THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN BOOKS II-IV OF THE RING AND THE BOOK

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PREFACE

Established commentary on Robert Browning's dramatic monologue The Ring and the Book has largely been restricted to accounts of subjectivity. This study continues that long tradition by examining speakers' production of subjectivity, but extends the discussion to considering the political implications of the personal word. Theories of the Russian literary theorist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin are employed to observe individual speakers' constructions of selfhood. However, unlike the traditional monological model, Bakhtin's model of dialogism allows for further examination of the personal word when it inevitably encounters, and subsequently struggles politically with, social and institutional discourses. Hence, this study is distinct from the long tradition of monological criticism of The Ring and the Book in its examination of the personal word as political contest.

I focus upon three books that have received relatively little direct critical attention in comparison to others within The Ring and the Book. Books II-IV, Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid, often called the opening triad, differ from the others in the poem because the speakers act as social figures--both personal and representative of social views. These books also offer an advantage of being possibly the least critically trammelled of the twelve books that make up the poem. Furthermore, commentary which does attend to this triad almost invariably consigns these speakers to the role of chorus or supporting cast to the brighter 'stars' whose narratives follow.

Whereas standard readings of the poem have tended to privilege one or more books as a location of truth, the dialogic model allows a re-examination of the poem as a progression of dramatic monologues without the need to privilege any particular speaker's word. As a modest first step in this enterprise, this thesis examines the opening triad for evidence of a struggle through language by the speakers, at both the personal and the political levels. Bakhtin would perhaps observe that this thesis, too, now joins the political struggle of language by

becoming a prior utterance that could influence future critical commentary of The Ring and the Book.

I am indebted to Warwick Slinn for his rigorous and provocative encouragement, to Michelle Dawson for acting as my interlocutor, and to my son Jacob for his support:

> A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces.
>
> V.N.Vološinov

CHAPTER ONE

The Personal Word and its Political Struggle

I

The Ring and the Book[1] consists of twelve separate poems spoken by ten narrators. Criticism has traditionally assumed the authority of the single, speaking (poetic) voice. For example, critics have usually described the first and final monologues as the voice of an over-arching narrator who functions as a surrounding frame for the ten remaining poems. Recent criticism still often follows this strong tradition by treating the speaker of Books I and XII as the voice of Robert Browning himself. J.J.Joyce writes:

> Books I and XII are a sort of "ring" of creative insight which encloses the other ten monologues. Browning's voice in these two books stands as authoritative in its pronouncements on the personalities, actions, and moral natures of the other nine speakers of the work.[2]

Dorothy Mermin goes further:

> Judgement is made easy: Browning tells us what to think of the characters before they say a word, and they are never allowed to mislead or confuse us.[3]

As recently as 1987 Paul Zietlow comments that, "for good reason, Browning is only half-playful in accusing the British public of liking him not (I.1379)."[4] It is tempting and it has been traditionally acceptable to link the contents of a poem with the context of the poet's life, and then to draw significance from the comparison. On the other hand, in rejection of this approach, New Criticism eschewed recourse to biography of the poet, or to the social condition at the time

of the work's production. According to John Crowe Ransom, critics should recognize "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake."[5]

This thesis does not subscribe to either of these extremes. Instead it investigates a theory of language which posits that all utterances--spoken or written, fictive or not--are inherently dialogical. Briefly, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism suggests that a word--any word--responds to prior utterance, and that each word in turn anticipates further response. Therefore the meaning of 'reality'--including the meaning of the very people involved in creating meaning--becomes a dynamic process of struggle. A word contests previous, present and possible future attempts at imbuing it with meaning, while simultaneously proposing its own 'truth'. This continual struggle is always carried out on the site of language, and at both the personal and political levels. Bakhtin's theory enables Browning's The Ring and the Book to be considered dialogically in relation to the poet himself, or in relation to any other relative factor, be it literary, social, or historical. This thesis uses the dialogic model, first, to observe how a selection of speakers construct their own selfhood through language, and secondly, to examine how those speakers employ the personal word to engage other discourses in political contest for ideological and hegemonic supremacy.

II

The dialogic model and the monologic model differ markedly in the authority each invests in the single, speaking voice. For example, traditional criticism has tended to privilege the author's and narrator's position when attempting to locate meaning or 'truth' within a text. Behind or within dramatic monologues an 'essential' meaning has traditionally been sought. By contrast, the dialogic model--in a manner similiar to post-structuralist models of criticism--locates meaning within the process of language itself. Rather than identifying an authoritative voice through which an essential meaning may be sought, dialogic criticism focuses instead upon the political activity of language through which narrators and even authors construct themselves, and through which meaning is generated.

Traditional criticism has generally been dismissive of the role of the auditor in dramatic monologues. In The Poetry of Experience, Robert Langbaum's seminal text on the dramatic monologue form, he writes:

> ...it makes so little difference, as long as the speaker's attention is directed outward, whether the dramatic monologue has or has not an ostensible auditor; for ultimately the speaker speaks to understand something about himself.[6]

A dialogic model on the other hand posits the auditor in a dramatic monologue as real, not ostensible, and as always present. However, there is no requirement for the auditor to be *physically* present at the narration, and she may even be notional. A redefinition will therefore be necessary, later in this chapter, of what a 'real' auditor is within a dialogic model.

The model also contests Langbaum's notions of the autonomy and essentialism of a speaker:

> Not only does the speaker direct his address outward as in dialogue but the style of address gives the effect of a closed circuit, with the speaker directing his address outwards in order that it may return with a meaning he was not aware of when sending it forth. I say a closed circuit because the utterance seems to be directed only obliquely at the ostensible auditor, and seems never to reach its ultimate goal with him. Nor does the essential interchange take place with the auditor; for even where the auditor's remarks are implied, the speaker never learns anything from them and they do not change the meaning of the utterance. If the speaker represents one voice of a dialogue, then his other self is the essential second voice in that it sends back his own voice with a difference. (Poetry of Experience 191)

Langbaum's monologic model assumes that the speaker is autonomous: the "essential interchange" takes place with an "essential second voice" which is "his

other self". Dialogism challenges the notion that there is an essential self. Rather, it posits that the self is in a constant process of construction, via language, through the other (the auditor). In a sense Langbaum does allow for this process--he simply regards it as a closed, circular process. Provided one remains within the boundaries of Langbaum's assumed subjectivity, his process remains valid, but it completely ignores the role of language, which is the basis of the dialogic model. Langbaum regards the other (the "essential second voice") as a mirror which leads back to the self--it is an image produced by the self, which is an idealist model. Elsewhere, he elaborates on this "closed circuit" paradigm:

> ...the speaker directs his address outward in order to address himself, and makes an objective discovery in order to discover himself. No matter how dramatic the dramatic monologue is, no matter how far outward it moves, its development is lyrical in that the speaker does not develop outwards towards an external ideal, he does not change moral direction as a result of the circumstances; he rather makes the circumstances a part of himself as he develops inwards towards an intenser manifestation of his own nature. (200)

Langbaum's position is 'essentialist' in that he subscribes to the long-standing Western philosophical belief in a fixed centre or essence to the self, whose discovery, according to the monologic model, the dramatic monologue facilitates. This essence is a transcendent truth, the search for which has become the prime objective of many critics and readers of dramatic monologues.

In applying this monologic model to The Ring and the Book, Langbaum claims:

> All the established institutions for distinguishing right from wrong– the law, the Church, the authority of parents and husbands–all have been either entirely wrong, or if partly right have still missed the main point, Pompilia's absolute goodness and Guido's badness." (113)

These 'essential' values--right and wrong, good and bad--are those of the individual self, including Langbaum's. He marginalizes the political truths within society through his model's failure to recognize that self and society are relative. An individual can locate personal 'truth' through and relative to the ideological discourse of external structures of society. The dialogic model returns politics to the arena of critical discussion, and examines the personal word in its political contest with the external discourses of society.

Recently critics have begun questioning the monologic model in various ways. For example, E.W.Slinn illustrates how attempts by so much established commentary to separate truth from falsehood involved or produced a separation of truth (transcendence) from language (medium).[7] He contrasts this with a post-structuralist approach which locates truth, not as a product, but "as process, truth in the making, and in that process truth is both subverted by language and produced by it" (Discourse of Self 123). He explains that the poem's multiplicity results in "only a series of texts which provide the contexts for each other's function and meaning." Rather than language revealing a hidden truth or meaning, "the poem presents truth and language as interdependent, as conceptual themes interwoven through dialectical process." Slinn includes the poet/speaker of Books I and XII of The Ring and the Book in this process, whom he distinguishes from "the biological referent Robert Browning". Slinn argues that the two books are not frames that sit *outside* the piece itself; rather, the poet/speaker, as with the other speakers, is "the produced subject of the language and contents" of his own speeches (128 and 204, n18). His challenge to the monological model underscores meaning as language process, and also reinforces the loss of singular authority in this process.[8] Similarly, A.Potkay observes that criticism of The Ring and the Book "with few exceptions, unites in assigning an infallible centre of authority to the poem." He notes of the twelve books that "no one interpretation ... can claim absolute validity or transparent truth."[9] This thesis, too, treats truth as a subordinate issue, not as unimportant to the poem, but as secondary to the process of language through which the speakers construct their realities and 'truths'.

Dialogism, as a theory of individual process, applies equally to fictive as

well as non-fictive discourse. For this reason application of dialogism to speakers within the frame of a book of dramatic monologues is not a special case, but is normative. The speakers within The Ring and the Book must define, present and re-present themselves, *vis-à-vis* other individuals and politically within society, through language. The process for each of them and for each of us is the same, and differs only in time and space. The dramatic monologues can thus be read and studied as complex dialogues. I restrict discussion in this study to three speakers within The Ring and the Book--Book II (Half-Rome), Book III (Other Half-Rome), and Book IV (Tertium Quid). Each speaker is examined, first, in terms of his construction of subjectivity through his personal word. However, as their names suggest, each speaker is also the sign for ideological forces of Roman society within The Ring and the Book. Dialogism posits that the personal word enters into political contest with other ideological discourses as individuals define their selves through the language of external social structures. Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid usefully illustrate the personal word struggling for ideological supremacy against and through hegemonic discourses. The more overt political roles of these three narratives reveal how individual discourses overlap with the wider social and institutional discourses.

