

# The concept of 'Idealism' and 'Transcendentalism' in Browning's monologue "Fra Lippo Lippi"

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**Abstract-** Fra Lippo Lippi presents a complete statement of Browning's concept of 'Art'. The concept of "Transcendentalism" in which the material world is the symbolic projection of the super sensuous world of immutable ideas. The main argument in the poem is creating art that is realistic, the artist is connecting with a sense of spirituality. We find Lippo explaining his concept of art and defending his thoughts regarding art. Thus, a struggle between 'Realism' and 'Idealism' can be clearly seen in this poem.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Even casual readers of Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" have noticed that the speaker of the monologue is a man of irreconcilable contradictions. Sworn by poverty, chastity and obedience, he goes out of medici's place and reaches a place "where supporting ladies keep their doors ajar"; obliged as a paint monk, to dedicate his art to portray human soul, he reveals in every look, his fascination for flesh. Lippo affirms that soul and perhaps God may be realised by loving submission to the senses.

Fra Lippo suggests most of the basic concept of transcendental concept of Art. However, before Lippo begins to define his own aesthetic ideas, he emphasizes how wrong his superiors are about the nature and function of Art. The monk wants soul, art, of course, but believes that one gets the soul by distorting reality. Therefore, the Prior tells Lippo - "Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms" but for Lippo the varying emotions revealed by human face are but varying forms of human beauty:

"Take the prettiest face, the Prior's niece...

Sorrow or joy? Wont beauty go with these?"

The perception of human beauty in the flesh makes one aware of the creative force which produced all beautiful form. For Lippo - "a laugh, a cry" evokes a vision. Thus, the contemplation of the flesh is the best way to awareness of the soul. Even if the perceiver fails to realise the soul(ideal) revealed in the flesh, he may sense it in his own, which is too close to the chaos of raw reality. Instead, he chooses the house of Cosimo of Medici, certainly very much of the world and yet secluded from it. There he finds artistic freedom from monastery control which he needs for full creative expression.

"I am my own master, paint now as I please"

By being both an active participant of life and an objective contemplator of it, Fra Lippo is able to shape the material of the descendant world into a work of transcendent which will awaken both monks and mistresses to the realization that soul and the body

can never be artistically separated. Lippo's love for flesh is justified by his consequent elevation of spirit.

For Lippo, the world is not simply an expression of the spiritual state. It is the only means of perceiving the spiritual and so this world with all its beauty and reality is of material existence that art can hope to grasp at greater truths, higher ideals. Art may become "a way whereby the whole range of mind and imagination can come alive. But that 'way' must begin with some determinable sensory experience.

The artist, must be a man of vitality who actively participates in reality in order to transcribe it vividly and accurately. Fra Lippo is, of course, such a man, not only in his "voracious hunger for new experience" and his "poignant sense of identity" but even in his manner of speech. Lippo suggests that the artist must be sharpened by the means of rather vigorous privation. Only after starving "in the streets eight years" does one learn "the look of things"

The artist's job, according to Lippo, is to recreate the material object as realistically as he can so that he may be elevated to an imaginative perception of the ideal:

"Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn....

Make his flesh liker and his soul like

And then add soul and heighten them threefold?"

In Lippo's opinion a painter should make body "liker" and the soul "more like", both in their order. A painter should give equal importance and attention to both, the body and the soul. It is wrong of the monk to have tried to spiritualize his art when he was yet a lad: "you should not take a fellow, eight years old and make him swear never to kiss the girls". He also said that he can never be a good painter because his work was concerned mainly with the physical aspect and very little with the spiritual side of human beings.

When Lippo joined the convent, he "did renounce the world" for "a mouth full of bread". So, it was after he saw the Prior's niece, that Lippo was able to turn from memory to the living present for his artistic material. Lippo soon felt compelled to seek it restlessly in the streets of Florence. There is no duality. Life and Art cannot be separated artificially.

Art, Lippo said, was given to human beings for a purpose. This world was not meant to be scorned or despised as a disgrace or, as something empty or meaningless. The world had a different meaning and it's meaning is good. The function of an artist is to discover it's meaning and convey it to the world just the way it is. In recognizing the goodness of nature and its beings, we recognise the hand of God. The artist helps us in this process of recognition

because he constantly looks for beauty, may it be physical or spiritual, he finds God in his art.

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