also there.

The various modulations made by the speaker to fit in with the definite moods of the Venetian belles and beaux he is imaging is a clever and original touch of the grotesque.

Group IV  Themes Involving the Fanciful and Symbolic Grotesque

Grotesque Tendency - Symbolic Imagery.

The Pied Piper

The poems that have been dealt with thus far are the noble grotesque. Among the grotesque poems they are most characteristic of Browning's attitude toward life, but the range of his genius was not limited to these. It is difficult to conceive of the man who wrote so intensely, whose philosophy seemed to actuate his every poetic thought as one who would permit his
imagination to become mere fancy. With perfect art, however, Browning related the fanciful story of The Pied Piper of Hamelin—a story which would appeal to a child's imagination, or a man's fancy.

To those who consider with Ruskin the grotesque as a product of the mere playtime of men's minds, it seems the most perfect grotesque written by Browning. Professor Schelling says Browning did all that is possible to do for the field of the grotesque when he wrote, The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

A lesser genius than Browning could have told of the Piper whom the children followed, leaving the town desolate, but no one so well as Browning could bring out the full flavor of the old legend, emphasizing the wistful beauty of the children's laughter, and the patter of their feet by the clumsy "scurrying of the rats. The poem is written very artistically. The first part of it is all humorous, the second pathetic. Humor and pathos distinguish the second sort of the grotesque which is akin to the picturesque. All the comic, awkward words at Browning's command are heaped together to describe the ravage of the rats, their following the Piper, and the meaning of the music to them.

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles
And ate the cheese out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling;
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers. 1

And then the music of the piper was:

- - - - - - - as a sound of scraping tripe,
And putting apples wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-presse's gripes;
And moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
And breaking the hoops of the butter-casks. 2

Browning heightens the grotesqueness by comparing the sole survivor, a stout old rat, to Julius Caesar, carrying "to Ratland home his commentary". The humor is very rich—the mayor's eye is perhaps a little better than any of the droll descriptions:

Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long opened oyster. 3

1 The Pied Piper, p. 269, lines 11-15, Stanza VII.
2 Ibid., p. 267, lines 31-36, Stanza VII.
3 Ibid., p. 269, lines 1-2, Stanza IV.
The rapid versification of the poem is full of variety. There are many grotesque rhymes, the drollest perhaps:

"Triumph of Doom's tone, painted tombstone"
"River Weser, Julius Caesar", pickle tubboards, conserve-cupboards" "Psaltery, dry-saltery", "rare havoc, Vin-de-Grave-Hock".

_Numpholeptos_

Browning's love of the fanciful is shown in his various and odd imagery. Much of it is drawn from the cosmic or outdoor nature side of life. Much of it is the impressionistic variety, influencing mood. Scientific imagery also plays an important part in Browning's poetry. The image of the light rays of the color spectrum is used in _Numpholeptos_.

_Numpholeptos_ (Nymph-entranced) is a weird vision or fancy with a tendency to paradox. In the center of a magic wheel of light, stands a transcendentally fair and virtuous "nymph". She is a perfect being, and her purity is typified by the absolute whiteness of the light in which she dwells. Beyond the limits of the circle immediately surrounding her, the light is broken up into its component rays - red, blue, yellow, "every dye o' the bow born of the storm-cloud", they stretch from center to circumference and from the spokes of the luminous wheel. At the feet of the nymph kneels her lover,
the son of earth, who has ventured to set his heart on this supernatural being. She has imposed on him various quests; he has fulfilled her commands, and now comes to implore her love in recompense of his obedience. One color ray after the other, he has, at her bidding explored to the end, and has returned with full experience of the path he has pursued. But each time he is received, not with the golden glow of love, but with the sad slow, silver smile of "pity pardon", which "even changes", as he persists in his prayer. For she will only grant her love on the condition that he come back unstained with the color of the ray he has traversed. This he cannot do. In the very ardor of his obedience he becomes suffused in turn with yellow, or scarlet, or purple. To her only the whiteness of perfect light is tolerable. She holds with aversion the deeply-dyed figure, "absurd, as frightful", who claims his reward.

Upon the meaning of the image depends the interpretation we assign this poem. Mrs. Glazebrook in her paper given before the Browning Society explains that the nymph stands for the ideal woman. She is alluring in beauty but false to her age, stationary in the midst of progress, complete when all the rest of the world is developing.1 Browning himself said, "And

1 Berdoe, Edward, Browning Studies, op. cit., p. 195.
the orb-raying color out of the whiteness was a fancy of my own."

Ever - from center to circumference,
Shaft upon colored shaft: this crimson thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.¹

This vision of the lady with her "silver smile" and "pity pardon" amid the splendor of the fusing colors is a fine note of the grotesque.