Some commentators dismiss Books II, III, and IV as mere sideshows to the main action that is to follow, rather than as the process of language through which later speakers are being 'written'. J.J.Joyce, for example, attempts to impose musical form upon Books II-XI to prove that organizational structure exists. In contrast to Slinn, Joyce begins by claiming that "monologues I and XII stand apart from the other books in that the monologist in both these poems is the persona, Robert Browning quite obviously a speaker whose function contrasts with the other voices of Books II-XI."[10] Joyce writes:

> The Monologists of Books II, III, and IV ... and Books VII, IX, and X ... are outsiders, characters whose knowledge of the murders of the Comparini family is not first hand. They are apologists and interpreters, each in his own way a judge of events in which Guido, Caponsacchi, and Pompilia ... have been the actors. Each of the speakers in the first and third triads offers a

> verdict of some sort on the actions of the speakers of the central triad. (303)

Dialogism would suggest that Joyce is privileging essential "events" over society's ideological construction of them. The assumption is that the "actors" (in whose play is moot!) of his second "triad" are not affected in areas such as expectation, ideology, or language by the prior raging debate within Roman society. Further, Joyce implies that the subsequent third "triad" construct their narratives independently of the six previous semiotic constructions of reality. Dialogism contends that all twelve monologues are spoken by "actors" who in turn "judge", "interpret", and *construct* events through their personal and political use of language.

Books II, III and IV of The Ring and the Book provide useful test cases for the dialogic model. Almost all earlier criticism of this opening traid has been from the perspective of traditional models, hence the opening triad provides ample scope for critical re-appraisal using a different model. Furthermore, even within established criticism, the three opening speakers have generally been marginalised as supporting cast to the subsequent 'main characters' whose narratives even today occupy most scholarly attention. Yet behind dialogism stands the political implications and ramifications of prior utterance upon present and future speakers. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace possible impact or influence from the opening triad upon subsequent narratives in The Ring and the Book, but in keeping with the dialogic model, the possibility of such political struggle through language remains implied. The opening triad will be examined as merely three voices within the personal and political process of a chain of dialogic utterances that extends back before, and also beyond the boundaries of The Ring and the Book.

III

Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas can be traced back to his early immersion in the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, but he was not to embrace the Marburg

philosophy nor Kantianism wholeheartedly.[11] Bakhtin begins by accepting that there is an 'unbridgeable' gap between mind and world. Much of his life's work, especially in dialogism, focuses upon that gap. He neither dismisses the world in favour of only the mind, as did Hermann Cohen, leading exponent of the Marburg School. Nor does he consign the *Ding-an-sich* (thing-in-itself) concept to the realm of the eternally unknowable. For Bakhtin, the very capacity to have knowledge is based upon a process of dialogue; and, by definition, dialogue requires the existence of an other. However, the other always resides on the opposite side of the gap to the self.

Bakhtin's major premise is that "the organising centre of any utterance, of any experience, is not within but outside - in the social milieu surrounding the individual being."[12] This apparent denial of the subject is based on Bakhtin's belief that we can never see or know ourselves. Even to look at ourselves in a mirror is to look out from the mind, across a spatial gap at an object located in the outside world. We can see and know only of the other; only through the other's point of view can we gain some measure of apperception. This lack of knowledge about the self includes even our birth and death, and our physical presence at a given moment:

> My temporal and spatial boundaries are not given for me, but the other is entirely given. I enter into the spatial world, but the other has always resided in it.[13]

Everything that pertains to the individual's concept of self, beginning with gender and name, enters the consciousness through others, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality:

> I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words (an infinitely diverse reaction), beginning with my assimilation of them (in the process of initial mastery of speech) and ending with assimilation of the wealth of human culture (expressed in the word or in other semiotic materials).[14]

To express oneself is not merely a means to make oneself an object for another, but also for oneself (what Bakhtin calls "the actualizing of consciousness"). This rebuts any suggestion that the self is a copy or re-presentation of an other.

Bakhtin's paradigm of self and other has a further component--language itself. He writes:

> There are no "neutral" words and forms - words and forms that can belong to "no one"; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.[15]

For the individual consciousness, language lies on the borderline (or in the gap) between one's self and the other. Bakhtin's dialogism by definition requires that at all times there must be an other if the process of apperception is to occur. But the other has no greater transcendental control of her utterances than has the self. Michael Holquist argues that the western humanist tradition of a close bond being felt between the sense I have of myself as a unique being and the being of my language ("***I*** own meaning"), has an opposite in what he defines as the deconstructionist view ("***No one*** owns meaning"). He argues that dialogism holds a third position ("***We*** own meaning ... or ... if we do not own it, we may at least ***rent*** meaning").[16] Neither Holquist nor Bakhtin is suggesting that the *we* who own or rent the meaning are an accumulation; rather, their emphasis is upon the process. Dialogism's emphasis is upon the dynamic interaction between self and other, with the word as the ground of contention, the point of struggle, the mediation that is the battle.

The individual consciousness is neither an autonomous locus of meaning and identity, nor is it a passive receptacle capable of being "filled up" with the meaning and identity bestowed by *langue*. The individual consciousness is not even a hapless victim of colonisation by some hegemonic ideology of others: there always remains the privilege of psychosis. Individual consciousness gains a conception of its self through the perception of the other, but only via a shared reality conveyed through the dynamic of dialogic utterance. Utterance organises experience. It gives experience of the other--and through the other, the self--the form and specificity of direction necessary for an individual to function as such.

The word "interlocutor" is favoured in this study to describe the person being addressed. It is "one who takes part in a dialogue, conversation, or discussion".[17] The term auditor ("a hearer, listener; one of an audience") suggests a passive response to the speaker, while a dialogue requires an *active* addressee. Bakhtin defines passive response as that which has no effect whatever upon the utterance. Examples of this are rare: even an ancient ritualistic prayer (provided it can still be linguistically comprehended) is dialogic. The prayer would originally have been uttered to provoke a response among votaries, and may still trigger reactive utterances many centuries later. The speaker's need for an active participant as interlocutor is crucial to dialogism. This interlocutor need not be physically present, and may even be notional. It is this concept that prompted Holquist to insist that the plural *we* rent the meaning of language. In an interview Bakhtin explains:

> In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding--in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*.[18]

The question this raises is who 'understands'--the speaker or the interlocutor? Since neither stands outside the dialogue, it follows that neither fully understands.

According to Bakhtin, each listener can understand the speaker, but cannot understand her self when she speaks. Both parties of the dialogue are structured by the process; hence mutual understanding must always reside somewhere between them. Bakhtin is aware that this approach is contrary to the received romantic notion of language and speech:

> Language is regarded from the speaker's standpoint as if there were only *one* speaker who does not have any *necessary* relation to *other* participants in speech communication. If the role of the other is taken into account at all, it is the role of a listener, who understands the speaker only passively.[19]

Bakhtin argues that terms such as "listener" and "understander", when used merely as partners of the "speaker", are fictions "which produce a completely distorted idea of the complex and multifaceted process of active speech communication." He rails against the "unified flow" graphic-schematic depictions of the speaker and listener in speech communication.[20]

> The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active responsive attitude towards it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on.... Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. (Speech Genres 68)

Of course, Bakhtin allows for "responsive understanding with a delayed reaction [since] sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener" (69). For example, Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid each orientate their communication precisely towards such an actively responsive understanding, since each expects "response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth" (Speech Genres 69). In Other Half-Rome's case, the notional Guido of the concluding few lines is the internalised other of the speaker himself.

Bakhtin takes dialogue to its conclusion by casting the speaker in the role of respondent to some degree. She is not, he argues, the first speaker "who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe". Her role as respondent presupposes not only the existence of the language system she is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances--both by her and by others--with which her own utterances contend, build upon, or at least presume to be known to the interlocutor. Thus any utterance becomes a link in a complex network of utterances.

In looking at language, Bakhtin maintains that it is only during the process of creating an utterance that a word becomes a "spark of expression" (Speech Genres 86). That expression exists neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us. It is only in the act of utterance--"the contact between language meaning and the concrete reality"--then, that expression (self) is constituted.

> Thus, emotion, evaluation, and expression are foreign to the word of language and are born only in the process of its live usage in a concrete utterance. The meaning of a word in itself (unrelated to actual reality) is ... out of the range of emotion.... [Words] acquire their expressive colouring only in the utterance, and this colouring is independent of their meaning taken individually and abstractly. (Speech Genres 87)

Further, Bakhtin argues that when we construct an utterance, instead of taking words from the language in their dictionary form, we usually take them from other utterances. Thus we take words from *parole* rather than from *langue*. Therefore, according to Bakhtin, a word exists for a speaker in three ways. First, it is a neutral (dictionary) word in the language which belongs to nobody in which, according to Holquist, no one owns the meaning of the word. Secondly, the word exists as an *other's* word, belonging to another person and filled with echoes of the other's utterance. Thirdly, the word exists for a speaker as her own word, for, since she is dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it becomes associated (but not imbued) with her "spark of expression". In the latter two cases the word appears to be expressive, but this

expression does not adhere to the word itself. It is only within the utterance that there is expression. From this, Bakhtin concludes that:

> ...all our utterances (including creative works), [are] filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness', varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (Speech Genres 89)

The expressiveness of words--including 'our-own-ness'--does not issue directly from the language system (*langue*), but is rather an echo of another's individual expression, which makes the word representative of another's whole utterance from a particular evaluative or ideological position. In the case of Other Half-Rome, for instance, Count Guido does not have to be physically present to be the interlocutor; the speaker already contends with the interlocutor's evaluative position and hence is already engaging in a dialogue. Before Other Half-Rome spoke, utterance existed.

Utterance already exists with regard to the contents of each of Books II, III, and IV. The murders have already been subjected to societal and cultural assessment. Indeed, in ideological terms they had already been assessed before they occurred, or society would not have had the language with which to discuss them. Therefore, in this sense any utterance is a political re-assessment, as Bakhtin notes:

> The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time. (Speech Genres 93)

Half-Rome's opening line, "What, you, Sir, come too?" (II.1), is part of a greater dialogue. Half-Rome's speech is a rejoinder in a larger utterance of twelve books about the Roman murders. Thus from a reader's point of view, the "come to what" query implicit in Book II is part of a dialogue that began in Book I. Were

we to take Book II in isolation, the same argument holds, except that we readers would not yet understand to what Half-Rome was referring. The past participle "come" implies an auxiliary "have" which has been deleted. Coupled with the adverb "too", this question assumes prior knowledge. Both Half-Rome and his interlocutor have arrived at the Lorenzo Church as a result of prior common knowledge. Half-Rome's rejoinder is in response to a prior utterance that they both share. Half-Rome's sentence is an anaphoric reference to received knowledge prior to the dialogue between him and his interlocutor. Bakhtin would claim that it *must* be anaphoric, or the two could not communicate; indeed, it must always be anaphoric because all utterances have dialogic undertones, even if only at the level of *langue*.

In terms of the future, Half-Rome speaks in anticipation of an active response from the interlocutor. That response may be only an active responsive understanding, but nevertheless the interlocutor's activity will affect Half-Rome's narrative. Half-Rome serves notice in his first line that he has purpose in mind by parenthetically noting, "Just the man I'd meet". Although we do not know this till later, he veils a warning to his interlocutor shortly after when he refers to *Honoris causâ* as the reason for Violante's horrific wounds. Within a few lines of the beginning of Half-Rome's narrative, we have evidence that it refers backwards (Half-Rome intends actively reassessing and reinterpreting knowledge that both he and his interlocutor share) and it refers forwards (Half-Rome has persuasive designs over his interlocutor).

