

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

A CHARMING SYMMETRY: POMPILIA'S MULTIPLICITY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English  
at Massey University

Tina Marie Sutton

1987

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Pompilia's monologue in The Ring and the Book.

William Walker's article "'Pompilia' and Pompilia" notes that criticism is unified in its assessment of Pompilia's monologue despite being divergent on other issues concerning the poem. He suggests that Pompilia can be read in the same terms as the other speakers, acknowledging however, that this produces a reading which contradicts the traditional evaluation of Pompilia. Walker calls for a reading which will accommodate the discontinuities in 'Pompilia'. The discussion which follows suggests that a reading based on the premises of Romantic irony is one reading which allows for these discontinuities.

Chapter One of the discussion examines criticism to date, providing a background against which my own reading of Pompilia's monologue can be placed and also being a means of evaluating Walker's own claim that criticism is unified in its assessment of Pompilia. The discussion is broken into five areas: early criticism, the Pompilia/Caponsacchi relationship, Pompilia's sainthood, her motives and her use of language.

Chapter Two outlines the theory of Romantic irony which originated with German theorist Friedrich Schlegel. The discussion considers the historical development of Romantic irony noting the political, philosophical and literary movements of the time.

Chapter Three consists of a detailed consideration of Pompilia's monologue. In order to address the balance which the title of this thesis suggests, this chapter concentrates on those more sophisticated aspects of Pompilia's monologue which are not considered by most criticism surveyed in Chapter One. Section I considers the first 179 lines of Pompilia's monologue in order to provide a background and to illustrate how the monologue works as a continuous piece of narrative. Section II then considers the rest of the monologue thematically,

these themes being: Pompilia's use of metaphor, her relationship with her audience, her use of irony, and her relationship with Guido and Caponsacchi. The final section of this chapter restores the balance by considering Pompilia's multiplicity and the charm which pervades her monologue.

The final chapter considers Pompilia as Romantic ironist. Pompilia's fulfilment of the principles of Romantic irony is limited by her attachment to the Virgin image as is revealed in the closing lines of her monologue. The poet is seen to be embodying the tenets of Romantic irony to a greater extent than Pompilia and this is shown by a brief discussion of Books I and XII of the poem. The poet as Romantic ironist shows us that Pompilia's monologue should not be taken as the centre for truth in the poem, but rather acknowledged as part of the linguistic processes which constitute The Ring and the Book.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my thanks to the interloan staff at Massey University Library for obtaining material needed for this thesis, and to Steve Grant and Colette Gwynne for their part in the preparation of the final product. I would like to acknowledge the support I received from English Department Staff and fellow staff at Massey University Library. In particular, my warmest thanks to Sue Olsson and my supervisor, Dr E. Warwick Slinn, for their friendship and advice.

## CONTENTS

<u>Acknowledgements</u>		iv
<u>Chapter One:</u>	Reading and Repetition: The Response to Pompilia	2
<u>Chapter Two:</u>	"Artfully Ordered Confusion": A Theory of Romantic Irony	32
<u>Chapter Three:</u>	Pompilia on Pompilia	48
	I : The Background - Lines 1-179	
	II A : Metaphor and Self-Characterization	
	B : Pompilia and her Audience	
	C : Pompilia and Irony	
	D : Pompilia and Guido	
	E : Pompilia and Caponsacchi	
	III : The Charming Symmetry	
<u>Chapter Four:</u>	"Here were the end, had anything an end"	91
<u>Bibliography</u>		106

CHAPTER ONE

READING AND REPETITION : THE RESPONSE TO POMPILIA

Pompilia's monologue constitutes Book VII of twelve books which comprise The Ring and the Book. Considering that Pompilia thus occupies approximately one-twelfth of the narrative space, and is one of three central characters in the poem, it is very surprising to discover that so little critical attention has been given to Pompilia as compared to the other protagonists. While critics are involved in some contention as to qualities of the other protagonists they are almost uniformly agreed on Pompilia's characteristics, and this is rather bewildering. One wonders what it is about Pompilia that moves critics, usually more than eager to engage in critical debate, into widespread concurrence. It is almost as if Pompilia is made to stand apart from the other speakers of the poem, as William Walker notes:

Though criticism of The Ring and the Book is markedly divergent on some issues, it is notably unified in its assessment of Pompilia's monologue ... generally speaking it has ascribed to Pompilia's statement the privilege of being exempt from those elements which are claimed to distort the accounts given by other speakers in the poem.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines the criticism of Pompilia's monologue to date, dividing it into five sections. The first section looks at early critical reaction to Pompilia, also taking into account later discussion of sources for the Pompilia figure, since this is mainly what early criticism debates. The following four sections discuss the Caponsacchi/Pompilia relationship, Pompilia's sainthood, her motives and her use of language.

I

Most critics see Pompilia as a naive child, an innocent victim both of Pietro and, particularly, Violante and of the cruelty of her husband Guido. Such innocence elicits a sympathetic response from the reader, which was particularly true of criticism on and shortly after the poem's publication. An unsigned review in Chamber's Journal of July 24, 1869 states:

Pompilia is exquisite in her beauty, her unconscious grandeur and nobility of soul, her simplicity, and withall her dignity, maintained alike amid great sufferings and petty persecutions more lowering than sublime trials. We cannot point to a creation worthy of being compared with her in the whole range of English literature.<sup>2</sup>

In the same month John Doherty claims that the character of Pompilia is "a type of simplicity, innocence and purity",<sup>3</sup> but perhaps the most emotional of the early reviews comes from R.W. Buchanan in the Athenaeum (March 20, 1869):

Our eyes are still so spell-bound by the immortal features of Pompilia (which shine through the troubled mists of the story with almost insufferable beauty), that we feel it difficult to write calmly and without exaggeration.<sup>4</sup>

This propensity to view Pompilia as naive and innocent does not, however, end with the Victorian critics, although responses to her certainly became less emotional.

Charles Hodell, in 1911, sees her as embodying "the deepest insight into womanhood with all its spiritual relationships, in the love of man, the passion of maternity and devotion to God,"<sup>5</sup> and in 1920 Cook's Commentary stresses the two elements of child-like innocent and young mother.<sup>6</sup> Both Hodell and Cook, and also Gest in 1925, spend some time comparing the Pompilia of The Old Yellow Book with the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book.<sup>7</sup> Cook's appendices ("IV: Could Pompilia Write?" and "V: The Monologues and the Depositions of Caponsacchi and Pompilia") spend considerable space refuting Browning's claim that the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book is just how he found her in The Old Yellow Book. Cook considers the discrepancies between the testimonies of Caponsacchi and Pompilia along with the issue of whether or not Pompilia could write to find that "the charm and nobility of...the hero and heroine were finally entirely [Browning's] creation" (Cook, p.292). While it is not my intention to consider the influence of The Old Yellow Book on Pompilia's monologue, it is interesting to note that while maintaining the two Pompilias are different, Cook nevertheless arrives at a similar response to each version:



The tender age, the helpless inexperience, the undeserved misfortunes, the saintly end of the real Pompilia excite our sympathy and our pity so keenly that, even if we could wholly dissociate her from the Pompilia of the poem, we should still desire to find her faultless. (Cook, p.293)

In a similar vein, Gest's evaluation of the Pompilia of The Old Yellow Book seems equally applicable to the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book and is, to a degree, contiguous with contemporary evaluation of the latter:

As we close this 'Old Yellow Book' with its record of meanness and crime, we turn back to the lonely figure of poor little Pompilia, in whom we see not an angel of light, but a frail and faulty girl whose pathetic fate cannot but excite our compassion. (Gest, p.629)

Despite finding fault with Browning's remark about Pompilia, both critics react to both Pompilias in a similar manner, and this would seem to lend support to Browning's claim while discrediting their own.