Child Roland to The Dark Tower Came

Just as it is difficult to understand the Browning who wrote Nympholeptos it is difficult to understand the Browning of Childe Roland. We have here the poetry and artistry of the shabby aspect of nature itself. Many poets have used rugged and gloomy landscapes but no one, the poetry of mean landscapes²

The poem depicts the lost adventure of a knight vowed to the quest of a certain "Dark Tower". The "Dark Tower" has been defined as Love, Death, and Truth. It is the familiar theme, Browning's interest in apparent failure, and its possibilities for future triumph. The atmosphere is highly charged;

¹ Nympholeptos, p. 813, lines 3-5.
awe underlies Roland's despair and a sense of supernatural opposition tightens his nerves as he faces crisis. A phantom emotion, such as that which shrouds remembered dreams, invents the infinite outlines of the Tower with vague apprehension of horror. This phantom emotion is heightened by the mood created through the mean and scrubby landscape.¹ No other poem communicates an effect of this kind. It has been associated with Coleridge's Kubla Klan. Both are composed of the pictures surcharged with a mysterious dream atmosphere. Both took their origin in a fragment of reading and experience.² The poem was suggested as Browning's note at the head of the poem indicates, by a line out of an old song the Fool quotes in King Lear.

This journey across the strange and dreadful country is one of the most grotesque and ghastly and vivid in all poetry. The knight relates that he has been for years on the quest for the "Dark Tower", in a "whole world-wide wandering" and now his "hope has dwindled into a ghost", when he comes to a repulsive cripple who sits by the highway. He asks the way to the "Dark Tower", and the cripple indicates that it lies in yonder ominous tract of country. The knight turns into the path across the

dreary plain. The desolation is great, even at first, and increases in repulsiveness as he goes on. The sun of the late afternoon shoots out a "grim red leer". He loses sight of the highway from where he came. The plain is so barren that a bur on it would be finding a treasure. Nature seemed to have given up as impossible making anything of this place.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, brushed as to balk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents. 1

Further on the knight comes to where the ground has been flooded and now is left covered with a coating of mud which looks as if it were "kneaded up with blood".

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood. 2

He is surprised by coming across a little river flowing across the plain:

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;

1 Childe Roland, p. 287, lines 67-72.
2 Ibid., p. 287, lines 73-75.
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof - to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

So petty yet so spiteful; all along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit,
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong.
What'ere that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

Which, while I forded, - good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

The imagery does not end here but is still intensified.
His eye fixed on the hideousness around him he is convinced that
he is arriving nowhere, and there is nothing to point his foot-
steps further. The thought is hardly formed in his mind, when
he feels his cap brushed, by the wing of a great black bird who
looks as if he might be "Apollyon's bosom-friend". Looking up
he perceives he is among the hills. Suddenly, with a flush of
heat over his whole body, the realization comes upon him that
this is the place he has been seeking. With that, instantly
he recognizes the marks, the two hills on the right like "two
bulls crouching with locked horns", and the "tall scalped moun-

1 Childe Roland, p. 288, lines 13-30.
tain" on the left, - and in the middle, the "Dark Tower" itself. To the suggestion that he didn't see because of the gathering darkness and so came close to the "Tower" before knowing it was there, the knight answers that the sunset kindled up again "through a cleft" in the hills. And as the sunset brightened and showed him the scene, there lay the hills "like giants at a hunting" when the game is cornered and they look on to see the death and the hunter stabs and ends the creature" - only, in this case the knight himself is the creature in such desperate straits. Someone suggests that maybe he didn't hear anything to attract his attention. To this the knight answers that "noise was everywhere". This, of course, was the noise in his own brain, the turmoil of the realization that he had reached what so many worthier than he had sought in vain. This tolled in his ears the names of the lost adventurers and was symbolic of the history of the quest. He pictures these knights all ranged along the hills. ("There they stood", to see how he would conclude the quest, "to view the last of me", "a living frame for one more picture" living frame in opposition with "they ranged along the hill-side"). The one more picture is to be the knight himself doing what he is about to do, the picture of what is going to happen when he blows his horn. His imagination is so heightened that he sees the knights viewing
him "in a sheet of flame". And yet exhausted as he is, and with all those of the past who have tried and failed looking upon him, with all that may come to pass in the next moment, "dauntless he sets the slug-horn to his lips and blows". What then? That blast of his horn is a challenge — not simply a blast to celebrate his having found the "Tower", but for the battle which takes place when in answer to the horn the inhabitants of the "Tower" rush out on him. He is dauntless in face of all this and blows his challenge.

The poem is a work of art. Its fascination is perhaps due to the wonderful descriptions in it and to the constant sense that the story corresponds to something in our lives and it is also due to the desperate determination and perseverance of the knight. It is a real study from the psychological standpoint. The working of the exhausted knight's mind, in view of the whole situation, the state of mind he has gotten into by the time he fords the river, his account of his experience before the "Tower" and the crucial moment, all brings vividly before us, his mind and the history of the quest. 1

Like The Flight of the Duchess, the poem seems to be an outcome of the passion for the mystical, for adventure, for

1 Hardy, I. "Browning's Childe Roland". Poet Lore, Vol. XXIX (January 1913).
the unknown, which lies at the root of the love of the romantic in Browning. While the poem is no allegory it evidently conveys a message, that of an unaltering loyalty to an ideal, the story of a man's sticking to his quest in the midst of all dismal repulsive surroundings, and meeting the suffering undismayed.

Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Game is surely a hint of a new and curious, highly artistic type of the grotesque. It hints of the same poetic novelty that produced a crowd of boldly designed poems in Browning's last book, every one of which taken separately might have found an artistic school.¹

Group V Themes Dealing with Whimsicalities of Wit and Rhyme.

Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis

The fashioning of subject matter from a special standpoint so as to diffuse over it an atmosphere of humor is illustrated by one of the Garden Fancies whose very title forbodes a prank of some kind. This poem is at the opposite end of the grotesque from the poems just studied. It is a good humored fling at pedantry. A student took among the flowers of his

garden a pedantic old volume, a treatise as dry and crabbed as its title. He reads it, then for revenge threw the book into a plum-tree, and coming to get it later in the day, finds that a spider has spun a web across the crevice.

And sat in the midst, with his arms akimbo. ¹

A toad-stool stuck to one chapter of the book its author had taken seriously, and all the little creatures, worms, slugs, efts and newts were making themselves at home among the pages. They

Tickled and toused and broosed him all over, ²

The contrast between the live creatures and the poor pedant's book is expressed in a fine bit of grotesque.

All that life and fun and romping,
All that frisking and twisting and coupling,
While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping
And clasps were cracking and covers suppling!
As if you had carried sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna or Munich,
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the ballet with trousers and tunic.

In the climax of this clever little poem we see a bit of irony at the pedant's expense. The student felt he had been

¹ Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, p. 167, line 4.
² Ibid., p. 167, Stanza VII.
too severe with the old author, so he fished him up out of the plum-tree and rescued him from the pains of being "stabbed through with a fungus" by replacing him on a shelf with less lively companions to "dry-rot at ease."

Pacchiarotto

The artificial or chaotic grotesque finds its most distinctive expression in Browning in Pacchiarotto. It is a decided contrast with all other poems and in it we see another phase of Browning's wit and humor. Pacchiarotto is the title given to a collection of poems which is grotesque in its very combination of subjects and its passing from boisterous humor and satire to lyrical verse. The collection contains several poems which are perhaps more confessedly subjective than any found elsewhere in Browning.

Pacchiarotto as a whole, is the most decided grotesque in Browning. A careful study reveals the fact that this impression finds its only basis in the mingling of unconnected thoughts and in the one poem Of Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper. The effect is caused, to a great extent, by the mere subjects of the poems. The combination of such titles as Shop, Bifurcation, Numpholeptos, etc., is rather disheartening
to the prospective reader, and, by the time the first poem is read, an indelible impression of grotesqueness is made for the entire collection.

Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper

The poem Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper is divided into two parts, the first being the humorous rendering of a true anecdote told by Vasari, of Giacomo Pacchiarotto, a Sienese painter of the Sixteenth Century; the second is a mirthful onslaught of the poet upon his critics. The story -

- - - begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckles, 1

is funny enough itself but extraneous matter is intermingled and the rhyme is grotesque to the extreme, almost frenzied. It is more of a curiosity than a poem.

Pacchiarotto, so the poem tells, found his vocation was to set things to rights. The world, he considered, needed reforming. He found mankind stubborn, not inclined to listen, so he constructed a workshop and painted its walls with all sorts and conditions of men. He drew kings, popes, priests and

1 Pacchiarotto, p. 807, Stanza XXVIII.
ladies, then washed his brushes and began to lecture them. He put arguments into their mouths, then refuted them. He went into the street to reform real people, met the society called the Bardotta, and attempted to set himself up as the leader. They would have none of him, and he was forced to flee and take refuge in a Franciscan monastery, where he hid in a vault with a corpse and the vermin.

And kicked by the live, kiss the dead fellows! 1

Many readings of this poem serve only to bring a little more definite sense of why the chaos exists. Beginning with the tale of Pacchiarotto, the painter who chose to build a grotto for his studies - I suppose because grotto gave opportunity for another grotesque rhyme - relates the artist's theory. He sees his critics as a band of chimney-sweeps dressed up for May Day, coming under his window with music of knuckle-bones and cleavers:

We critics as sweeps out your chimbley!
And neighbors complain it's no joke, sir,
- - You ought to consume your own smoke, sir! 2

The poem becomes even more boisterous and grotesque in its absurd characterization of these critics. It is decidedly

1 Pacchiarotto, p. 802, stanza III, lines 20-23.
2 Ibid., p. 806, stanza XXV.
not good grotesque. It seems to say much where there is little
to say, and to say that much wildly.