Other Half-Rome's interlocutor is, as we shall see in Chapter Three, marginalized to the point of near-invisibility. Even if we accept his physical presence, his role in Book III conforms to that of Other Half-Rome's internalised other. The interlocutor may be seen in the guise of the like-minded public of Other Half-Rome; Book III, therefore, assumes its identity as--simplistically--the voice of those who side with Pompilia. An argument against a dialogic reading of Book III would suggest that Other Half-Rome's speech is simply a monologue to confirm the speaker's thoughts and attitudes. Presumably, this entails Other Half-Rome *talking to himself*. But is this not tantamount to a dialogue between aspects of himself? Within his self he is divisible into speaker and interlocutor--

self and other. Furthermore, if attitudes are to be confirmed, they necessarily had to exist prior to the process of confirmation. Therefore they may be traced back to prior utterance. If the prior utterance was by Other Half-Rome himself at some earlier point, then a dialogue still exists between the present speaker and an earlier self. The Pope, for example, adopts this last dialogic process in Book X.

Alternatively, if Other Half-Rome is using the speech of Book III not to confirm existing attitudes but to persuade himself, then the utterance becomes *per se* a dialogue between contending voices within. Each "self" would then represent differing discourses drawn from within society, or from different temporal selves within his consciousness, and each would speak in that voice. In either of these apparently non-dialogic arguments, Other Half-Rome's utterance of Book III involves an internal debate whose conflict requires the existence of prior utterance and of competing selves. The voices of those in Book III who side with Pompilia against Guido, and whose utterances we detect as undertones to that of Other Half-Rome, may then be defined dialogically as the hegemonic inner sociality of the speaker.

IV

The dialogic model suggests that the most obvious struggle taking place at any given time in The Ring and the Book is at the level of the individual. This chapter argues that Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid engage in elaborate dialogues with interlocutors who are either present, or are notional, but are nonetheless equally 'real' in terms of dialogic effect. The dialogues are not of choice; they are necessary for consciousness to occur within each individual.

Thus far I have argued that the other is necessary for the self to construct a personal identity. To test this model, we need to ponder the consequences of a speaker who is not able to conduct a dialogue. Suppose a speaker were unable to locate an interlocutor on the literal level. Would it be likely (or even possible)

that she would also not be able to conjure up a notional partner capable of acting as interlocutor?

D.K.Danow, following Bakhtin, observes that a restriction of dialogic interaction "bears a certain tragic potential, borne out repeatedly in the linked realms of the personal and political, where violence as a response--verbal or otherwise--represents the negative correlative of dialogue."[21] Presumably, the frustrated and violent response of Guido represents the failure of an inner voice to engage in dialogue. Violence would then become his only means of communication. Bakhtin believes that it is an essential characteristic of the word (and human beings) to communicate:

> [It is] the nature of the word, which always wants to be *heard*, always seeks responsive understanding, and does not stop at *immediate* understanding but presses on further and further (indefinitely).[22]

This requirement to be heard is never more obvious than at the conclusion of Book XI, when "the word ... fears the third party [here, the Pope] and seeks only temporary recognition (responsive understanding of limited depth) from immediate addressees" (Speech Genres 127). But instead, Guido receives no response, and is driven to despair. He searches for any word "out of the world of words" (XI.2416) that will engage his interlocutors in dialogue, but without success. Bakhtin believes that an individual must be heard in order to exist. "*To be* means *to communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered."[23] Guido's babble becomes monologic as he desperately seeks recognition through others:

> I am yours,
> I am the Granduke's - no, I am the Pope's!
> Abate, - Cardinal, - Christ, - Maria, - God,...
> (XI.2422-24)

A dialogic reading suggests that it is at the ellipsis in line 2424 that Guido is

destroyed as a self. Bakhtin wrote that "for the word (and consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response*" (Speech Genres 127). The irony of Guido's concluding line--"Pompilia, will you let them murder me?" (XI.2425)--is, in fact, the establishment of dialogic relations between Guido and Pompilia, which is necessary for Guido's consciousness and identity. It is not relevant that the physical woman Pompilia is dead. In the absence of any response from the others to whom he directs his utterances, Guido constructs an internalised Pompilia who will respond as an *other* to his *self*. Even the signified God is no longer available to him as an other, presumably because of ideological restrictions placed upon Guido by a hegemonic inner sociality. His constructed Pompilia becomes active ("let"), and he has become dependent upon her. He defines his dependence through her. Guido has reconstructed himself through dialogic interaction with Pompilia.

We have observed the failure of the word to be heard, and the lengths an individual will go to receive recognition. Bakhtin was adamant on this point:

> A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate sphere of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone. (Dostoevsky 177)

Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome and Tertium Quid are no less affected by their process of construction of self through the other. None of the three faces the possibility of the gallows. Yet in dialogic terms, failure by them to be heard still represents a kind of death. Each attempts to constitute himself through language as an identity, and must contend with opposing voices and ideologies. If we read Books II, III, and IV in this manner, we see the texts not as reflections of the speakers' fixed characters, but as the process itself of character creation. Slinn argues that in reading monologues, we are required "to shift our focus, not to read language as an expression of a speaker's character, as a representation of belief, but to follow the processes by which a 'character' ... is constituted in language."[24]

This process of creation and presentation of self requires another, and the interlocutors of Books II, III, and IV fulfil this dialogic role for the speaker. "To be means to be for another and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*" (Dostoevsky 287).

V

Chapters Two, Three and Four each examine how the speakers of Books II, III, and IV attempt to construct themselves on a personal level *vis-à-vis* their interlocutors and through the personal word. However, taken within the context of The Ring and the Book, Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid compete for ideological supremacy. As their names suggest, they represent societal forces that are in constant hegemonic friction. Unless physical violence erupts, the battle is fought out at the site of language. Yet even when physical violence occurs--such as with the murder of the Comparini--comprehension, reaction and interpretation of the physical events can be made only through language. Living in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, Bakhtin made the same observation when he wrote that the "sign becomes an arena of the class struggle."[25]

The struggle for ideological dominance in Books II, III, and IV provides society with more than just a later received version of events. Subsequent speakers are in the process of being constructed through language. They will, in their turn, respond through language that has already been ideologically loaded, and they will speak as people who already have meaning. Hence, when Pompilia later speaks in Book VII, it is not as a *tabula rasa*. She has not literally heard Books II, III, and IV, but her speech contests politically the discourses of external structures which are ideologically opposed to hers. Pompilia is not a "blank page"[26] on which she writes her own 'truth'. Her personal word struggles politically through the medium of language which is already ideologically loaded, to establish her own version of reality relative to the anticipated ideological

positions of Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid. Therefore each chapter concludes by examining the personal word of the speakers for evidence of political struggle.

This study is distinctive in its examination of the political implications of the personal word. Established commentary on The Ring and the Book has generally been restricted to accounts of subjectivity. Dialogism provides a necessary and useful model with which to examine the individual's construction of selfhood. However, unlike the monological model, dialogism also allows the political element to be introduced. Examination of political struggle for meaning through language can be extended indefinitely. Critics may choose to include social, historical, biographical, and even academic politics against and through which the speakers of The Ring and the Book must struggle in their language. However, this more modest study restricts itself to the opening triad of speakers, and purports to highlight only a few major skirmishes in the politics of language. The word itself, according to Bakhtin,

> is neutral with respect to any specific ideological function. It can carry out ideological functions of *any* kind.... The reality of the word, as is true of any sign, resides between individuals.... (Marxism 14)

Hence, truth belongs to the realm of dialogue, and becomes itself contextual. On this basis we turn from truth to the language itself, and to the individuals who as signs themselves struggle for personal, ideological and political identity and supremacy in the arena of language.

Notes

1. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book (London: Penguin, 1971). All subsequent quotations from the poem in this thesis are taken from, or conform to, the Penguin Classics edition, reprinted 1990.

2. J.J.Joyce, "Music's Ternary Form as Organizing Principle for Monologues II-XI of Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*," Victorian Poetry 18 (1981): 302.

3. D.Mermin, The Audience in the Poem (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1983) 64.

4. P.Zietlow, "The Ascending Concerns of *The Ring and the Book*: Reality, Moral Vision, and Salvation," Studies in Philology 84.2 (1987): 202.

5. M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1981) 117.

6. R.Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: Norton, 1957) 190-91.

7. E.W.Slinn, The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry (London: MacMillan, 1991).

8. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but dialogism would have no difficulty responding to arguments relating to the authority or otherwise of Browning's (singular) voice in The Ring and the Book. Briefly, the argument would run that he was defining himself as a Victorian poet in anticipation of reaction from his "British public", and through the language of the times. Further, he was responding to the many different voices contained in the *Old Yellow Book* written in Italy about 170 years earlier. Within each of the *masks* that he donned to write each persona would be discerned the myriad of voices--social, literary, critical, historical--that makes up each dialogue between Browning and us. Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, which deals in great detail with the author-listener-hero dynamic in the novel, suggests a parallelism between literary character and real-life individual. Each must author her self in response to the authoring word of the social milieu, through the temporal and spatial context of language, and in anticipation of future utterance. The argument becomes circular: Browning as speaker becomes no more, no less a different and independent character in each of the 12 books, than if we begin with the premise that each speaker *is* an individual on whose conversation we eavesdrop. In other words, the lives of both Browning and the speakers in The Ring and the Book are texts responding in similar ways to language.

9. A.Potkay, "The Problem of Identity and the Grounds for Judgement in *The Ring and the Book*," Victorian Poetry 25 (1987): 143, 148.

10. "Music's Ternary Form...," 301-2.

11. Bakhtin's education and philosophical background is well documented in his biography: K.Clark and M.Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U.P., 1984). As a result of the critical acclaim that the translation of Rabelais and His World received in the West in 1968, other works by Bakhtin--dating in some cases back to the 1920s--were 'discovered' and progressively translated. Ironically, only then did he become generally known throughout the USSR too. Works of disputed authorship by Vološinov and

Medvedev are generally now either jointly attributed, or cited under the others' names as *noms de plume*. One major treatise on Goethe, similar to those on Rabelais and Dostoevsky, has been irretrievably lost: Bakhtin evidently used the unpublished manuscript for cigarette papers during one particularly harsh period of Stalinist exile. My understanding is that apart from minor essays and working notes, the bulk of Bakhtin's work is now available in English.

12. V.N.Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (New York: Seminar Press, 1973) 93.

13. M.M.Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 147.

14. Speech Genres 143.

15. M.M.Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 293.

16. M.Holquist, "The Politics of Representation," Allegory and Representation, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981) 163-4.

17. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). All subsequent definitions will be sourced in the text as SOED.

18. M.M.Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff", Speech Genres 7.

19. Speech Genres 67.

20. Bakhtin's theories anticipate contemporary research which questions the basis for traditional sender-receiver models of communication. See for example, Denis McQuail Mass Communication Theory (London: Sage, 1987).