If we consider the possibility that Browning did model the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book on the one he found in The Old Yellow Book, and that the Pompilia of The Old Yellow Book is of "insufficient character to resist temptation" and of "instincts stronger than her principles",<sup>8</sup> then the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book may also be less a pure, innocent and saintly child than critics like to believe. This possibility, however, was not considered seriously until the late 1960's.

Critics have also turned the discussion of the source for Browning's Pompilia from The Old Yellow Book to Dante's Beatrice and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning. In 1926 J.E. Shaw believes that the Pompilia of The Ring and the Book is not the Pompilia of The Old Yellow Book.<sup>9</sup> However, he offers other sources for Browning's Pompilia. For Shaw, Browning's Pompilia is a combination of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning and Dante's Beatrice and is a 'donna angelicata', comparable to the lady of Italian love songs of the thirteenth century. He maintains that Pompilia, Mrs Browning and Beatrice all dwelt together in Browning's mind and that The Ring and the Book becomes a vehicle for the exposition of Browning's theory of love, a

theory comparable to Dante's. So Caponsacchi, like Dante, turns from "frivolous worldly loves to the one devotion which summoned all the good in him, and which became a worshipping mystical passion for the lady who seemed to him so like 'Our Lady of Sorrows' (J.E. Shaw, p.78).

Some thirty years after Shaw, in 1956, Henry Charles Duffin agrees that the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia is 'spiritually akin' to that of Dante and Beatrice.<sup>10</sup> He nevertheless disagrees that there is any resemblance between Pompilia and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning:

I find it impossible to believe that Pompilia, the child of seventeen, is in Browning's representation intended to stand for Elizabeth, who had never to him been anything but a mature woman... (Duffin, p.117)

The controversy about the relationship between Pompilia and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning and Beatrice still continues in more recent criticism. Altick and Loucks claim:

While there is little overt resemblance between Pompilia and Elizabeth Barrett, apart from their dark hair and their pallor, it is likely that Pompilia is in some way a much idealized version of Browning's dead wife, or perhaps more accurately, a substitute figure.<sup>11</sup>

Speculation on the similarities between Pompilia, Beatrice and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning depends, of course, on the evaluation of each of these three figures. The majority of critics see Pompilia as an idealized version of either the Pompilia of The Old Yellow Book, or Beatrice or Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, or a combination of these. What is taken for granted is that Pompilia is idealized in some way. This is because she is traditionally read as a totally 'good' and innocent character. To read her as less than innocent, as composed of both good and bad characteristics, is to undermine the idealization, and so creates the need for a re-examination of her relationship with the figures seen as possible influences on Browning's creation.

## II

Criticism largely agrees about the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia, viewing it as existing on a spiritual plane which is based on a combination of courtly love idealism and worship of the Virgin, and ruling out any possibility that sexual intimacy occurred.

A.K. Cook states that Pompilia has a "mystical devotion to Caponsacchi" (Cook, p.144), while John Doherty also acknowledges that the relationship has a supernatural quality to it.<sup>12</sup> Walter Bagehot's remark that Pompilia "accepted the services of the priest with gratitude, as she would have received the aid of a toothless peasant" although stressing a more down-to-earth aspect of the relationship than Cook and Doherty, also suggests that the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia was not based on sexual desire.<sup>13</sup>

In 1956, Henry Charles Duffin stresses the mystical nature of the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia. He maintains that Pompilia expresses her love for Caponsacchi more freely than he expresses love for her, and notes that the small discrepancies between the accounts of escape in their monologues can be accounted for. These discrepancies in no way detract from the mystical nature of their relationship as he sees it:

The priest, a good man but entirely lacking in serious purpose, sees - just sees - a girl whose lovely face is dim beside the perfect beauty of her soul: he is instantly raised to his highest power by mystic love. His whole life and being are henceforth dedicated to her and the goodness and beauty she represents and embodies. (Duffin, p.131)

In the same year Robert Langbaum also notes the effect of Pompilia on Caponsacchi's life. Pompilia provides Caponsacchi with the opportunity of his life, "the chance for heroic exploit and the chance to recognise, in her, embodied goodness, and thus to be recalled to his priestly vows and the true meaning of Christianity."<sup>14</sup> Sister Mary Richard Boo takes an extreme position on the spiritual aspect of the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia stressing

that Caponsacchi's love for Pompilia is not merely like a religious conversion, it is a religious conversion.<sup>15</sup> Caponsacchi is never unaware of the physical beauty of Pompilia, however, the changes he experiences are the result of Pompilia's role as an agent of spiritual rebirth:

Through the instrumentality of Pompilia he has undergone a process of purgation and illumination which forms an accepted part of the pattern of spiritual progress, and by the end of Book VI he has unquestionably attained at least a firm beginning of spiritual perfection. (Boo, p.180)

Mary Rose Sullivan and Roy Gridley, both writing in 1968, continue to discuss the mystical nature of the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia, but there is also a movement at this time towards a consideration of the romance elements used to describe their relationship.<sup>16</sup> This movement is part of an increasingly more open criticism of Pompilia which begins to question the traditional and rather narrow evaluations of Pompilia as purely innocent and good.

Sullivan acknowledges the religious element of their relationship but also notes that Caponsacchi and Pompilia considered the possibility of an earthly love. Sullivan's phrase "both concede that their love was not meant for earth" (Sullivan, p.99), suggests an unwilling, or at least resigned, aspect about their hope for union in heaven. In addition, Sullivan's comment that Pompilia may be speaking out of a half-unconscious desire to have Caponsacchi at her side (Sullivan, p.87), also suggests that Pompilia finds comfort in Caponsacchi's physical, earthly presence. While Caponsacchi may be a "reflection of God's own justice and truth on earth" for Pompilia (Sullivan, p.94), Sullivan's belief that Pompilia speaks in order to clear Caponsacchi and that Caponsacchi's presence is more vivid to her than that of Gaetano again points to a concern for Caponsacchi in this world, as well as the next.