The grotesque element is manifested in its impossible
style. Wild ingenuities of puns, rhymes and grammatical struct-
ures are evident. The entire poem is composed of grotesquely
rhymed couplets with an occasional variation of three-line
groups, such as:

Confutation of vassal for prince meet -,
Wherein all the power that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mince-meat. 1

For the sake of such rhymes any sacrifice of sense is
made. The meaning of the poem is further obscured by the use
of foreign terms merely for rhymes sake. Pacchiarotto does
contain some excellent satiric epithets and a few sensible lines,
but the utter artificiality of the whole is unquestioned when
we consider such lines as:

If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole
I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's,
Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas'
Whoever to scan this is ill able
Forgets the town's name's a disyllable: 2

1 Pacchiarotto, p. 813, stanza VII.
2 Ibid., p. 804, stanza XV.
Browning loved what was odd and quaint. In no other poem has the poet made so evident an ingenuity as in *Pacchiarotto* and he must have laughed as he wrote it. When we regard his works as a whole, we are convinced that in this very matter of rhyme he is perhaps the greatest master of our language. He is able to do what he pleases with rhyme and very often he pleases to make it a stunt performance. In single and double rhyme, in simple and grotesque alike, he succeeds in fitting rhyme to rhyme with a perfection which is unsurpassed.

Browning was constantly trying out new rhymes and meters. His original devices show his great genius. This is seen in the unusual bit of rhyming in the clever little riding poem, *Through the Metidja to Abdel - Kadr*. It is strung together on a single rhyme. It is an experiment in monorhyme and without repetition of words and without forcing of sense, thirty-six words rhyme with ride. The whole effect of the rhyme is to produce the movement of the riding and this is done through the broken sentence and the clang of the "i" sound.

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1 *Pacchiarotto*, p. 807, stanza XXVII.
As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is described, ways untried,
As I ride, as I ride.

In Browning's lyrical poems we see many varieties of form. The poem, *A Pretty Woman* uses the same word for rhyme, e.g., "hers, hers", "sweet, sweet". In fact sweet is the final word in eight lines. *A Woman's Last Word* uses the same device, but here the first and third lines end in the same word. Love, instead of sweet is the word repeated so many times. Popularity has lines of this same style.

Stand still, true poet that you are!
I know you; let me try and draw you.
Some night you'll fail us: when afar
You rise, remember one man saw you,
Knew you, and named a star!

In a *Grammarians's Funeral* we have "overcome it" rhyming with "summit", "fabric" with "dab brick", "far gain", with "bargain". Usually where there is a forced rhyme however, there is a special sense - emphasis. This was intended on "far" and "bar", due to the opposition between near and remote profit to the soul and between the conception of what is good and bad, which makes "far gain" and "bargain" mate more perfectly.
Equally startling are the rhymes in the Prologue to Ferishtah's Fancies. "Italy" is made to rhyme with "spit-ally", "Unpalatable" with "each who's able". Mr. Vernon Harrington in his Studies of Browning declares that any one with common sense would not suppose that these things were done by Browning otherwise than on purpose and to be in keeping in some way with the spirit of the poem.

In Christmas Eve and Old Pictures of Florence there are great inconsistencies of rhyme, but they are used for contrast in relation of expression to thought and character and should not be charged up to awkwardness and carelessness. We see this point illustrated in the dramatic appropriateness in the unconventional diction of the story of the old Huntsman in The Flight of the Duchess.

Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin
His sire was wont to do forest work in;
Blesseder he who nobly sunk "oh's"
And "ah's" while he tugged on his grandsire's trunk-hose;
What signified hats if they had no rims on,
Each slouching before and behind like the scallop, -
And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on 't,
What with our Venerers, Prickers and Verderers,
Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
And oh the Duke's tailor he had a hot time on 't!

And again in the contrasting smooth rhyme fitting the gypsy character:
Over a silver plate whose sheen
Still through the mixture shall be seen,
For so I prove thee, to one and all,
Fit, when my people ope their breast,
To see the sign, and hear the call,
And take the vow, and stand the test —

To various devices of unusual rhyme Browning has added a sentence and stanza structure with quite as many devices. The broken sentence and broken line is characteristic of Browning's verse. The varied line lengths of In A Year help bring the sad and haunting song of quiet despair to the poem.

Never any more,
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before.

Mesmerism uses the five line stanza with the second and third lines short. Women and Roses has the stanza of three short lines alternating with stanzas of nine long lines. My Star contains only thirteen lines which increase in length from

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is it can throw,

in the first lines to

Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

in the last line.
Such devices and caprices of rhymes usually fit in with Browning's purpose. The style usually matches the theme and is in harmony with the character or mood expressed. Browning is ever in bounds. Because he can create figures he does not intrude them where they do not belong.

Having looked at the grotesque poems of Browning separately it may be observed that the grotesque in these poems fall into somewhat definite centers such as:

1 **Love of the Psychological**

Metaphysical studies including fanciful ethics, curious and honest human ugliness.

2 **Pleasure in Clever Analysis, Intellectual Discourse**

Play with argument, Serious and fantastic thinking.

3 **Variety and Oddity in Imagery**

Symbolic and impressionistic imagery. Scientific Imagery. Imagery drawn from the cosmic out-door nature side of life.

4 **Indulgence in Wit.**

Wit which found amusement in analogies, far-fetched illustrations, quips and cranks and wiles of fancy, whimsicalities of rhyme, and diction.
Browning treated all phases of the grotesque. It was the depicting of the revolt against God, man and nature which led him to the grotesque. Thus in the most triumphantly optimistic of poets we find the greatest conflict. This conflict being a part of his intellectuality led him to the grotesque. It is therefore natural that the greatest poet of conflict should be the greatest artist of the grotesque.
Chapter IV.