21. D.K.Danow, The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin (London: Macmillan, 1991) 64.

22. Speech Genres 127.

23. M.M.Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 287.

24. E.W.Slinn, "Some Notes on Monologues as Speech Acts," Browning Society Notes 15.1 (1985): 8.

25. Marxism 23.

26. See Susan Gubar, '"The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity,' in Elizabeth Abel ed., Writing and Sexual Difference (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 73-93.

CHAPTER TWO

Half-Rome's Struggle with the Cousin

I

The title of Book II of The Ring and the Book announces that this narrative is not fully representative of Roman society. Half-Rome is a sign that acknowledges the necessity of a complementary other. The word "half" retains its oldest sense of "side" and of "one of two opposite, corresponding, or equal parts."[1] However, the book's title fails to indicate the terms on which a division is made.

On a personal level the sign Half-Rome refers to a speaker, the narrator of Book II. A person is normally considered to be 'whole' within herself even if the story she narrates is incomplete or one 'sided'. However, if the sign refers to her as a being, rather than to her narrative, then the possibility of human incompleteness cannot be discounted, however paradoxical this may first appear. In this chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism will be applied to Half-Rome the speaker to test how autonomous or complete he is. The issue is salient to our reading of Half-Rome as a sign struggling for self identity, both personally and politically, through the process of language.

The sense of "measurement of degree" adheres to the compound word of the signifier. Half-Rome is in the process of construction, "attaining only half-way to completeness" (SOED). This has implications if Book II is read in the context of The Ring and the Book. The discourses of future speakers (and of readers outside the boundary of the text) are being constructed, because Half-Rome is imbuing language with significance through his utterance. The narrative of Book II is Half-Rome's struggle for completeness.

On a political level, the sign suggests that its signified is not universal.

If the concept of a Half-Rome is to exist, there must also exist at least the possibility of an 'other' Half-Rome--one with a complementary, possibly competing, signified. Another task, therefore, is to examine Book II for evidence of differing or dissenting ideologies concealed within the discourse of a single speaker. This chapter will examine that struggle.

II

Bakhtin believes that all discourse is oriented towards a "responsive" understanding, that is, "every word is directed towards an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates."[2] Half-Rome's entire speech is constructed in this manner, beginning with his first pleased recognition of the interlocutor (II.1), through to his concluding advice to his interlocutor to warn his (the interlocutor's) cousin away from Half-Rome's wife (II.1545-7). Soon after they have viewed the bodies of the Comparini, Half-Rome asks his interlocutor if he holds Guido "so prodigiously to blame" (II.189). We don't need the rejoinder to be explicit, because the next question encapsulates the response: "A certain cousin of yours had told you so?" Again, the interlocutor's rejoinder to that second question need not be explicit in the light of Half-Rome's further response: "Exactly! Here's a friend shall set you right." This passage (II.189-91) illustrates the dialogic nature of Half-Rome's dramatic monologue. Half-Rome's comments cannot be interpreted except in the knowledge of his interlocutor's rejoinders. The passage gives us access to the struggle that has been occurring in the preceding 190 lines of Book II. The manner in which Half-Rome elicits the cousin's opinion about Guido's guilt suggests that Half-Rome has been aware throughout of the cousin's influence upon the interlocutor. It becomes clear that his discourse thus far has been contending with the cousin's (and hence the interlocutor's) probable point of view, as Bakhtin explains:

> Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, [Half-Rome's] word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word." (Dialogic Imagination 280)

Half-Rome's speech is political: it answers the prior word of the cousin, while at the same time it anticipates, and manoeuvres in order to dominate, the future responses of the interlocutor.

We are therefore led to suspect that the cousin plays a central role in Half-Rome's presentation of events, perhaps greater than that of the interlocutor himself. While Half-Rome continues to speak directly to the interlocutor, he is also 'speaking' to the cousin, and furthermore is responding to the prior utterance of the cousin. The cousin is the other through whom Half-Rome defines himself. However, it is not till almost halfway through Book II that Half-Rome openly reveals to his interlocutor that he is struggling with the cousin:

> ... since there's more to come,
> More that will shake your confidence in things
> Your cousin tells you, -- may I be so bold?
> (II.619-621)

Bakhtin calls this type of utterance a "hybrid construction". He writes in The Dialogic Imagination that the hybrid construction belongs,

> ... by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but ... actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems. (304)

The first phrase in Half-Rome's statement (above) is the authoritative speech of another, making a statement of an objective and completely indisputable fact--that further events happened. The second clause commences within the frame of that previously objective style by reiterating the word "more". But a totally different axiological conceptual system lies behind the second use of the word. The second statement conceals a change from a quantitative to a qualitative value judgement. Half-Rome submerges his own direct authorial discourse into the objective voice of common knowledge, and then puts the two together against the prior word of the cousin.

The shift in style in the final phrase is one of appearances only, and is designed to obscure the previous concealment even further. Half-Rome's final direct discourse provides a marked subjective challenge, which contrasts with the previous 'common view' (and his own voice merged within that general opinion). The question ("may I be so bold?") requires a direct response from the interlocutor, but it is a loaded question. The cousin's version is posited as the antithesis of the 'real' story–of which there is more to come. The interlocutor has little option but to request more of Half-Rome's version of the story. Dialogically, an affirmative response has been neatly anticipated by Half-Rome's clever prior utterance.

The passage also illustrates the way in which Half-Rome uses language in his struggle to define himself through the word of the cousin. Half-Rome has just previously asked the interlocutor, "Is this your view? 'Twas Guido's anyhow" (II.603). Half-Rome's struggle through the interlocutor with the cousin focuses on the word "anyhow". Guido and the cousin are posited as holding opposite personal ideologies. But Half-Rome has no direct access to them. At the literal level Guido is in prison and the interlocutor's cousin is ... who knows? perhaps singing and playing his lute about Half-Rome's house! (II.1545-6). But Half-Rome does have direct access to their discourses. He re-presents the word of Guido, through his own discourse, and contends this with the word of the cousin, via the word of the interlocutor, but again through his own discourse. Hence, Half-Rome constructs his self in response to the cousin's prior utterance, and in anticipation of the cousin's and the interlocutor's future utterance.

By the middle of Book II we are already far removed from Robert Langbaum's "closed circuit" paradigm regarding dramatic monologues, whereby "the utterance seems to be directed only obliquely at the ostensible auditor." Langbaum claims in The Poetry of Experience that "even where the auditor's remarks are implied, the speaker never learns anything from them and they do not change the meaning of the utterance."[3] This is in contrast with Half-Rome's attitude towards his interlocutor.

By halfway through his narrative, Half-Rome not only has "the handsel"

of his interlocutor's ear (II.192) but now makes "so bold" (II.621) as to relexicalise the interpretation of events. He uses theatrical metaphor ("this makes the first act in the farce" II.622) whose irony is really a multi-voiced utterance. Half-Rome trivializes the brutal murders as a form of comedy which "commonly employs highly exaggerated or caricatured character types".[4] If the interlocutor is to understand the metaphor, he has to recognize at least the possibility of the connotations: that Guido, Pompilia, *et al* are type-cast characters passively working within the parameters of their given roles; that events are somehow authored beyond their control, and that the story leads to a conclusion. As storyteller (or playwright) Half-Rome has presented the first act in this comedy of errors, complete with the necessary interpretation for his version of a correct comprehension. Even were the interlocutor to disagree with Half-Rome's interpretation (and we see no evidence of this in Book II) he must now allow for the possibility of Half-Rome's world view, if only by contradistinction to another less-accommodating stance (such as the cousin's probable version).

The ironic theatrical utterance also speaks with the voice of the Book I and XII narrator, who writes Half-Rome into a certain role within The Ring and the Book. This includes the naming of Half-Rome. Similarly, behind the narrator's voice may be heard Browning the poet, who in that line (II.622) ventriloquizes the language of theatre. And in the late twentieth century students write of the voices within that utterance, but accommodate them within the context of later utterances about Victorian poets, the post-Romantic subject, Bakhtin and dialogism, and so on. However, the process of attributing significance is not unilinear, beginning with Half-Rome and ending with whoever happens to be the latest reader. Bakhtin notes that,

> every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view."[5]

This suggests that not only is the interlocutor involved in the 'dialogue' with Half-Rome, but so are we--more than a century later. If this were not so, then Book II would indeed be a monologue--"speech that brooks no response"[6]--in the

negative sense of being closed and completed. Dialogism opposes the notion of closure. Half-Rome's construction of himself as an identity requires a continual dialogue with the interlocutor's cousin on the basis of prior utterance, and with any possible present or future 'listener'. I as writer of this thesis, and you as reader, have also assumed 'roles' in the 'act' which Half-Rome has theatrically re-presented. Paradoxically, to disagree with my arguments is to privilege and enter into a dialogue with prior voices: perhaps with critics such as Langbaum and Dorothy Mermin[7] (who themselves anticipated a range of responses while constructing their positions); or perhaps directly with Half-Rome himself.

The other aspect of Langbaum's claim, that the 'implied' auditor's remarks "do not change the meaning of the utterance" is also contestable. However, I shall not revisit arguments by others against Langbaum's idealist belief in a fixed meaning, his privileging of transcendent 'truth' in The Ring and the Book.[8] Langbaum perceives discourse in The Ring and the Book as monologic--fixed and complete. Bakhtin sees any discourse as "directed both towards the referential object of speech ... and towards *another's discourse*, towards *someone else's speech*" (Dostoevsky 185). Bakhtin writes that,

> ...every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed towards its referential object, clashes with another's word within the very object itself. The other's discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another's implied words. (195)

Bakhtin's belief goes further than merely refuting Langbaum's claim about the auditor's remarks not changing the meaning of the utterance: dialogism suggests that through the interlocutor Half-Rome *creates* his meaning.

Half-Rome anticipates the points of view not only of his interlocutor, but of us as well, otherwise the book could hold little meaning for us. Bakhtin

believes that "a *passive* understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all" (Dialogic Imagination 281, emphasis added), that even a passive understanding of the speaker's intentions contributes nothing new to the word. Such an understanding "never goes beyond the boundaries of the word's context and in no way enriches the word" (281). In contrast, Bakhtin defines understanding as active:

> It assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. (282)

As we have already seen, Half-Rome's narrative is not only for the benefit of his interlocutor, but is also a response to the prior utterance of the interlocutor's cousin. The only way Half-Rome can comprehend the cousin's point of view is through the form in which he fashions his monologue of a dialogic exchange with the interlocutor. In examining the problem of understanding, Bakhtin notes that "understanding strives to match the speaker's word with a counter word."[9] In this sense the cousin is the speaker, who Half-Rome is striving to understand and counter, and he attains this understanding through the interlocutor. Contrary to Langbaum's statement, then, Half-Rome is continually learning via the response of his interlocutor, and as a result of this dialogic process, he constructs the meaning of utterance and point of view.