While pointing to some of the earthly aspects of the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia, Sullivan wishes to maintain the dominance of a divine aspect to their relationship:

They are spiritually akin in their acceptance of the bond that draws them together as one of divine inspiration, beyond the possibility of rational explanation; they are one in their conviction that their actions are dictated by a law stronger and more binding than any on earth. (Sullivan, p.99)

Roy Gridley claims that Pompilia does not understand what Caponsacchi means to her until her monologue has nearly ended. She wishes to deny the amatory aspects of their relationship early in the monologue, but later is able to explain the role of Caponsacchi in her life by citing the figure of the cavalier in the tapestry. Gridley states that Pompilia has an aversion to the figure of the princess in distress because she does not want them to think that Caponsacchi was her lover (Gridley, p.79). She does, however, use the Perseus figure because of its contrast with the Satanic figure (Guido), and its emphasis on saving the weak. The metaphor which Pompilia uses describing the situation at Castelnuovo, with Caponsacchi as the guardian angel St. Michael, Guido as Satan and herself as the Virgin of the Apocalypse, also stresses the element of saving the weak rather than the amatory qualities. While Gridley is right in pointing to Pompilia's concern over a misreading on the part of her audience in relation to her use of the St. Michael metaphor, I nevertheless find that the reader, and presumably Pompilia's audience, do not miss the romance elements. This is due to the use of the St. George figure if not by Pompilia, then certainly by others, and to the fact that much of the language Pompilia uses in discussing Caponsacchi has romantic overtones, as William Walker points out (Walker, p.59).

Altick and Loucks, also writing in 1968, stress Caponsacchi's role as saviour of Pompilia. They contend that Browning transforms Caponsacchi into a "chivalric hero" (Altick and Loucks, p.55), but nevertheless stress the Christian rather than romance elements of the rescue. Caponsacchi is comparable to Spenser's Red Cross Knight; Pompilia to Una. Attractive though this proposition is, it denies some of the basic elements of the plot. Caponsacchi may help Pompilia escape Arezzo but ultimately he cannot save her. He may, according to Altick and Loucks, represent the church militant but it is Pompilia who lifts the sword against Guido at Castelnuovo.

Donald Hair seems to agree with Altick and Loucks' position by stating that Browning wishes to exclude the possibility of a sexual relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi and so wishes to have a knight figure without the winning of the princess in the normal fashion. The rescuer is inevitably rewarded with the lady's love:

Although the characters for a romantic narrative are all present - a knight, a maiden in distress, and a dragon...the flight itself is treated as a quest for greater insight rather than an escape from a dragon.

Throughout the journey from Arezzo to Castelnuovo Caponsacchi seeks what can only be described as spiritual communion with Pompilia.<sup>17</sup>

It is really only Kitty Locker and William Walker who suggest the possibility of an earthly love between Caponsacchi and Pompilia. Locker states that Pompilia intuitively recognises that Caponsacchi truly serves God, but she also believes that Caponsacchi recognises that Pompilia might have been his wife:

Caponsacchi does indeed identify Pompilia with the Madonna in the first half of his monologue, in the second half, as he recreates the flight from Arezzo for his auditors, the Madonna image falls into disuse and Caponsacchi seeks to comprehend Pompilia not indirectly by metaphor, but directly, as a woman, who given other circumstances, might have been his wife.<sup>18</sup>

William Walker claims that it is language which suggests that there may be more to the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia than that which exists on a spiritual plane. He acknowledges that Pompilia refers to Caponsacchi as her angel (Walker, p.48), and that she believes he is a saintly guide (Walker, p.54), but he also maintains that the sexual connotations of the language Pompilia uses in describing her relationship with Caponsacchi "may be seen to constitute the vengeance of language against one who may be hiding something" (Walker, pp.59-60). Walker then goes on to examine some passages from Pompilia's monologue which support this claim, including her use of flower and seed imagery in connection with Caponsacchi, her use of expressions such as "O lover of my life" (l.1786), and her denial of Guido's paternity of Gaetano. I am inclined to agree with

Walker on this point. There seems no good reason for exempting Pompilia from an evaluation based on her use of language and metaphor since this process is applied to the other speakers in The Ring and the Book. However, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, the analysis of Pompilia's language to date seems rather selective and is used as a means of supporting the conventional image of Pompilia as naive and innocent.

### III

The main reason why Pompilia's relationship with Caponsacchi is accepted as innocent is the goodness perceived in her, a quality which leads to her adoption as a saint. Generally, there is admiration for the intuitive qualities of Pompilia which lead her to recognise good and evil and act in a Christian way.<sup>19</sup> In addition to intuitive qualities, Pompilia's attributes include a "deep understanding achieved through love, implicit religious faith, tolerance and forgiveness" (Duffin, p.132), and "every Christian virtue enumerated in the sermon on the mount" (Altick and Loucks, p.57). As with criticism about her monologue generally, agreement about Pompilia's saintliness seems almost universal, although its precise nature is uncertain.

Buchanan says her "saintliness comes of her suffering",<sup>20</sup> while Langbaum suggests it arises by comparison, from the context of other more human motivations and from her role as antithesis to Guido (Langbaum, p.329). For Park Honan Pompilia is only 'half saint' at the time of her discourse, "and already purged of feelings that were once her own, all strictly human emotions, as it were. Her love and hate are the saints own: love for goodness and hatred for evil as these concepts are entities in themselves."<sup>21</sup>

For most critics, Pompilia's saintliness is constituted by her complete innocence and purity, along with her devotion to truth and to God, her forgiveness of those who have wronged her and her martyrdom at the hands of evil. Kitty Locker, however, while agreeing that Pompilia is finally a saint, suggests that this is not so until the end of her monologue. It is a quality achieved through spiritual

growth which happens during the course of the monologue, so that Pompilia displays human imperfections and is not totally forgiving until the end of her speech. For Locker, Pompilia's sainthood is revealed in "her unconscious ability to serve as a mediator between man and God" (Locker, p.200), as she brings new meaning and vitality to the faith of Caponsacchi and the Pope. According to Locker, Pompilia's development towards sainthood shows that for Browning "sainthood is not a static quality but instead can arise from the fruition of a developing soul" (Locker, p.207). The idea of development can be traced back to Gridley who also notes a "growth towards saintliness" (Gridley, p.83).

Detailed criticism of Pompilia's monologue is relatively recent as so it comes as no surprise that the most sustained account of Pompilia's sainthood is provided by Kay Austen in 1979.<sup>22</sup> She catalogues the reasons why Pompilia should be viewed as a saint by contending that Pompilia's life both fulfills the requirements for canonization by the Catholic Church and follows the patterns of sainthood in saintly legends. Unlike earlier critics, who perceive Pompilia's saintliness as due to extreme goodness, innocence and naivety, Austen maintains that saints have superior understanding and intelligence, aspects which have not been attributed to Pompilia.