Artistic Possibilities and Worth of Browning's Grotesque

The discussion of the artistic possibilities of the grotesque can be only an arbitrary one, as it is scarcely possible for a student definitely to solve a problem which has so long been the subject of discussion among the greatest philosophers and critics.

It will not be attempted to bring together the varying theories of art or definitions of art, but three tendencies which seem to be evident in present day criticism will be noted.

First, it seems that there is evident a decided tendency to enlarge the field of what is called the beautiful to include the ugly or at least the rugged. Such a tendency Bosanquet pointed out and this tendency was mentioned in the first part of this paper.1

Secondly, art definitions seem to point toward truth rather than mere beauty as the criterion of art.2 Matthew Arnold's oft quoted dictum, "Poetry is the criticism of life" illustrates this tendency.

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1 Bosanquet, op. cit., p. 47

Thirdly, modern scientific methods are being applied to criticism, and instead of judging the artistic value of literary works according as they conform to arbitrarily fixed theories of art, these theories are now being constructed from a basis of fact, thus theories of art are being broadened to admit new subjects of art.

With the growth of the new trend in criticism, the ugly is existent, and its portrayal is the portrayal of truth. Furthermore, the ugly when greatly conceived, enters the realm of beauty under the new idea of beauty, the rugged. Finally, the test of whether the ugly should come in the realm of art is found in the master-pieces of art which are essentially ugly, as the statue of the Laocoon and the drama of Prometheus Bound.

However, determining the ugly in art would not place all the grotesque in art. The grotesque in its greatest form arises from the artist's inability to comprehend his subject sufficiently to adapt it to the laws of art. The second class of grotesque springs from the playing of fancy and possesses a distinct fascination. The third class of grotesque is artificial, chaos, and in its very nature is unable to portray truth that arises from any ordering of facts and so this grotesque must therefore be excluded from art.

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Art seems in every case to make three demands; freedom, order and truth. What reply does the grotesque make to these? In the first class of grotesque, the noble grotesque, there is freedom of imagination. In the fanciful grotesque there is a subjective restraint. In the third or false grotesque, the imagination is forced, hence chaos results.

As to the demand for order, at first it would seem all grotesque would be unordered. The third kind of grotesque is chaotic and its expression often inarticulate. The imaginative grotesque glimpses beyond the chaotic however, and is ordered. The fanciful grotesque finding its restraint subjective is more ordered than either of the other. The first two kinds of grotesque then, may be included in art, and have long been thought of as art.

The ultimate demand of art seems to point more and more to truth and in truth the grotesque must find its ultimable test as an enduring art form. The imaginative grotesque portrays the failure to comprehend facts, yet this in itself is reality. The fanciful grotesque is so close to the picturesque that we accept it without questioning. However, whether the grotesque in reality can be determined as art can be determined only by

practical test, and for this one turns to Robert Browning, the artist of the grotesque. The Browning student, is accustomed to think of Caliban, The Heretic's Tragedy and others of the first kind of grotesque as great poems, and as great art. And if great conceptions finding expression in a great nature make art, these poems are art.

The fanciful grotesque finds its illustration in Browning's Pied Piper of Hamelin. This poem is regarded as typical artistic expression. The essays of Bagehot and Schelling refer to this. Pacchiarotto and parts of Holy Cross Day, the reader first and last finds chaotic, and so this he leaves out of his consideration.

No criticism of Browning's artistry can be vital or intelligible, which is not based upon the fact that he was a conscious and deliberate artist. Browning knew perfectly well what he was doing. He used the ugly intentionally, and contrary to most opinion he did care for form. Browning was always weaving and inventing new forms. Many of the great poets who are supposed to have cared more for form than Browning used their old forms for all their poems as long as they had a new idea but when Browning got a new idea he tried to make a new form to express it.

Wordsworth, and Shelley were original poets; their atti-
tude of thought and feeling marked changes in literature and philosophy. The Ode on the Intimations of Immortality is a perfectly normal and traditional ode, and Prometheus Unbound is a traditional Greek lyrical drama. These are original artistic forms but Browning created a large number of novel artistic forms. The Ring and The Book, for example, - the method of telling the same story several times and trusting to the variety of human character to turn it into different interesting stories, is an original art form. Pippa Passes is a new form, a series of detached dramas connected by one figure. The Heretic's Tragedy with its weird echo verses is absolutely an original form. Any of Browning's great monologues are built up like good short stories and are most unique as original forms. Take Caliban Upon Setebos, it is built up entirely on the principle of the value of language arising from its arrangement, and the deduction from this is that Browning is an artist and that his processes of thought are those of an artist and not a scientist. Milton's Sonnet on his Blindness and Keats in his Ode on a Grecian Urn are both original, but we can point out other such sonnets and odes. No one can mention however, poems of exactly the same structural and literary type as Nationality in Drinks, Childe Roland, Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, My Star, The Householder, House, Shop, Fears and Scruples, A Portrait, Bad Dreams, Ferishtah's Fancies. Browning was not indifferent
to technical beauty but he invented a kind of technical beauty
of his own.