Half-Rome's speech reveals clues of his constant checking and reviewing of the interlocutor's beliefs. He deliberately sets out to "shake" the interlocutor's confidence in the cousin's version of events. However, Half-Rome's uncertainty of progress and need for response is most obviously seen in his asides. These are sometimes direct questions to the interlocutor ("Is this your view?" II.603) behind which we see Half-Rome gauging the position of the cousin's prior utterance. From the response he receives, Half-Rome then constructs his own response, and in doing so positions and constructs his own self.

III

Many of the verbal strategies we have examined which Half-Rome uses to produce a self through the other, also double as political weapons with which to attack his interlocutor's ideological construction of society. For example, the speaker uses verbal asides that are damning ("Have not you too a cousin that's a wag?" II.937). On the personal level, Half-Rome constructs himself in contradistinction to the cousin. Like Guido, Half-Rome too has the responsibility of keeping a wife and a household. And like Guido, Half-Rome can ill-afford to have anyone disrupt his domestic situation through pranks. The anyone is specifically the cousin, against whom Half-Rome constructs himself. He therefore launches a direct attack on the character and credibility of the other 'speaker'--the cousin--who competes for the interlocutor's *Weltbild*. The interlocutor is caught between the ideological constructs of the cousin and of Half-Rome.

From the beginning, Half-Rome has struggled as a representative of ideological forces within society in constant hegemonic friction with other forces. Half-Rome is extremely pleased to meet his interlocutor near the Lorenzo Church, where the bodies of the Comparini are displayed. "Be ruled by me," he tells his listener, and "I'll tell you like a book." (II.2,4) Clearly, Half-Rome intends reconstructing events using his own language and is conscious of his intentions upon the other, as he notes in parenthetical asides: "Just the man I'd meet" and "The right man, and I hold him." (II.1,16)

What is not yet obvious to us from the opening paragraph is why Half-Rome is keen to manipulate his interlocutor's point of view, nor what the political implications of this ideological conflict will be. Half-Rome uses the argument of *honoris causâ* to underpin ideologically his arguments. He says of Violante's wounds to the face:

> ... punished thus solely for honour's sake,
> *Honoris causâ*, that's the proper term.
>
> (II.28-29)

Half-Rome describes the stabbings as punishments, which is to bring the act, through discourse, within the realm of civilized and rational behaviour. Authority punishes wrong-doers, with what it has deemed to be justification after provocation. By labelling Violante's wounds as punishment, Half-Rome yokes her actions (whatever they may have been) to the notion of transgression. Half-Rome interprets and categorises Violante's actions for his interlocutor before he details them. This act predisposes his interlocutor to interpret them within Half-Rome's ideological belief system, and to excuse Guido his actions before learning of his motivations. The punishment, Half-Rome says, was done for "honour's sake". By using a Latin legal label, he draws the motive for Guido's acts of violence within the realm of legal discourse which is hegemonic. Half-Rome hopes that if *honoris causâ* can become a motive for the violence recognizable by its "proper term" (II.29), the murders might gain a degree of social sanction. For Guido's actions to have a grandiose legal nomenclature is to suggest that they are not comparable to common murder. Half-Rome constructs events in language that privileges and naturalises certain meanings (or potential meanings), while at the same time closing off other sets of meanings.

As a sign for an ideological force within Roman society, Half-Rome has implied within the signifier the possibility of 'other' ideological forces. The speaker is quite open about this. For instance, he states:

> Now, am I fair or no
> In what I utter? Do I state the facts,
> Having forechosen a side? I promised you!
> (II.1213-15)

He uses the word "side" which is the oldest sense of "half" and which in most cases still retains a sense of being one of two portions of a whole (SOED). As we will see later in this chapter, Half-Rome is not above deliberate verbal deceit. Yet he innocently protests about not having pre-elected an ideological stance--itself a political ploy--or then of selecting the facts to suit. He even concludes with a promise to his interlocutor. If Half-Rome is read as an ideological 'side' to Roman society, on what philosophical grounds can his ideological position be

privileged over the 'other side'--or *vice versa*? We should be mindful of the speaker of Book One's warning:

> 'T is there--
> The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
> Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look.
> (I.862-4)

Rather than try to "fix/Truth at the bottom" (I.857-8) with regard to Half-Rome's ideologies, we are better served in seeing him as a signified in the process of being defined. The production of that ideological identity takes place dialogically against that of the other, which in this case is not necessarily commensurate with the voice and person of the cousin.

Dialogically, Half-Rome also competes against the anticipated word of Other Half-Rome. Half-Rome has not "forechosen a side" (II.1215); he *is* that side. He is the sign for the axiological belief system which encompasses Guido, the speaker, and--if the speaker's rhetoric is ultimately successful--his interlocutor as well. Behind the personal struggle for recognition by the speaker, the interlocutor and his cousin, lurk the ideological forces of Roman society in combat for hegemonic dominance.

IV

On a different level, Half-Rome attempts to construct a received version of events for future speakers and for history. When Half-Rome introduces the cardinal into his narrative, he first tempts his interlocutor by avoiding the facts: "I name no names" (II.153). The interlocutor is forced by this manoeuvre to seek elucidation. Half-Rome then yokes the cardinal and Guido together in two ways: Guido previously served the cardinal, who in turn *married* Guido to Pompilia (II.155-6). When his interlocutor expresses disbelief at this, we hear Half-Rome's parenthetical response ("Will you have the truth?" II.157). The interlocutor has been set up to seek the details, and when he expresses surprise

at some of them, Half-Rome responds, by retorting in effect, *'Well you asked for details. Do you or don't you want them?'* Naturally, what the interlocutor is hearing from Half-Rome is not commensurate with what he had earlier heard generally, or from his cousin.

This dialogic explanation is more convincing than the footnote to the Penguin edition of The Ring and the Book, (p.646) which claims that "'Guido' (line 156) is Browning's error for 'Paolo'." Why then would the interlocutor express such surprise at the information as to require Half-Rome to interrupt his narrative and deliver his parenthetical challenge? Rather, any confusion between Guido and Paolo is a deliberate lie on the part of Half-Rome to confuse and persuade his listener. This argument gains further credibility if taken in context with another deliberate lie a few lines later. Half-Rome first introduces Curate Carlo into the story, a "brisk lad" with a reputation for embellishment. Half-Rome then reports what he expected Carlo to tell the cardinal by way of "improving the event": Pompilia's confession, and Caponsacchi's punishment, complete with imagery of Lucifer, Eve, and Adam (Guido) (II.159-169).

The fictive speech by Carlo is a variation on what Bakhtin calls "pseudo-objective motivation". Normally in this form, the logic motivating the sentence seems to belong to the author of the narrative, "but in actual fact, the motivation lies within the subjective belief system of his characters, or of general opinion" (Dialogic Imagination 305). Half-Rome inverts the form in an attempt to conceal his own speech behind another's. He constructs Carlo as a character in his own narrative, and gives that character objective motivation to speak. The interlocutor apparently hears the objective beliefs of the referent Carlo, and perhaps generally held public opinion; what he actually receives is the concealed voice of Half-Rome.

By the time Half-Rome reports that Carlo did not actually say these things, damage has already been done. The possibility of them has been actualised. The "fancy" has become "just one fact the more" and Pompilia and Caponsacchi have been "charactered" by the words of Carlo as ventriloquized by Half-Rome. Half-Rome even gives the events a further twist by insinuating that by *not* saying these

things Carlo was behaving suspiciously:

> Too wary, he was, too widely awake, I trow.
> .....
> Oh but he's quick, the Curate, minds his game!
> (II.172, 181)

It is not Carlo, but Half-Rome who gives "history's self some help" (II.162), especially when he slips a deliberate and blatant lie into the summary of events attributed to Carlo. As we saw a few lines earlier when Half-Rome deliberately confused Paolo with Guido and then hastily bluffed with a parenthetical aside, he does the same with his second lie. He mentions the "wife's confession" (II.163) and then boldly elaborates to the interlocutor:

> (This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
> (II.164)

The lie is footnoted (p.646) which ponderously explains that it is "groundless rumour", that in her confession Pompilia "declares herself innocent". Such explanation, while technically correct, is to miss the point. It ignores the extent to which Half-Rome will go to attack the interlocutor's and his cousin's constructions of events. We have not yet learnt why Half-Rome is making such a savage attempt at dominating the opposing voice which both is, and speaks through, the interlocutor. But this passage alone suggests that for Half-Rome the need to dominate is paramount; dialogism would suggest that his survival as a self is at stake.

Politically, Half-Rome is attempting to formalize the received version of events. If Pompilia's "confession" (II.164) can become a popular rumour throughout Rome, then the orientation of future speakers is influenced. Other Half-Rome might protest her innocence in Book III, and Pompilia's own narrative of Book VII would deny culpability, but the reception of these narratives will already be predisposed to alternative interpretations. In this respect, Half-Rome does not always have to convince future listeners of the "truth" of his assertions.

If he voices an alternative significance, his discourse has actualized its possibility. Language then has within it the possibility of Half-Rome's alternative, and future speakers must contend with that significance within their discourses. As Book One's speaker dryly asks:

> Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
> Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
> (I.704-5)

V

Bakhtin argues that for an individual a sign can have no meaning; rather, meaning is a creation between individuals, or within a social milieu. Having acquired social value, the word carries that significance back to the individual consciousness which assimilates it (Marxism 22).

For Half-Rome the word is heavily invested with the social value of patriarchal power. His identity as a self is through patriarchal discourse, which privileges male social dominance. Not unexpectedly then, Half-Rome constructs events in favour of male initiative or, where males have obviously blundered, in terms of female manipulation. Hence while Pietro is "the old murdered fool" (II.21), nevertheless "it was Violante gave the first offence" (II.34). Half-Rome constructs Pietro as yet another victim of Violante. It was she "who purchased [Pompilia] simply to palm on him" (II.57); it was "she, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot/Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife" (II.66-7) and,

> ...when her husband must be told in turn,
> Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
> And, alternating worry with quiet qualm,
> Bravado with submissiveness, quick fool
> Her Pietro into patience: so it proved.
> (II.74-8)

Half-Rome's language must overcome the discourse of women if he is to maintain his identity. Violante's contending ideology is trivialized as the "wife's trade" and the "sex's trick" which is to contain and marginalize it. Her 'devious' activities are condescendingly relexicalized as natural to her role as wife and to her identity as female, and in addition are universalized as to be expected of all women (*the* wife's trade and *the* sex's trick). To crown his ideological construction, Half-Rome equates the Comparini murders with divine justice--"Even the blind can see a providence here" (II.87)--which naturalizes and authenticates his patriarchal ideology.