Austen, correctly I think, disagrees with Altick and Loucks who mistakenly attribute Pompilia's forgiveness of Guido to her being ignorant of his motives. As Austen points out:

This insistence on Pompilia's ignorance is puzzling in view of the fact that Pompilia experiences Guido's evil daily for three years and then spends a good portion of her monologue explaining it. (Austen, p.297, n.17)

Pompilia's sainthood is achieved through the struggles and processes which are necessary to achieve canonization, as Austen explains:

By the time she speaks, Pompilia has undergone in Guido's palace the ordeal by fire, the test of faith experienced by many saints and martyrs; she has converted Caponsacchi to the true faith; and she has defended that faith against the foe at the Castelnuovo inn. Slain for her faith and goodness, the saint and martyr lies dying of twenty-two stab wounds, five of them fatal, yet she miraculously lives four days. As she lies dying, Pompilia, like other saints, bears



witness to the glory of God by converting those about her bedside and by explaining her exceptional life. (Austen, p.289)

In what is the most thorough challenge of conventional criticism to date, William Walker disagrees with Austen about Pompilia's ultimate spiritual perfection. Walker agrees that Pompilia is intelligent and capable of sophisticated assumptions, but he also argues that her account is biased by "personal interests and rhetorical strategies" (Walker, p.55). This aspect of Pompilia's sainthood originates with Denis Camp who, some eight years earlier in 1966, questions the degree of self-consciousness apparent in Pompilia's saintliness. He suggests that the idea of saintliness may be something she herself consciously perpetuates, noting that Pompilia refers to Caponsacchi as a saint, names Gaetano after a saint, and characterizes her own life as saintly at the end of her monologue (Camp, p.354).

Walker discounts Austen's criteria for evaluating Pompilia as a saint. He points out that Pompilia does not convert her audience and that the so called miraculous rescue of Pompilia is due to the age old attraction between man and woman. The fact that she survives four days after the stabbing is also not beyond "naturalistic explanation" (Walker, p.55), and does not astound the surgeon who accurately predicts Pompilia will die that night. Altogether, Walker finds Pompilia's monologue "more complex than the 'kind of mystery play' Austen regards it as being" (Walker, p.56). We might conclude then, that Austen treats Pompilia too simply - precisely what she criticizes conventional criticism for doing.

Nina Auerbach questions the appropriateness of reading Pompilia as a saint when she points out that despite having the trial vindicate Pompilia, Browning does not end The Ring and the Book with the recognition of a dead saint.<sup>23</sup> As he ends with a recognition of the fallibility of human speech, "Let God be true and everyman / A liar..."<sup>24</sup> he would seem be working towards an evaluation of man which lies in the opposite direction from sainthood. Browning, unlike the majority of critics, does not indicate that Pompilia is exempted from

this evaluation, and so, Auerbach implies, Pompilia should not be read as a saint.

W. David Shaw's reading of The Ring and the Book in his The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning, which sees the poem as embodying a biblical myth, stands apart from the main body of criticism.<sup>25</sup> Insofar as the reading is distinct it is difficult to discuss it in relation to other criticism. I include it in this section on sainthood because of its basis in Christian mythology.

David Shaw maintains that Caponsacchi, Pompilia and the Pope all address their testimony to God and their motives are therefore disinterested. Shaw continues:

The basis of their myth is a metaphoric identification of Pompilia's foster parents with Adam and Eve. In yielding to the wiles of the Satanic Guido, the Comparini are admitting to their domestic Eden a son-in-law who is a demonic parody of Christ, the second Adam. The hero of this myth is the messianic deliverer, Caponsacchi, whose crusade to right the wrong choice made by the first Eve issues in his rescue of the second Eve, Pompilia, his victory over the Edenic serpent, Guido, and his redemption of what is at once a society and a bride. (W.D.Shaw, p.278)

Shaw then goes on to discuss the monologues of Caponsacchi, Pompilia and the Pope in turn.

He begins his section on Caponsacchi by saying that Caponsacchi addresses a two fold audience - the judges and God, and that his rhetoric changes as he becomes converted to Pompilia's cause. These remarks would seem to contradict what he has said earlier about Caponsacchi addressing his testimony to God and being of disinterested motives. David Shaw gets around this by saying that while Caponsacchi's immediate purpose may be to try and see Pompilia, this "is subordinate to the conversion of his audience and his continued worship of God" (W.D. Shaw, p.279). Shaw's reading discusses Caponsacchi's use of the rhetoric of religion and embodiment of a biblical myth persuasively, but his emphasis on Caponsacchi-the-priest to the exclusion of Caponsacchi-the-man, denies the very human struggle which lies at the heart of Caponsacchi's monologue. Caponsacchi's statements at the beginning and near the end of his

monologue, "I cannot see/ My own hand held thus broad before my face / And know it again" (VI.3-5) and "I do but play with an imagined life" (VI. 2081), proclaim a struggle for identity which seems to me to be central to an understanding of Caponsacchi.

Similarly, Shaw's reading of Pompilia deals inadequately with the human aspects of Pompilia's character. Shaw notes that Pompilia's "legal oratory consists of her defense of Caponsacchi, which is designed to justify a past action, and her plea on behalf of her son, which is directed to the future" (W.D. Shaw, p.286). This would seem a reasonable assessment of aspects of Pompilia's monologue. However, Shaw continues, "as a panegyric addressed to God, her oration is not calculated to win any personal advantage" (W.D.Shaw, p.286). I would contest that Pompilia or Caponsacchi address God at all. Pompilia's concern with her audience throughout her monologue would suggest that she is concerned with how her audience on earth perceive her. Hence, even after VII.1198 where Shaw maintains Pompilia begins to speak to God (W.D. Shaw, p.289), there is evidence of rhetorical strategies directed at winning over her audience on earth. Altogether, W.D.Shaw's reading fails to encompass the complexities of the characters.

#### IV

A further area of contention among critics is the issue concerning Pompilia's reasons for speaking and how these affect her monologue. As some critics maintain that Pompilia speaks the truth, this discussion often speculates as to how Pompilia's reasons for speaking effect the truth of her account. There seem to be three main areas of opinion on this issue. The first two groups maintain that Pompilia speaks either with no concern but to tell the truth or with concerns that do not effect the truth of her monologue. The third group, in opposition to the first two, maintains that Pompilia does have definite reasons for speaking and these do effect the truth of her account.