An author who has added something to literary form
should not be criticized because his work does not contain some-
thing which is obviously the specialty of some one else. An
author should not be blamed for not having reached another
writer's ideal when he did not try to reach it. Browning wished
to be known by that in which he was grotesque and original, and
not by that which he has carried forward, the stately flow of
English poetry. The master of the grotesque selects the gnarled
and knotted delighting to limit his art by difficult condi-
tions. He puts together what no one else puts together and
produces in our minds a result which no one else could have pro-
duced. 1

Browning has suffered much injustice because his oppo-
nents as well as his admirers believe that what is called his
grotesque style was a kind of necessity adopted by a great
genius in order to express novel and profound ideas. Browning
did not adopt a grotesque style in order to express novel and
profound ideas. What is called ugliness in Browning he enjoy-
ed for its own sake. Browning's style was very suitable for

1 Bagehot, Walter. op. cit., p. 338.
the expression of his peculiar moral and metaphysical view.
But the whole work of Browning will be misunderstood if one does not understand and realize that he had a love of the grotesque of the nature of art for art's sake. In the body of the paper some poems were classified under "Fanciful Grotesque" and the following is a short poem belonging under this title and one which shows Browning's love of the grotesque of the nature of art for art's sake. The poem is descriptive of one of those elfish German jugs in which it was presumed Tokay had been served to Browning. This is the entire poem:

Up jumped Tokay on our table,
Like a pigmy castle warder,
Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,
Arms and accoutrements all in order;
And fierce he looked. North, then wheeling south
Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drought,
Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspat-feather,
Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,
Jingled his huge brass spurs together,
Tightened his waist with its Buda sash,
And then, with an impudence nought could abash,
Shuffled his hump shoulder, to tell the beholder,
For twenty such knaves he would laugh but the bolder;
And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly juggling,
And dexter-hand on his haunch-abutting,
Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch strutting.

It is apparent here that Browning was simply fashioning a ridiculous knick-knack, exactly as if he were moulding one of these preposterous German Jugs and nothing more.
The Browningesque style had its failures, but the vast majority of great poets have written a large amount of bad poetry. Browning's uncouth effusions should not be treated as his masterpieces. Such a line as

You Tommy-make-room-for-your uncle us!
is a very bad line but other great poets have written bad lines also, Tennyson's

And that good man, the clergyman, has told me words of peace

is a very ugly and a very bad line. Browning exhibits fewer instances of this failure in his own style than any other of the great poets.¹ His rhymes are generally good, uncommonly various and rich and his bad rhymes are infrequent. The greater number of his rhymes are unnoticeable because they blend in the verse-flow so perfectly. When his rhymes are odd, or forced or obtrusive, they are most often dramatically justifiable. They may be accounted for on the score of strong sense emphasis, the spirited declamation of the speaker, the whimsical or sportive nature of the piece, or the abrupt blurring sort of talk habitual to the frame of mind presented.

¹ Clarke, Helen A. *Studies in Browning*, New York: 1913,
The essential thing about judging Browning should be not whether he, in common with Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley or Tennyson sometimes wrote bad poetry, but whether in any other style except Browning's poems like Setebos, The Laboratory or Childe Roland could have been achieved. This style must then be justified because he could not in any other style except his own achieve this precise artistic effect.

The whole issue of Browning's artistry depends upon the fact that one realizes that ruggedness is a "mode of art". Browning meant to be rugged in his art just as Edgar Allen Poe meant to be gloomy. Ruggedness is an essential quality in the universe, there is in man that which responds to it. Ruggedness is a "mode of art" and some poems ought to be rugged just as some poems ought to be smooth. Just as there is such a thing as a poetical meter being beautifully light or beautifully grave and haunting, so there is such a thing as a poetical meter being beautifully rugged. For instance, the old ballads are charming in their ruggedness and especially attractive in their irregular verse.

O whar awa are ye riding?
I maun be bound to a foreign land,
    And now I'm under hiding.
Whar sall I gae, whar sall I rin,
Whar sall I rin to lay me?
For I hae kill'd a gallant squire,
    And his friends seek to slay me.
To give a satisfactory idea of Browning's rhythmic originality would be impossible without copious quotations. Browning had a great sense of melody when he wished to use it. Could it be said that the man is not a poet who wrote:

O lyric Love, half angel and half-bird  
And all a wonder and a wild desire, --

or

That's the wise thrush, he sings each song twice over  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture.

The point about Browning's poetical method is not whether it is the best in the world but whether it is the best method for certain things which can only be conveyed by that method. Take the fun-loving Fra Lippo in his outrageous gallop of rhyme:

Zooks, what's to blame? You think you see a monk!  
- - - - - - - - - -
Do harry out, if you must show your zeal,  
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole  
A nip each softling of a wee white mouse,  
Weke, weke, that's crept to kept him company!  
Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take  
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat  
And please to know me likewise.