Half-Rome produces and sustains the authority of his patriarchal identity by recourse to hegemonic discourse. By invoking *honoris causâ* he confronts alternative and competing discourses with the closed or monologic word of authority--in Bakhtinian terms, discourse that brooks no response. In the very act of utterance the centripetal forces of official language which Half-Rome invokes compete with centrifigual forces of decentralization and disunification (Dialogic Imagination 268-71), thus belying Half-Rome's attempts at monologism. The defence of honour is hegemonic discourse, appropriated by Half-Rome as his personal word, and then propelled forward into the political arena of other ideologies and discourses.

Half-Rome's self is as much at stake on this political level as it was on the personal level previously discussed when his self was in contention with the interlocutor and the cousin. Half-Rome identifies himself through the external structure and discourse of patriarchy. But if the cousin succeeds in cuckolding him, his masculine power and authority of being able to control his wife will be destroyed. Hence Half-Rome struggles against *any* discourse that threatens his.

However foolish Pietro and, later, Guido may have been, of greater importance to Half-Rome is the essential issue of wifely obedience. He attempts to reinforce that essence by linking Guido, Pompilia and Caponsacchi respectively to Adam, Eve and Lucifer through simile and metaphor (II.167-9). The use of these figures reinforces Half-Rome's patriarchally based discourse, which privileges his male dominance over that of the deceiving and luring wife. By

extension, Half-Rome himself becomes an Adam who could fall through the evil actions of the Lucifer-cousin. If the interlocutor accepts this connexion, he cannot escape finding himself between the ideological positions of Adam (Half-Rome) and Lucifer (his cousin). Half-Rome's discourse appropriates the ideology of Christian orthodoxy in its struggle against the competing discourse of the cousin. Nowhere in this contest is a female discourse given credence; in Book Two it is subsumed.

Half-Rome extends the Biblical metaphor to include Violante and Pietro too. In the Bible (Genesis III.16-17) God charges Adam with ruling over Eve because of her disobedience, and also punishes Adam for listening to his wife in the first place. In Half-Rome's adaptation, Violante's first "trick" is procuring Pompilia. Violante then performs a second "trick" of arranging the marriage of Pompilia to Guido,

> ...lest Eve's rule decline
> Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
> Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise
> (II.253-5)

Violante's actions, which include showing initiative and making financial preparations for the couple's final years, are ideologically denaturalized by being described as a rule by Eve over Adam. Pietro, also, is made culpable for not restricting his wife to her proper role. In consequence, his cabbage-plot (Garden of Eden) is now only a fools'-paradise, insinuating the transitory state of his fanciful happiness as punishment for his sin. This metaphoric attack on Violante and Pietro serves not only to destroy the credibility of women who exceed their proper role, but it reinforces the ideology of patriarchy through scriptural authority. If Half-Rome's interlocutor disagrees with the word of Half-Rome, he must also contest the hegemonic discourses of patriarchy and scripture as well. Conversely, to accept Half-Rome's construction of events is to cast Violante--and by extrapolation, Pompilia --in the mould of Biblical deceiver and beguiler at very least. In either case, the contending social discourse of the women has been successfully marginalized.

The political contest occuring in Half-Rome's narrative also involves what Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin describes how the carnival,

> celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.[10]

It is "during Carnival that's near" (II.1543) that Half-Rome most fears being cuckolded by the interlocutor's cousin. During this season of festivity, which immediately precedes the high seriousness of Lent, Half-Rome expects that his patriarchal authority will be threatened. His narrative is a dramatic attempt to establish and assert sufficient dominance through discourse so that his authority may withstand the pressures of other discourses. On the literal level this requires that Half-Rome's wife be 'ruled' by his word, and that the cousin fear his patriarchal ideology of *honoris causâ* suffiently to leave his wife alone. Politically, Half-Rome fights to maintain the hegemony of his ideological discourse over that of others which will contend during the disruptive carnival.

The suspension at both the real and the ideal levels of hierarchical rank during carnival time is what, according to Bakhtin, led to,

> the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. (Rabelais 10)

This "special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression" (10) lies dialogically behind the personal word as political contest in The Ring and the Book. Bakhtin's carnivalesque brings together the carnival and the fair (or market-place), and places them in political opposition to an existing hierarchy. He posits laughter as a sign of the carnivalesque. Half-Rome's narrative supports the hypothesis that laughter is a sign of political struggle.

When Half-Rome explains that Violante confessed to having purchased Pompilia, he observes that Guido was ridiculed:

> Guido, thus made a laughing-stock abroad,
> A proverb for the market-place at home
> (II.625-6)

Half-Rome brings together laughter, the market-place, and the Church's "short Shrift"--this last being a "boon" by the Pope to mark his eightieth birthday (II.539-41). The laughter underscores the mob's voice in a *cause célèbre* of the aristocracy.

By becoming a "laughing-stock" and a "proverb," Count Guido Franceschini is being laughed at, not by an individual, but by all the people of the market-place. The lower classes are rebelling against aristocracy in the only manner open to them short of formal public protest and civil disobedience. The laughter makes a parody of the Pope's favour upon his flock to mark his jubilee, especially since a member of the aristocracy is among those who fall victim to his beneficence. The laughter is directed at all of the carnival's participants, including the lower classes. The upwardly mobile Comparini, and their daughter Pompilia of "the deepest of our social dregs" (II.560) all tumble from the dreams and aspirations that accompany lower classes who marry into the upper echelons of society. As Bakhtin asserts, the laughter is gay and triumphant and at the same time mocking and deriding. And it is directed at everyone, including the carnival's participants (Rabelais 11-12).

Finally, the incident is lexicalized by Half-Rome as "the first act of the farce" (II.622). Guido's marriage and Pompilia's origins are presented as a carnivalesque morality play, whose 'moral' can be interpreted according to a market-place 'non-official framework' as well as from the ideological framework of hegemonic powers within the Church and the aristocracy. Half-Rome's role is as reminiscent of a narrator within a pageant, as it is of a speaker without. Hence, within Half-Rome's narrative, patriarchal discourse struggles with the voice of the market-place mob which transgresses the boundaries between them and the aristocracy with their laughter.

The importance of the approaching carnival to Half-Rome is indicated by a further reference he makes to it in connexion with Caponsacchi, who is invoked as:

> The hero of the adventure, who so fit
> To tell it in the coming Carnival?
> (II.1452-3)

Caponsacchi is what Susan Blalock calls the dandified St. George's Day parody hero, replete with cavalier costume and sword, who in fact is rescued by Pompilia.[11] Here, Half-Rome touts him as a troubadour who will entertain the crowds:

> 'Twill make the fortune of whate're saloon
> Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye
> Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
> The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
> Capture, with hints of kisses all between -
> (1454-8)

Half-Rome's "hints of kisses" is suggestive of what Bakhtin terms "grotesque" aspects of the body--the "lower stratum" concerned with naturalistic images as opposed to the "higher stratum" of cosmic and heavenly elements (Rabelais 18-27). While the link between kisses and, for example, the rebirthing process of copulation and pregnancy, may seem tenuous on the strength of a single reference, it gains credibility given Pompilia's pregnancy, and the way Caponsacchi has been portrayed by Half-Rome as more than just a 'courtly' lover. Caponsacchi is presented as a troubadour in the context of the cyclic festival of Carnival. Half-Rome attempts to classify Caponsacchi's discourse as emanating from the lower stratum in contrast to his own higher, and consequently authoritative, discourse. Additionally, by associating the priest Caponsacchi with the carnival, Half-Rome's discourse is a veiled attack upon the Church.

Half-Rome's previously mentioned reference to "Carnival that's near"

(II.1543) occurs a mere five lines from Book Two's conclusion. In the most direct and unmistakable manner of the book, Half-Rome tells the interlocutor to warn off the cousin from wooing Half-Rome's wife:

> A certain what's-his-name and jackanapes
> Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
> About a house here, where I keep a wife.
> (II.1544-6)

An irresistible parallel exists between Caponsacchi the "courtly Christian" (II.791) who 'cuckolded' Guido (II.890)--"What harm in Carnival?" Half-Rome ironically asks (II.802)--and the minstrel cousin "with lute and song" (II.1545) who currently haunts Half-Rome's house just before the next carnival.[12] In both cases officially sanctioned patriarchy is threatened by the transgressing and sensual discourse of the carnivalesque. As with Guido, Pompilia and Caponsacchi during the previous carnival, this forthcoming carnival will be the spatio-temporal site of conflict between the contending ideologies of Half-Rome and the interlocutor's cousin.

Book II is a conflict between Half-Rome and the cousin, and is fought out for dominance of the interlocutor and control of Half-Rome's wife whom the cousin is wooing. On a personal level, Half-Rome develops a concept of his self through his struggle with the cousin as dialogical other. Meanwhile, Half-Rome as sign for the ideological forces within society is an area of struggle whose rebuttal we witness in Book III. Finally, Half-Rome is a sign whose significance is in the process of construction. He writes not only this story, but imbues the language of future utterance with possibility. He also constructs us as readers. Henceforth, as we read on in The Ring and the Book, we too will engage in constant dialogic struggle with the prior word of Half-Rome.

Notes

1. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). All subsequent definitions will be sourced in the text as SOED.

2. M.M.Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 280.

3. R.Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: Norton, 1963) 190-91.

4. M.H.Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 4th ed., 1981).

5. M.M.Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 196.

6. A.Shukman, ed., Bakhtin School Papers (Oxford: RPT Publications, 1983), 154.

7. D.M. Mermin, "Speaker and Auditor in Browning's Dramatic Monologues," University of Toronto Quarterly 45 (1976): 138-57.

8. See, for example, articles by Potkay (1987) and Slinn (1989) cited in Chapter One.

9. V.N.Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1973) 102.

10. M.M.Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 10.

11. S.Blalock, 'Browning's *The Ring and the Book*: "A Novel Country",' Browning Institute Studies, 11 (1983): 46.

12. E.W.Slinn, in The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry (London: MacMillan, 1991) 176, n.18 observes that like Half-Rome, "Guido himself is desperately afraid of cuckoldry - see XI.897-919."

CHAPTER THREE

Other Half-Rome's Identification with Guido

I

Book Three's title, Other Half-Rome, encourages readers to treat the poem as a 'mirror' of Book Two. Half-Rome was seen as expressing sympathy for Guido's predicament, and now Other Half-Rome is perceived as favouring Pompilia's interpretation of events. Readers are tempted to read the pair as the 'two sides' of the story. Instead, this chapter explores the multiple stories contained within the speaker's narrative, and also it examines the political struggle between his discourse and the polyphony of other discourses he encounters. Book III is at once Other Half-Rome's story, and the story of the speaker himself.

Book Three differs markedly from either Book Two or Book Four in a dialogically significant manner. Unlike the other two, which have easily identifiable interlocutors, Other Half-Rome provides little evidence of an auditor present at the telling. If there is an interlocutor who is physically present, he is marginalised to the point of near-invisibility. This chapter reviews the evidence for an interlocutor's presence, and suggests that even if a listener is present, he may not in fact be fulfilling the role of other during Other Half-Rome's process of construction of self, or during his political contest with other discourses.