A.K. Cook's remark that Pompilia relates her thoughts "as they come" with "artless charm" (Cook, p.141), locates him firmly in the

first group described above. In a similar vein, W. David Shaw and Altick and Loucks, both writing in 1968 some forty-eight years after Cook, maintain that Caponsacchi, Pompilia and the Pope speak in a transparent and open manner, while the other characters have concealed motives. Shaw refers to "disinterested" motives (see Shaw, p.278), while Altick and Loucks state:

six of the nine (Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope, who speak directly from their souls, are the obvious exceptions) reveal through their inconsistencies and prejudices and obsessions more of their hidden nature and unacknowledged motives than they intend their speeches to express. (Altick and Loucks, p.10)

Mary Rose Sullivan and Roy Gridley are also writing in 1968, and their responses fit more firmly into the second group, those who note that Pompilia has reasons for speaking but who see these reasons as in no way affecting the accuracy of her account. Sullivan suggests that Caponsacchi is more vivid to Pompilia than Gaetano and thus the pain involved in recalling the terrible trials of her life is for Caponsacchi's sake. She hopes that her words may clear Caponsacchi's name although since, Sullivan maintains, Pompilia's account with her audience is tenuous, it is unlikely that she works in any calculated way to do so, rather there is a spontaneous quality about her monologue:

What happens when the strongly emotional Caponsacchi-Pompilia arguments come together and reinforce each other by their shared spontaneous, almost inspired quality is a counter-balancing of the impression produced by Guido's highly rhetorical presentation. (Sullivan, pp.99-100)

Roy Gridley reads Pompilia's monologue as an attempt to reveal "herself to herself" (Gridley, p.83), that is, a quest to understand what her life has meant, "a definition of herself by means of speech" (Gridley, p.68). By comparing herself to various figures, for example the Virgin, Daphne, a distressed princess, Pompilia can explain her life. Pompilia speaks not from a need to defend her actions but a need "to define in figurative language what these actions were" (Gridley, p.83).

Gridley avoids saying directly that Pompilia's monologue is to be equated with truth but he maintains the possibility of equating truth with Pompilia by stating that Pompilia is "a speaker striving to arrive at 'truth' by the end of the monologue" (Gridley, p.65). He further associates Pompilia's monologue with truth when he speaks of her as akin to what Langbaum calls soliloquy: " 'The soliloquist' says Langbaum, 'is concerned with truth ....' " (Gridley, p.65). For Gridley Pompilia's monologue is not "a conscious strategy in which the speaker pleads for a preconceived point of view" (Gridley, p. 83).

Denis Camp, in 1966, is one of the first to acknowledge that Pompilia's reasons for speaking affect her monologue and mean that her account is not to be associated with 'truth'. Camp points to the Pope's statement that "Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these - /Not absolutely in a portion" (X.228-9), and to the poets affirmation that art rather than the individual, can tell a truth, to reiterate that it was not Browning's intention that Pompilia's monologue, "but one-twelfth of the total structure" (Camp, p.361), be equated with truth.

Camp is more perceptive than other critics of the time, because he looks more closely at the monologue for evidence of Pompilia's biases, rather than accepting a tradition of criticism which does not question the equation of her monologue with truth. He finds that Pompilia herself admits her distorted views and that this distortion "makes it impossible to believe she sees truth 'in its genuine contours'" (Camp, p.360). However perceptive Camp is for his time, even he ultimately fails to investigate fully the consequences of an acknowledgement of personal interests on Pompilia's part. It is left to Herbert Tucker<sup>26</sup> and William Walker twenty years later, to pick up where Camp left off.

Tucker points out that a recreation based on memory of the past resembles artistic creation in its "studied suppression, emphasis and integration of details" (Tucker, p.316). The way in which Pompilia remembers the events of her past affects her recounting of them. Tucker points out some of the traits particular to the way in which Pompilia remembers. Pompilia has a resistance to remembering any

evil in her life and she represses certain aspects of her past. As Tucker points out, "whole portions of her life with Guido are blank because she declares them so: 'for me, - / I cannot say less; more I will not say' (VII.709-10)" (Tucker, p.313).

Pompilia replaces the blanks she has created by choosing not to remember, with memories of Caponsacchi. While Caponsacchi's actual deeds have faded, they leave behind in Pompilia's memory seeds which stimulate her to remember the parts of her life that involved him, or perhaps more pertinently, remember and enlarge upon his role in her life. In suppressing certain aspects of her life with Guido and emphasising those pleasant times spent with Caponsacchi, Pompilia presents an edited version shaped by her. Such a version is certainly not equivalent to the 'truth' some critics maintain she presents. In the light of criticism to this point, this is a rather radical contention on Tucker's part since it sets Pompilia on the same level as the other monologists. In the past critics have wanted to do the opposite by maintaining that Pompilia stands apart, that is above, other speakers.

William Walker also offers a new interpretation. He claims that Pompilia has well defined motives for speaking, thus disagreeing immediately with Altick and Louck's claim that Pompilia speaks with "no aim to make a case" (Walker, p.47). Walker maintains that we must consider the effect of Gaetano and Don Celestino's instruction on the monologue, along with Pompilia's concern to defend Caponsacchi and herself. The nature of her monologue then, is a defense, and as such Pompilia is highly concerned with her audience and their response and is not, as Gridley claims, "remarkably free from the pressures of her auditors" (Walker, p.48 cites Gridley, pp.64-5). Walker suggests that Pompilia already has achieved some understanding of her life before she embarks on her monologue, probably during her confessions to Don Celestine. As her monologue is then, not the first time she has come to terms with her life in spoken language, Walker disagrees with Gridley's claim that Pompilia's monologue is "an explorative process of self-discovery and understanding" (Walker, p.53).

Pompilia's reasons for speaking inevitably affect the relationship she has with her audience. Those who view her reasons

as either non-existent or transparent and innocent, despite concern with Caponsacchi and Gaetano, or who view her sole purpose as the expounding of truth, regard Pompilia's contact with the audience as tenuous. For Sullivan, Pompilia is only vaguely aware of her audience and "unlike other characters, she notes little or no response from her audience" (Sullivan, p. 87). This remark seems to conflict with what Sullivan has to say later in the same chapter, when she notes that Pompilia "will preface a remark with a pointed reminder of its importance" (Sullivan p.90). One may well ask why Pompilia would bother with a 'pointed reminder', if not for the sake of influencing her audience.

Conversely, Walker notes many examples of tactics to win her audience over, among them child-like talk and compliments. Pompilia characterizes her audience as suspicious in order to manipulate them, assumes a "tone of pathos as a ploy" (Walker, p.58), and signals her anxiety about potential misunderstanding on the part of the audience by her excited and exclamatory tone in places. Child-like talk, Walker suggests, is for the purpose of winning a sympathetic understanding of herself and Caponsacchi from the audience. Compliments work in a similar way, endearing her audience to her by means of flattery. Paradoxically, regarding them with scepticism and suspicion also works to win her audience over. Openly accusing them of blaming her and then convincing them that have misjudged her instils guilt in the audience, who then side with Pompilia to appease their own guilt. Walker notes (p.58) that Pompilia's pleas for sympathy employing pathos are sometimes a little too strained to be accepted as genuine rather than assumed:

The surgeon cared for me,  
To count my wounds, - twenty-two dagger wounds,  
Five deadly, but I do not suffer much-  
Or too much pain, - and am to die to-night.      (11.37-40)

Direct addresses to the audience, genuine or ironic, testify to Pompilia's concern with audience response. Lines 905, "And now you are not tired? How patient then" and 1260 "Now, understand here, by no means mistake!", and phrases such as "I told you" (l. 736), "as I told you" (l.1264) and "as I say" (l.1276), are examples of this. Walker's numerous examples of Pompilia's awareness of her audience

would seem to undermine Sullivan's statement that Pompilia notes little or no response from her audience, beyond contention.