This picture would lose in energy, and spirit and the original grotesque would be lost entirely if written in another style. Browning's conception of nature was, energy. The ele-
ment of grotesque in art, like the element of grotesque in na-
ture is energy, the energy which takes its own forms and goes
its own way. Browning's verse in so far as it is grotesque is
natural and not artificial, it is in the legitimate tradition
of nature. Nature did not mean flowers and grass to Browning,
it meant such things as monstrosities and living mysteries of
the sea, and just as strange things meant to Browning energy in
the physical world, so strange thoughts and strange images meant
to him energy in the mental world.¹

Browning often used the grotesque to touch the nerve of
surprise, to awaken the fantastic, to appeal to the sense of
wonder that the grotesque can produce. He at times indulged
in puns, rhymes, and grammatical structures. This was partly
a mark, no doubt, of his vitality, curiosity, and interest in
details. He prided himself upon having written The Ring and
The Book and I presume he prided himself upon writing:

The wolf, fox, bear and monkey,
By piping advice in one key -

This queer trait in Browning must be recognized all the
more because as a whole he was a very perfect artist, and a par-
ticularly perfect artist in the use of the grotesque. But many

¹ Chesterton. op. cit., p. 147.
writers are tedious and perfectly aimless while expounding some thought which they believe profitable. In many of the comic scenes of Shakespeare we have this elephantine ingenuity, this hunting of a pun. In Browning it is to a certain extent traceable to the mark of real hilarity. For the same reason Browning is at times subtle and obscure, sketchy and abrupt. He likes to express himself in a particular manner. He is not trying to confound or be intentionally obscure. In the poem Popularity, which is an appreciation of the poet Keats, we see this stanza:

Hobbs hints blue - straight he turtles eats:
Nobbs prints blue - claret crowns his cup:
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats -
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?

This whole verse explains itself if we know the meaning of the word murex, which is the name of a sea-shell, out of which was made a blue dye of Tyre. The poet takes the blue dye as a simile for a new fashion in literature, and points out that Hobbs, Nobbs, obtain fame by merely using dye and adds the comment:

- - - who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?

This verse was not meant to be subtle but is a perfectly casual piece of sentiment at the end of a light poem.
The treatment of such works as *The Ring and the Book*, *The Inn Album*, and *Sordello* as to motive and artistic effect, assist in pointing out what is meant by harmonizing all the parts of a poem in Browning. When the component parts of a work are manipulated consistently from beginning to end to suit a synthetic idea, all the lesser matters of poetic workmanship, rhyme, rhythm, diction, imagery, even subject-matter sink into the general trend, each contributing a due share towards the mutual harmony. Browning's design and harmony very often are so inclusive in smaller effects that are frequently in other poets ends in themselves, that his work is censured for traits that assume special meaning and beauty when they are understood as appropriately subordinated to the general plan. The subordination of the various constituents of a poem to an inclusive design is used in such poems as *Childe Roland*, *Development* and some of the poems typical of historic life such as *Imperante Augusto Natur Est*. This social or historic and always evolutionary motive which underlies all the details and determines the modeling of so many of his poems is a new and original factor in the creation of poetry, and alone is enough to signalize Browning's genius.¹

Browning himself gives the sufficient clew to the characteristic quality of his subject-matter and the art that sets it forth in his Epilogue to Pacchiarotto:

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
Earth is my vineyard, these grew there;
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage.

Browning was constantly experimenting, sometimes he failed but more often he produced a crowd of boldly designed poems of highly artistic merit. The real artistic triumph of his grotesque art according to Schelling and Bagehot is The Pied Piper.¹ Bagehot in his Literary Studies classifies grotesque art along with Pure and Ornate Art. He says grotesque art works as contrasts and incongruities. "It enables one to see, it makes one see, the perfect type, by painting the opposite deviation. It reminds one of the perfect image by showing the distorted and imperfect". In the Pied Piper there is something homely and comic and true reminding one what bourgeois nature really is. By showing the type under abnormal conditions one is reminded of the type under its best and most satisfying conditions.²

At last the people in a body
To the town hall came flocking:
'tis clear, "cried they", our mayor's a noddy;
And as for our corporation - shocking.

Browning's artistic originality concerned itself with
the serious use of the grotesque. The serious use of the gro-
tesque in all its power has been seen in Caliban Upon Setebos.
The close observation of the work of Browning on the side of
his artistry, in all respects go to prove him not to be an ir-
regular genius, crude and careless in artistic workmanship, but
a genius whose originality was exerted equally in shaping varied
and appropriate artistic outlines for his creative spirit. If
we wish to look we will find that Browning's poems are almost
invariably works of art and this in a very high degree, if we
understand by a work of art, a poem which attains its ends and
fulfills its purpose completely, and which has a worthy end and
a plain purpose to attain. ¹ Surely this is of far more vital
importance than mere melodiousness of lines or a meter of un-
varying sweetness. Matthew Arnold speaks of the necessity of
accurate construction, and the subordinate character of expres-
sion. There is no characteristic of Browning's work more ad-
mirable than his unity, the skill and care in construction

¹ Symons, Arthur. Introduction to the Study of Browning,
and definiteness of impression. Take for example, the series of characters in *Men and Women*. There are fifty to choose from, see if he has not succeeded in carrying to your mind a distinct and clear impression. His artistic method is always inner, emotional, having to do not with logical but with psychical consistency.