II

The final twenty-one lines of Book III would appear to be a direct address by Other Half-Rome to Guido. However, since Guido is known to be incarcerated at this time, he is regarded by most critics as a notional interlocutor. This final passage includes one of the book's four vocatives to an interlocutor ("Sir" III.1687). This final passage will be examined in detail in Part III of this chapter, along with dissenting interpretations.

Of the other three times that Half-Rome addresses a "Sir", the first does not occur until almost halfway through the book:

> As it had been just so much Hebrew, Sir:
> For why? (III.754-5)

This was revised in the edition of the *Poetical Works*, of 1888-89, as follows:

> As if it had been just so much Chinese.
> For why?

The removal of the first vocative leaves just two other instances, which do not appear until the final four-fifths of the poem (at III.1335 and 1411). The deletion of the first "Sir" for the later edition further obscures the already slight presence of an interlocutor in the narrative, and suggests Browning's desire to minimise attention to the speaker's interlocutor. Yet, by not deleting the other two direct addresses, Browning leaves open the possibility of various interpretations. C.S.Finley, for example, finds a degree of fault with Browning:

> I cannot help believing that Browning's revision was somewhat unthinking and resulted partly from his own uncertainty about this monologue. I suspect the poet felt that "The Other Half-Rome" was no "fancy-fit," but he was unable or unwilling to revise the poem to make it bear out more clearly the poet-speaker's preview in Book I. As it stands, he made a few revisions that do not serve to further dramatize the limitations of the speaker."[1]

Finley believes that the deletion of the first vocative removes the key to the sense of involvement various pronoun references have with an auditor at that point of the narrative. He observes that within a hundred and forty lines of the first vocative, "Other Half-Rome includes his listener in his discourse a total of thirteen times either by 'you,' 'we,' or 'us'" (132). The narrative at that part of Book III questions the motives of Caponsacchi's actions. The inclusion of the 'Sir' in the first edition, according to Finley, "dynamically involves [Other Half-

Rome's] auditor in the questioning. The question 'For why?' seems immediately addressed to the listener." Yet in the revision, the pronouns have "no definite relationship to an auditor." Application of dialogism would provide Finley with a different conclusion. He would be required to search beneath the surface of Other Half-Rome's utterance for a subsumed auditor, through whom Other Half-Rome was constructing his sense of self. This in turn would force Finley to question whether Book III was really about Other Half-Rome after all, rather than about Pompilia *et al.*

Admittedly, a dialogical analysis of Book III would have been simpler and tidier had Browning revised all three vocatives out of the poem for the 1888-89 edition, instead of removing merely the first. Those speculative circumstances would have clearly illustrated that a speaker need not have an interlocutor physically present to still engage in dialogue, as is illustrated by the Pope in Book X. The profusion of pronouns would have underscored the dialogic nature of the 'monologue'. Yet, finally, by deleting only the first direct address, Browning does not negate this argument. Dialogically, it matters little whether an interlocutor is physically present or not. If one is not, a speaker will soon conjure one up. In Book III of either edition, the interlocutor's physical presence is so muted that his disclosure is deeply subsumed within the voice of Other Half-Rome.

The interlocutor--whether or not physically present--is so dominated by the voice of Other Half-Rome as to have confused and misled some critics about his role or even his existence. For example, R.D.Altick and J.F.Loucks claim that Other Half-Rome,

> ...appears to have no specific and constant auditor, and may be considered as delivering for the most part a long speech to an indeterminate audience, which is occasionally appealed to directly.... But the evidence is uncertain. The allusions to 'you' ... and 'we' ... suggest the presence of an auditor. The pronouns, however, may simply represent the Other Half-Rome's rhetorical habit.[2]

By contrast, Mary Sullivan suggests "that it is addressed to an audience of one rather than to a group and that the one is probably a friend, since the speaker makes little attempt to attract or hold his attention, instead seeming to feel sure of a sympathetic response."[3]

The physical presence of an interlocutor at Other Half-Rome's telling cannot be discounted, if only because of the three direct addresses. Yet, because the interlocutor is so marginalised and absorbed within the discourse of Other Half-Rome, his ideological position can be fixed only approximately through Other Half-Rome's own dialogical positioning. Under these circumstances there are good grounds for treating the interlocutor of Book III as though he were notional--that is, as a social construct by Other Half-Rome to meet his need for an other through which to construct himself. Browning's removal of the first "Sir" in the final revision reinforces this approach by further obscuring the interlocutor's physical presence. However, it is fundamental to dialogism that the interlocutor's *importance* remains paramount to Other Half-Rome's construction of reality irrespective of whether he is physically present, is an indeterminate audience, or is notional. Meanwhile, it is necessary to return to the other notional interlocutor of the poem--Guido--who also causes problems for some critics.

III

Dialogism assists in clarifying the role, and presence (or absence) of people other than the speaker in dialogues and even in monologues. This is particularly the case at the conclusion of Book III of The Ring and the Book, which has been interpreted quite extremely in some cases.

The concluding twenty-one lines are regarded by most critics as being an address by Other Half-Rome directly to Guido, and not to the interlocutor (present or notional) of the preceding 1673 lines of the poem. In the final passage, according to Altick and Loucks, Other Half-Rome reveals that:

> like his predecessor [i.e. Half-Rome], he is interested personally in the case, not because it happens to mirror his own situation--it obviously does not--but because he is nursing a long-standing grievance against the accused himself. He cannot forgive an insult ... by Guido, who was co-heir of an estate administered by the speaker. Guido's objection to the Other Half-Rome's performance of that trust has become a stain upon his honour fully as malign as that which Half-Rome has represented Guido to have suffered through his wife's elopement with the priest. (Roman Murder Story 43)

Dialogically, it is irrelevant that Other Half-Rome's narrative has been "another sample-speech i' the market-place/o' the Barberini by the Capucins" (I.896-7) while Guido has been incarcerated in "that New Prison by Castle Angelo/At the bridge-foot" (I.1284-5). Hitherto, Other Half-Rome's speech has been "an apparently judicious weighing of evidence on both sides" (Roman Murder Story 42) which finally breaks down into a voice of passionate outrage:

> That were too temptingly commodious, Count!
>
> (III.1674)

His previous "judicious temper" (42) was bound to break down eventually, to reveal Other Half-Rome's deepest feelings about Guido, because it is through Guido that Other Half-Rome defines himself. Bakhtin writes:

> It is only in the other human being, in fact, that a living, aesthetically (and ethically) convincing experience of human finitude is given to me.... [The] body is not something self-sufficient: it needs the *other*, needs his recognition and his form-giving activity.[4]

Other Half-Rome reveals more than just his long-standing grievances; he reveals his identity in relation to an other against and through whom he defines himself. As evidence for this we find that he draws parallels between himself and Guido:

I who have no wife,
Being yet sensitive in my degree
as Guido (III.1678-80)

It was only recently as a middle-aged man that Guido was able to find a marriage partner, and then only through the initiative of his brother. The lack of a wife obviously bears reasonably heavily upon Other Half-Rome's consciousness too. In another parallel, he notes that the law did not serve to remedy his own alleged wrongs either:

--Aha, do you think law disposed of these?
(III.1689)

While the circumstances that gave rise to legal complaints differ, Other Half-Rome displays a bitterness strongly reminiscent of Guido's because he, too, feels 'let down' by the legal system. As a result, Other Half-Rome acknowledges the parallel position and, further, indicates a frighteningly similar reaction:

My honour's touched and shall deal death around!
(III.1690)

The concept of honour is a social and ideological construction. In reacting against Guido as an Other, Other Half-Rome constructs himself by the same set of values, even to the extent of seeking redress for alleged wrongs through the same axiological system: revenge leading to death. The difference between the Comparini murders and Other Half-Rome's desire for revenge is one of procedure rather than of belief system. Guido moved outside the accepted boundaries of hegemonic legitimacy (indeed, the defence of *honoris causâ* centres on this very debate), while Other Half-Rome hopes that society will perform his desires for him. As it later turns out, society does, although admittedly in response to a plethora of other desires, motives, excuses, and 'truths'.

To some critics, the suggestion that Other Half-Rome directly addresses Guido in the final twenty-one lines of Book III is a "fantastic reading." Finley

(133-5), who makes this charge against Altick and Loucks, seems unable to comprehend the dialogical possibility of a notional Guido. Finley claims that if Guido is in prison, then Other Half-Rome cannot possibly address him, and therefore must be directly addressing the one auditor throughout the entire poem.

This extreme stance forces Finley to devise "a simpler and more reasonable reading" whereby:

> ...the auditor and Other Half-Rome are, indeed, friends, even relatives, as the "co-heir" suggests [III.1687]. There is no anger whatsoever directed against the "Sir" who has been listening [the fourth "Sir" of III.1687]. On the contrary, Other Half-Rome alludes to a past breach of their friendship or financial association, which had been mended or its obligations and liabilities solved under law--"compounded for in days gone by" (III.1681), in order to show the absolute injustice of Guido who has resorted to law only to murder in the name of honour. (135)

According to Finley's own fancy-fit, the line:

> My honour's touched and shall deal death around!
>
> (III.1690)

is in fact "humour and sarcasm" (135) to mock his auditor with an exaggerated and Guido-like phrase. Finley is as incredulous over what he calls "the 'Guido theory' of Altick and Loucks" as he is with readers who try to "prove the 'like swerve, like unsuccess' [I.884] in Other Half-Rome as in Half-Rome" (134). Finley writes:

> If the speaker is genuinely seeking to turn his monologue to the point of his injury, then he must seriously intend to identify with Guido, for it is Guido who argues for injured honour, not Pompilia. (134-5)

Ironically, in this statement Finley unknowingly comes extremely close to a Bakhtinian reading of the text. Finley errs in assuming that to identify with someone is necessarily tantamount to agreeing with that person. To the contrary, it is through just such a close identification with Guido, that Other Half-Rome is able to define his own self. Other Half-Rome's seemingly reasonable and judicious narrative--his 'truth'--can be tentatively positioned only when we understand the speaker's own relative position to the other. Other Half-Rome's final direct address to Guido is an outraged (III.1678) and impassioned outburst because he finally confronts his other openly. Previously he has disguised this dialogue beneath a calm and considered monologue to a nebulous interlocutor. But throughout the entire narrative, Other Half-Rome has struggled against the word of Guido. We now need to look for the dialogical evidence of this in the bulk of Book III.