## V

The final area I wish to discuss in considering criticism to date is Pompilia's use of language.

A.K. Cook notes that Pompilia's monologue exhibits a "simplicity of language, manner, and rhythm" (Cook, p.140), and this signifies simplicity of thought. She relates her thoughts with "artless charm" (Cook, p.141). In a similar vein, Altick and Loucks claim that Pompilia, along with Caponsacchi and the Pope, plays no games with language. The three "represent themselves as they are, not as they would wish to be seen if their moral integrity did not suffice to justify them" (Altick and Loucks, p.127). Sullivan takes much the same line when she states that Pompilia's monologue is "the artless expression of powerful feelings set forth in direct simple language with little attention to rhetorical effect" (Sullivan, p.95).

Diction may be a clue to character and Park Honan in his comprehensive study on imagery and diction in The Ring and the Book, notes that Pompilia uses three types of word groups. The first and largest group consists of common words that a girl half Pompilia's age would be capable of. These are words such as 'poor', 'little', 'good', 'kind', 'happy'. The second group consists of more complicated words, but those which, Honan maintains, are not beyond the grasp of a seventeen year old girl. This group consists of words such as 'register', 'laughable', 'omitting', 'particular'. The final group is the smallest and most significant group, consisting of a few terms which Honan sees as being beyond the capacity of an adolescent, such as 'perquisite', 'imposthume', 'suffusion', 'quintessence', 'pellucid'. Park Honan draws the conclusion that these "few complex terms are the ones that suggest Pompilia is more than the young girl she appears to be " (Honan, p.241).

Honan goes on to suggest that this component which is beyond the young girl, is the transcendent quality in Pompilia, a quality which



allows for the part of her that is Virgin and saint. Walker, however, suggests a more simple explanation. This kind of language points to the adult in Pompilia; we should believe her when she says that she is not a child (Walker, p.58).

While many critics agree that she is more than a young girl, there is some disagreement as to what the additional qualities are. Camp states early in his article that he wishes to restore Pompilia to the world of mortals and, not wishing to acknowledge transcendent qualities, explains her monologue in terms of human attributes. Auerbach also places Pompilia among mortals when she notes that Pompilia's words "have no more authority than other words that fly around this poem" (Auerbach, p.172). As mentioned previously, Gridley notes that Pompilia, like other speakers in the poem, is forced to use language and is subject to the distortion in language. He also notes that the significance of much of what has happened to Pompilia seems beyond language.

As we have already seen, Herbert Tucker believes that the way in which Pompilia remembers affects her monologue. Due to the suppressions and 'creations' of her memory, her account is somewhat edited. Pompilia's wish to "omit from the record certain salient features and substitute in their stead 'what one cares to know' also determines the spoken record of inward and outward events that makes up her poem" (Tucker, p.313).

Whereas Tucker states that Pompilia's periods of blankness, of not being able to remember, or not wishing to remember, are due to repression of memory, Camp refers to such periods of blankness as due to Pompilia's dreamy state of mind. He employs Freud's theory on dream distortion as a means of explaining the dream-like distortion in her confession. He also notes that dreaminess makes the remembering easier for Pompilia to bear. A third reason for the vagueness of Pompilia's monologue is given by Sullivan who refers to it as Pompilia's "gently surprised and puzzled effort to make sense out of the baffling things that have happened" (Sullivan, p.89).

While there is this degree of vagueness, Sullivan also notes a conflicting move towards accuracy at points in Pompilia's monologue,

for instance her recitation of her name, age and number of stab wounds. This contrast between what Pompilia does know and her vagueness, dramatizes the conflict in Pompilia:

She shows the extent of the conflict by the curious disparity in her discourse between explicitness in details surrounding the central issues of the story and vagueness about the issues themselves. (Sullivan, p.88)

We seem to be faced with a variety of explanations for Pompilia's vagueness - deliberate editing, natural reaction to trauma, bewilderment. Walker's sympathies clearly lie with Tucker on this issue. Walker maintains that Pompilia is more sophisticated than conventional criticism allows. Because she speaks with particular motives in mind and with the aim of getting the audience on her side, Pompilia is very conscious of the language she employs. In addition to this, Pompilia's awareness of sophisticated linguistic devices such as irony and metaphor also points to her awareness of how language works.

An awareness of the discrepancy between things themselves and what they are called, as in ll.874-77, and ll.902-904 (an awareness of the difference between signs and their referents), is quite a sophisticated perception of Pompilia's part. If Pompilia can perceive irony and understand how it has worked against her, then she is also capable of using it for her own benefit:

Given Pompilia's characterization of herself, it would be surprising not to find her on occasion introducing the complexities of ironic discourse which would disrupt a consistent relation between her literal statement and her intended meaning. (Walker, p.51)

Walker uses Pompilia's account of appeals to the Archbishop as evidence of this. Pompilia realizes that the Archbishop, although supposedly representing God, does not really do so. Her repetition of the phrase 'he stands for God' acknowledges her recognition and effectively communicates this knowledge to her audience. But, while irony can be a means of getting the audience on her side, Pompilia also uses ironic discourse to deride her audience:

And now you are not tired? How patient then  
 All of you, - Oh yes, patient this long while  
 Listening, and understanding, I am sure!  
 Four days ago, when I was sound and well  
 And like to live, no one would understand.  
 People were kind, but smiled 'And what of him,  
 Your friend, whose tonsure, the rich dark-brown hides?  
 There, there! - your lover, do we dream he was?  
 A priest too - never were such naughtiness!

(11.905-13)

This example ultimately works to gain the audiences approval also. Having derided them she then forgives them, winning them over with her generosity.

Locker also points to Pompilia's perception of irony, noting that Pompilia comes to recognise and accept the greatest ironies in her life: that Guido's evil has resulted in good (Gaetano), and that Guido's luring of Caponsacchi also worked for good - "Guido's very evil resulted in bringing about her own salvation" (Locker, p.31).