Browning's discovery of a method of character analysis, in the form of dramatic monologue, leads the way to seeing him as an artist of rarest technique, how perfect we have hardly begun to appreciate, so taken up have we been by the discussions of his philosophy of life. "In richness of nature, in scope and penetration of mind and vision, in all the potentialities of poetry he ranks probably second among English poets".¹ It is because of his originality that he has been pointed out as a striking figure in poetic literature. He was wisely devised by his own instinct to turn to *Dramatic Idyls* or *Dramatic Personae* or in other words to dramatic situation.

Allied to Browning's originality in temper, topic, and manner of treatment and special form; we have noted his origi-

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nality in style. He prefers sense to sound, thought to expression. As a dramatic poet we have seen he is obliged to moderate sometimes even to vulgarize his style and diction for the proper experience of some particular character in whose mouth delicate felicities of rhythm would be inappropriate. 1 Browning's lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any preceding poet. Symons and Pater agree that in the poems Johannes Agricola, and Porphyria's Lover, imagination of intense fire and heat abound, and an almost finished art, a power of conceiving subtle mental complexities with clearness and a method of expressing them in a picturesque form and in perfect lyric language exists. Each poem renders a single mood, and renders it completely. 2

In music, in the analysis of the musical soul, in the characteristic episode of its development Browning has given a wholly original range of poetic subject which is simply unique. The latent qualities of painter and musician had developed themselves in his poetry and much of his finest and very much of his original verse is that which speaks the language of painter and musician. Abt Vogler is the richest, deepest fullest poem on

music in the English language. Because of Browning's insight into the plastic arts, poems like Andrea del Sarto and Fra Lippo are unique. His rendering of impressions, sensations caused by a particular picture as expressed in Old Pictures in Florence show his artistic interest and are manifested throughout his work. This power is subordinate to the human interest, however, and his exercise of power in placing character or incident in a sympathetic setting is not outdone.

Through grotesque art, therefore, passion and philosophy can be as well expressed as through any other medium. The minor verse-writer skims the surface of life but nothing human is alien to Browning. Poets ought to deal in meanings. Their special function is indeed to be priests of the beautiful. But the beautiful must clothe itself in circumstances. Besides the most perfect beauty, the most satisfying for the purpose of art, in the end, the only beauty, is beauty of thought. Modern poets identify beauty with truth; and Browning says:

Oh! would as God has made it:  
Truth is beauty.

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1 Symons, Arthur. op. cit., p. 41.
Conclusions

In the discussion of the grotesque as found in its chief poet, Robert Browning, the attempt has been made to involve and answer in some small degree, the following questions:

1. What is the grotesque?
2. How is the grotesque embodied in Browning's work?
3. Is the grotesque a legitimate subject for art, and has Browning succeeded in making it art?

The findings of the Thesis point out that the grotesque is the revelation of the ugly along with the sublime and the humorous. The grotesque revealed itself as the imaginative form of the ugly and was very close to caricature in its origin. It came into being from primitive man's failure to comprehend sufficiently, that which he wished to portray in order to adapt it to the laws of his art. Because of this the grotesque became incongruity. In order to depict the concrete manifestation of the idea in its totality, the grotesque was admitted into art as the portrayal of the ugly. It was in this manifestation that Browning found incongruity.

Browning embodied the grotesque in his work by treating all phases of the grotesque. It was the depicting of the revolt against God, man and nature which led him to the grotesque and it was this breadth of subject-matter which influ-
enced his choice of themes, especially his psychological studies. The imaginative grotesque was his discovery and it led him into the field of quaint recondite knowledge and symbolic imagery. It was for the most part, this same imaginative grotesque, that prompted and attracted him toward some of the whimsicalities in his art and rhyme.

Since art has tended more and more to depend upon its criterion of freedom, order and truth, the grotesque may now be considered a legitimate subject for art. The ugly has long been classed as material for art and both the imaginative grotesque and fanciful grotesque have been considered art. Recently the ultimate demand of art has come more and more to consist in truth, and in its truth must the grotesque find its ultimate test as an enduring art form. Since the ugly is existent, and its portrayal is the portrayal of truth, the ugly when greatly conceived has entered into the realm of beauty under the new idea of beauty— or that larger thing for which, as yet, there is no other name than beauty, for it becomes the rugged.

Browning now seems to have been a pioneer and a revolutionist in the art of psychological poetry a century before his time. He has succeeded in making his psychological soul studies an artistic work. This makes him preeminently a mod-
ern poet and a prophet of the grotesque.¹ He is the poet of
the self-pioneering, perfectly educated, modern world, which
having come to the end of all direct and purely external ex­
periences, must necessarily turn to the world within.² It is
because he has ministered with such marvelous vigor, variety,
and fine skill to this interest that he may be called the poet-
artist of the grotesque.

¹ Mortimer, Raymond. "Browning and Contemporary Taste",
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The thesis submitted by Miss Oral Marguerite Hagerty has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 26, 1944
Date

Signature of Adviser