Such sophisticated perceptions on Pompilia's part call to mind disputes over the degree of self-knowledge that she has. Locker maintains that Pompilia has some degree of self-knowledge but experiences spiritual growth during the course of the monologue. It is this spiritual side of self-knowledge which Pompilia is largely aware of. However, Austen's remark that "she has a profound understanding of her life and of mankind" (Austen, p. 295), suggests a more comprehensive degree of self-knowledge. It is perhaps pertinent to ask just what self-knowledge involves. To be able to speak about yourself or to cite yourself suggests distance, or as Walker maintains, that you have achieved understanding prior to present circumstances (Walker, pp.534).

Hair, on the subject of detachment, contends that Pompilia's death-bed "is a vantage point from which she can survey her life and her situation, but remain detached from both" (Hair, pp.151-2). According to Hair, Browning attributes Pompilia with 'lyric insight' "which appears as a devotion to truth, and as a purity of heart which enables her to see God" (Hair, p.151). It is this lyric insight, Hair claims, which is responsible for the sense of detachment one feels when reading the monologue.

The tone of bitterness and cynicism apparent during places in Pompilia's monologue, has been noted by many critics. The early critics, in general, wished to attribute this to a slip on Browning's part, as Locker notes:

Since the monologue ascribed to Pompilia shows a human and imperfect woman, many commentators have found fault with the monologue as an artistic creation: Pompilia, some critics argue, is made to say things which are "out of keeping with her character." (Locker, p.176)

Cook disagrees with Hugh Walker whom he cites - "Simple child as Pompilia is, there is a depth of philosophy in her utterances that is not in strict keeping with her character" (cited by Cook, pp.139-40). Henry Donaghy, in a similar fashion, maintains that Pompilia "seems a bit too cynical for her age in one brief moment when she insists, 'Prayers move God; threats and nothing else move men'. It is a minor blemish but one which is a little inconsistent with the total picture of Pompilia" (Donaghy, p. 61). For Altick and Loucks, Pompilia's monologue "is the least realistic of all" (Altick and Loucks, p.57). They do not elaborate on their use of 'realistic'.

There has also been an attempt by Kitty Locker to explain Pompilia's bitterness by the fact that Pompilia has not fully forgiven Guido. Her bitterness throughout the monologue is evidence of an incomplete forgiveness which she achieves only near the end of her monologue. Fra Celestino's concern that she remembers all in order to forgive fully, along with Pompilia's imagery provides evidence of her lack of total forgiveness during different stages of her monologue. As examples of this Locker cites the following:

After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,  
Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty  
Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,  
(11.741-3)

And he divined what surge of bitterness,  
In overtaking me, would float me back  
Whence I was carried by the striding day.  
(11.1535-7)

William Walker notes not only bitterness, but also potential sarcasm at 1.1768, "Ah, Friends, I thank and bless you every one!",

and finds in ll.3-7 evidence of Pompilia's capability of regarding the world with more understanding than many critics are willing to allow:

'T is writ so in the church's register,  
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names  
At length, so many names for one poor child,  
-Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela  
Pompilia Comparini, - laughable!

Pompilia finds she cannot regard the "nominal formalities seriously" and finds something to laugh at in the "discrepancy between them and the reality they signify" (Walker, p.50).

By far the largest amount of space in any discussion of Pompilia's use of language is devoted to her use of metaphor. Initially criticism regarded metaphor as totally unselfconscious, and Pompilia's comparisons to the Virgin Mary and her identification with the roles of innocent lamb and victim were seen as an accurate statement of her position. Park Honan does at least recognise that Pompilia characterizes herself with certain images, such as lamb and young dove. He goes on, however, to claim that Pompilia, unlike other characters, is unaware of their character-revealing significance, maintaining that when Pompilia does something as apparently conscious as linking Guido with a ferocious animal, she is not responsible; it is a friend who first suggests the image to her:

'Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,  
How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?  
And the soft length, -lies in and out your feet  
And laps you round the knee, - a snake it is!  
And so on. (ll. 124-28)

Sullivan also makes the point that when Pompilia speaks in a derogatory way of Guido it is because she has heard how other people have spoken to her of him. Pompilia merely records what she hears. Sullivan is thus also pointing to an unconscious use of language. She sees Pompilia's images of herself in a similar way, as spontaneous and "artless but truthful" (Sullivan, p.93). They have such an impact because they are "like the frank observations of a clear-eyed child" (Sullivan, p. 92). Tucker has mentioned that child-like talk is one way Pompilia can win her audience's sympathy. Sullivan

clearly does not accept Pompilia's child-like qualities as a ploy. Her reaching back to memories of her childhood is "in order to help her hearers to see how a thing really was" (Sullivan, p.92).

Roy Gridley, in line with his interpretation of the purpose of the monologue, states that Pompilia uses figurative language to explain her life and to help overcome the subjectivity of language:

To surmount the distortion inherent in "filthy rags of speech", the speaker resorts to the indirectness and obliquity of figurative language Pompilia discovers that by translating into metaphors the past actions of herself and others she can arrive at profounder insights into those actions and can communicate something of those insights of her auditors. (Gridley, p.68)

The images she draws on are primarily from her childhood - for instance, the statue of the Virgin Mary and the tapestry of the Perseus and Andromeda myth. Gridley agrees with Devane who claims that Pompilia might not know the specific details of the myth: "she cannot call herself Andromeda, she can never-the-less identify with the role of victim."<sup>27</sup> Gridley emphasizes the process of identifying as a means of understanding, noting that Pompilia also identifies with the roles of Daphne, the Virgin and the helpless lamb. Gridley points out that metaphor is a kind of lie because it compares unlike things, and while Walker would have used such a statement to discredit Pompilia's imagery, Gridley sees it working in a more positive way, to "give verbal form to an otherwise ineffable, private, and subjective understanding of what her life has meant" (Gridley, p.76).

Camp is another critic who maintains that Pompilia is largely unconscious of the imagery she employs. He sees her images as being "metaphorical for the reader alone; Pompilia perceives no hidden meaning in them" (Camp, p.358). Walker has pointed out, though, that Pompilia does know how metaphor works and to maintain that Pompilia does not, is surely to argue against Pompilia's own words: "You know the figure never were ourselves/Though he nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life,-/As well what was, as what, like this, was not,-" (ll.197-9).

Austen does not consider Pompilia in terms of a self-conscious

use of metaphor, but discusses the way Browning characterizes her in terms of images of fire and encirclement. The closest Austen comes to acknowledging that Pompilia even uses metaphor is with phrases such as "the many mythic analogies Pompilia uses to explain her life" (Austen, p.293) and "Pompilia likens herself to Christ" (Austen, p.300). Considering the date of Austen's article, her lack of acknowledgement of Pompilia's conscious use of metaphor is a little surprising.

Kitty Locker notes that critics are unwilling to assign less than kind intentions to Pompilia. They claim that images which damn Guido are quoted by Pompilia from some other source, or like Sullivan, they claim that they do not "seem unkind on Pompilia's part" (Sullivan, p.33). Locker disagrees and cites places where Pompilia endorses the claims of Guido's evil, for example ll.129-30, "And laps you round the knee, - a snake it is' / And so on. Well, and they are right enough, / By the torch they hold up now: for first, observe." She also notes:

one lesson we surely learn from the differing versions of the Roman murder story in 'The Ring and the Book' is that it is not uncommon for a speaker to project his own responses onto someone else and attribute to another person words which reflect his own concerns. (Locker, p.180)

Locker goes on to agree with Honan and Sullivan that Pompilia does not seem to draw attention to the significance of the words she uses, but she adds that Pompilia does not really need to, since the images are so transparent. The alleged spontaneity of Pompilia's images, Locker contends, makes them more, not less, reliable indicators of her feelings.

Finally, we must consider Pompilia's imagery in combination with statements which reveal her as bitter and even cynical. These are signs of Pompilia's recognition of being sinned against and of the incomplete nature of her forgiveness of Guido until about l.1727, where Locker contends that even as Pompilia "recognises that 'hate was thus the truth of him', she pardons him" (Locker, p.185).

Again, it is William Walker who makes the most radical statement about Pompilia's employment of imagery. He maintains that she is

fully conscious of her images and that she uses them to present herself favourably:

Given that Pompilia has specific aims to fulfill and given that she is to some extent aware of her narrative techniques, many of the apparently "innocent" and "natural" images and rhetorical figures to be found in her monologue are more reasonably regarded as elements calculated to fulfill her intentions and design. (Walker, p.57)

Pompilia does not state that she is aware of the implications of her imagery but this does not preclude such an awareness.

From this account of approaches to Pompilia's monologue, it can be seen that developments have been very slow and there have been considerable periods of time where the monologue, and indeed the whole poem, has been ignored or forgotten. The period between T.E. Shaw's article in 1926 and William DeVane's A Browning Handbook in 1955, nearly thirty years, passed with practically no discussion of The Ring and the Book. DeVane, however, seems to have sparked off a spate of Browning criticism which continued until the early seventies as far as Pompilia was concerned, although it is the past five years which have seen the most dramatic developments.

From an initial emotional response, criticism moved to a more detailed appreciation of Pompilia's many virtues, including innocence, purity, sainthood and maternal solicitude. The move from a view that all speakers except Pompilia spoke with a definite motive, to a consideration that Pompilia did have motives, albeit innocent ones, came in the nineteen sixties, with the likes of Sullivan and Altick and Loucks. More recently, full recognition of the self-consciousness of Pompilia's motives and her sophisticated use of diction, tone and metaphor has been arrived at in articles by Herbert Tucker and William Walker. In 1869 we have Pompilia as "a type of simplicity, innocence and purity",<sup>28</sup> but in 1984 she is "a subtle rhetorician who on occasion is cynical and ironic, and who deliberately employs various strategies to achieve her ends" (Walker, p.60). One begins to wonder if we are talking about the same Pompilia and Walker's comment that there appears to be "severe discontinuities to be found in the thing we call Pompilia" (Walker, p.61) seems rather an understatement.



Locker's way of dealing with this problem is to say that "Pompilia resists our efforts to categorize her; any adjectives we use to describe her are potentially misleading, for they seem to suggest a static fixity which denies the reality of this woman" (Locker, p.212).

Yet, we must come to terms with Pompilia somehow in order to understand her place in the poem. Walker suggests that what is needed is a reading of the monologue which would explore and accommodate the discontinuities in her character, her multiplicity, and it is to the requirements of such a reading that I now turn.

## ENDNOTES - CHAPTER ONE:

1. William Walker, "'Pompilia' and Pompilia", Victorian Poetry, 22 (1984), 47.
2. Unsigned Review in "Chambers Journal", July 24, 1869, rpt.in Browning: The Critical Heritage, ed. Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p.331.
3. John Doherty, "The Dublin Review", July 1869, rpt. in Critical Heritage, p.329.
4. R.W. Buchanan, "Athenaeum", March 20, 1869, rpt.in Critical Heritage, p.317.
5. Charles W. Hodell, "Introduction", The Old Yellow Book: Source of Robert Browning's 'The Ring and the Book', ed. Charles W. Hodell (London : Dent, 1911), p.xvi.
6. A.K. Cook, A Commentary Upon Browning's "The Ring and the Book" (1920; rpt. Connecticut: Archan Books, 1966).
7. John Marshall Gest, The Old Yellow Book: Source of Browning's the Ring and the Book [A New Translation with Explanatory Notes] (Boston: Chipman Law, 1925).
8. Gest, p.624.
9. J.E.Shaw, "The 'Donna Angelicata' in 'The Ring and the Book'", PMLA, 41 (1926), 55-81.
10. Henry Charles Duffin, Amphibian: A Reconsideration of Browning (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1956).
11. Richard Altick and James F. Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story: A Reading of 'The Ring and the Book' (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp.19-20.

12. Doherty, Critical Heritage, p.329.
13. Walter Bagehot, "Tinsley's Magazine", January 1869, rpt. in Critical Heritage, p.305.
14. Robert Langbaum, "'The Ring and the Book': A Relativist Poem", PMLA, 71 (1956), p.133.
15. Sister Mary Richard Boo, "The Ordeal of Giuseppe Caponsacchi", Victorian Poetry, 3 (1965), p.180.
16. Mary Rose Sullivan, Browning's Voices in 'The Ring and the Book' (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968); Roy Gridley, "Browning's Pompilia", Journal of English and German Philology, 67 (1968).
17. Donald Hair, Browning's Experiments with Genre (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp.149-50.
18. Kitty Locker, "The Definition of Woman: A major motif in Browning's 'The Ring and the Book'." (Diss. U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977), p.85.
19. For example, see Dennis Camp, "Browning's Pompilia and the Truth", The Personalist, 47 (1966), p.357; Sullivan, p.99; Locker, p.185.
20. Buchanan, Critical Heritage, pp.318-19.
21. Park Honan, Browning's Characters: A Study of Poetic Technique (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 196.
22. Kay Austen, "Pompilia: Saint and Martyr Both", Victorian Poetry, 17 (1979), pp.287-301.
23. Nina Auerbach, "Robert Browning's Last Word", Victorian Poetry, 22 (1984), 171.

24. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book ed. Richard D. Altick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), XI.453-54. This edition is a reproduction of the first edition of the poem published in four volumes between 21 November 1868 and 27 February 1869. Although Robert Browning made extensive revisions for subsequent editions, Altick makes a case for the superiority of this version. All subsequent references to the poem refer to this edition. All line references pertain to Book VII unless otherwise specified.
  
25. W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968).
  
26. Herbert Tucker, "Mnemonic Imagination in Shelley and Browning", Studies in Romanticism, 19 (1980), 285-385.
  
27. Gridley, p. 70 cites William DeVane, "The Virgin and the Dragon", Yale Review, 37 (1947), 44.
  
28. Doherty, Critical Heritage, p.329.