IV

Continued investigation into the location of Other Half-Rome's interlocutor runs the risk of becoming a vicious circle. One way around this is to examine the hermeneutic problems raised (or solved) by Other Half-Rome's speech act. E.W.Slinn writes:

> There is the sense in which any utterance ... is not "representation" but a "presentation" of thought. Thought does not precede the performance but is brought into existence by the utterance and is inseparable from it. In this sense the ventriloquist does not speak through the dummy, but the dummy speaks the ventriloquist, bringing him into existence as ventriloquist.[5]

Other Half-Rome is not representing an external or transcendent event, but instead presents a new (spatio-temporal) event: namely, Other Half-Rome. He does this by becoming the ventriloquist who gives voice to the "dummies" who will parade on the stage of his own devising, till he finally confronts Guido in the present

tense at the curtainfall. Other Half-Rome's staging of the play is not an epilogue to the play proper; rather, it is a play about a play. Of Pompilia, Other Half-Rome comments:

> That was the prelude; this, the play's first act:
> whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all.
>
> (III.1338-9)

The prelude is Pompilia's birth, her marriage is the first act, and later events he will shortly present.

When Guido murders the Comparini, Other Half-Rome narrates:

> That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
> O'the foil and brought Mannaia on the stage.
>
> (III.1488-9)

With Mannaia (the guillotine) on his stage, Other Half-Rome's presentation draws close to the present. In a narrative flashback, he presents events surrounding Pompilia in the Convent, and then at the Villa with her parents. Paolo disappears from Rome,

> As if to leave the stage free. A whole week
> Did Guido spend in study of his part,
> Then played it fearless of a failure.
>
> (III.1587-9)

In Book III Guido *et al* are not autonomous agents, but are actors politically scripted and narrated by Other Half-Rome in the presentation of his making. The play effectively concludes with other Half-Rome's authoritative "All is told" (III.1642). His following statement is traditionally interpreted as being directed at his interlocutor (in whatever way critics have chosen to visualise the auditor). However, if we read Book III as a presentation by Other Half-Rome, we are forced to consider that perhaps *we* are the audience at this moment. Other Half-

Rome plays to whoever will listen to him. After the "all is told" conclusion, Other Half-Rome comments:

> You hardly need ask what Count Guido says
> (III.1643)

This comment is directed at us. It is in the present tense, which indicates further that the previous presentation has concluded. The three "Sir" vocative references can even be interpreted as sexist language labels from a previous century, and which can refer to any audience that Other Half-Rome manages to attract, rather than to a specific male within the poem.

The following 30 lines (III.1644-73) are a buffer before the concluding direct address to Guido. This buffer is a present tense prosecution of Guido's position, which slides into addressing him in the second person:

> Why, only when the balance in law's hand
> Trembles against you and inclines the way
> O' the other party, do you make protest
> (III.1664-6)

Nevertheless, this buffer is still scripted by Other Half-Rome. It is a verdict of the present, couched in reported speech. Only in the much discussed final passage does Other Half-Rome look up from his script and address Guido impromptu.

The Other Half-Rome of the final few lines has been brought "into existence as ventriloquist"--to borrow from Slinn--through the preceding performance. His ability to extemporize directly with Guido results from his previous construction of self through the other. Other Half-Rome speaks through the voice of the other--and the other speaks through him--more subtly than is evident in Book II. Half-Rome contends most obviously with a single interlocutor (although dialogically both Half-Rome and his interlocutor speak through, with, and against a myriad of other social voices as well). However, because Other

Half-Rome's interlocutor is far less obvious than his counterpart in the previous book, it is tempting to view Other Half-Rome's voice as more homogeneous, or even monologistic.

Nevertheless, from the beginning, Other Half-Rome exhibits a propensity for getting others to speak for him. Yet this poem is not a representation of events so much as a presentation of Other Half-Rome himself through the characters who populate his presentation. Ostensibly, Other Half-Rome remains outside these characters, yet it is through his voice that they speak. Bakhtin writes that in narrative there exists,

> the possibility of translating one's own intentions from one linguistic system to another, of fusing "the language of truth" with "the language of the everyday," of saying "I am me" in someone else's language, and in my own language, "I am other."[6]

The boundaries between self and other become fluid as Other Half-Rome narrates a story in which he ventriloquizes all the parts. Indeed, he relies far more heavily than does either Half-Rome or Tertium Quid, upon direct or indirect speech quotations. On occasions, Other Half-Rome's personal narratorial "part" is merely a fillet separating dense chunks of others' speech presentations. This gives the illusion that there is little narratorial control over the report. However, seldom do these quotations break out into either direct speech or free direct speech, both of which would locate Other Half-Rome farthest from apparent narratorial control. Instead, Other Half-Rome tends to couch his characters' speech in free indirect speech, which gives the narrator partial control of the report.[7] For example, Other Half-Rome narrates how Paolo visits Violante with the intention of proposing a match between his brother Guido, and Violante's "daughter" Pompilia:

> He dissertated on that Tuscan house,
> Those Franceschini, - very old they were -
> Not rich however - oh, not rich, at least,
> As people look to be who, low i' the scale

One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favour of the money-bag; 't is fair -
Do all gifts go together? But do n't suppose
That being not rich means all so poor!

(III.270-77)

Other Half-Rome as narrator opens the report with the first phrase in indirect speech. The main clause ("He dissertated") is subordinated to the narrator's deixis (spatio-temporal orientation). Next comes a merging of voices: ("very old they were -/Not rich however"). This is a hybrid of Other Half-Rome's authoritative control and Paolo's indirect speech. The exclamation ("oh") turns control apparently over to Paolo who begins a qualitative redefinition of wealth.

Other Half-Rome immediately follows the argument about wealth with another that betrays his own voice behind that of Paolo's:

Say rather, well enough - i' the way, indeed
Ha,ha, to better fortune than the best,
Since if his brother's patron-friend kept faith,
Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
Would but the Count have patience - there's the point!

(III.278-83)

This argument begins as free direct speech by Paolo to Violante and the laughter (III.279) would appear to be Paolo's. However, the next line brings the report firmly under Other Half-Rome's control again ("if his brother's patron-friend kept faith") by objectifying the character of Paolo as a ventriloquist's "dummy". This dialogic reading distributes the humour of the laughter, at least equally anyway, between Paolo and Other Half-Rome himself. Perhaps Other Half-Rome sees some ironic humour in the fact that were Guido to have been patient just a little longer he could have gained some windfall wealth from the Cardinal after all?

If we accept Slinn's sense that this "dummy speaks the ventriloquist," then

the "if" (III.280) becomes "the point" (III.283) as much, if not more for Other Half-Rome as for Paolo. Other Half-Rome attains some victory over Guido by gaining the moral high ground in terms of patience at least. This is reinforced a few lines later when the "if" becomes a "when":

> And have the patron's bounty when it fell
>
> (III.292)

The free indirect speech of this latter line is presented in Other Half-Rome's deixis, and not in Paolo's; it is the voice of the ventriloquist spoken through (created) by his own dummy.

In dialogic terms this means that the other is, and remains for Other Half-Rome, Guido. This is irrespective of whether Other Half-Rome is talking to an interlocutor within the frame of the Book III, or if as I posited, he is speaking to us as readers of The Ring and the Book. Furthermore, it is irrespective of whether the character of the moment in the presentation happens to be, for example, Paolo speaking to Violante. Behind the linguistic and stylistic permutations is the voice of Other Half-Rome in dialogic struggle with Guido. The "dummy" of this passage--Paolo--speaks Other Half-Rome into existence as a man who identifies strongly with and against Guido. The identification of Other Half-Rome with Guido possibly includes envy or jealousy and gloating jubilation, as the Freudian slip of changing the "if" to a "when" suggests.

It could be argued that this change is a deliberate ploy on the part of Paolo to persuade and manoeuvre Violante into betrothing Pompilia to Guido. Indubitably, Other Half-Rome would have us (or the interlocutor) believe that the change is deliberately Paolo's. That is part of the craft of telling a convincing story. Other Half-Rome hopes to illustrate through an apparently objective narrative report--seemingly but not quite in Paolo's own words--that Paolo manipulated Violante into agreeing to the marriage. Other Half-Rome yokes Paolo's reported manoeuvrings to Guido through repeated references to their fraternal relationship. The replacement of the conditional conjunction ("if) with a temporal one ("when") is presented through the narrative voice of Other Half-

Rome, who constructs himself in relation to Guido (through Paolo) in direct response to the implications of just such semantic ploys and techniques as these. The other to whom Other Half-Rome reacts at the conclusion of Book III does not yet exist at this early stage of the poem: the Guido of the final few lines has not yet been written. Similarly, Other Half-Rome, too, is still in the formative stages of being constructed.

Paolo's apparently autonomous speech lasts 43 lines (III.270-312) before Other Half-Rome firmly interjects with emotional authorial comment. The ten lines (III.313-322) are repetitious and paratactic, with phrases tumbling over each other till "one's ear-drum ache" (III.317). Other Half-Rome uses his own destructive backgrounder to damn Paolo and his speech, and concludes with a sarcastic one-liner:

> Well now, the man was rational in his way -
>
> (III.322)

Paolo 'speaks' again for a further 50 lines (III.323-372) out of fraternal concern. As with the earlier speech, his devious ploys to secure a bride for his elder brother are yoked to Guido, while the voice of the narrator remains as stylistically distant as Other Half-Rome can manage in a report of his own construction and presentation.

At the conclusion of Paolo's speech (III.372), Other Half-Rome takes narratorial responsibility for the poem for a couple of dozen lines, but soon searches for other "dummies" through whom to speak.

Other Half-Rome's habit of using others to 'speak' predominates Book III in various guises, and is a particular feature of Other Half-Rome's speech act. Its preponderance suggests that Other Half-Rome is deliberately playwright and ventriloquist to a far greater degree than are Half-Rome or Tertium Quid. The latter two resort to this device only occasionally. As we have seen, Half-Rome generally attempts to confront his interlocutor in open debate. In contrast, Chapter Four will examine Tertium Quid's attempts to speak on behalf of authoritative discourse.

V

During Other Half-Rome's struggle through discourse for construction of self, he has also been attempting to dominate the ideological struggle taking place within Roman society. One technique he uses is to 'naturalize' his discourse. This involves submerging his own voice behind that of public opinion. It has the effect of closing off certain sets of meanings, while privileging others. Of the many examples in Book III, one falls immediately after the passage just examined during which Other Half-Rome spoke with and through the voice of the Abate Paolo (III.270-370). After a break of twenty-three lines in which Other Half-Rome openly narrates, he slides his own voice behind that of public discourse (III.396-427). In this passage, Other Half-Rome buttresses his authorial estimation of Paolo and Guido with general public opinion, thus naturalising and generalising his construction of his opponents.

Public opinion is an ideological construction in that it attempts to hide its very ideology.The social origins of public opinion are suppressed, unnamed, or deemed irrelevant. Public opinion seeks to locate the socially and historically contingent 'beyond discourse' and thereby to render it uncontroversial. By denying that certain attitudes are products of politically established ways of viewing 'reality', Other Half-Rome seeks to have those attitudes accepted as properties of the natural world itself.[8]

Other Half-Rome would have his audience infer that public opinion is natural, and that anything natural is beyond ideological interpretation. This 'logic' lies behind his public ventriloquism, which he uses as a powerful ally. Public opinion is difficult to refute exactly because--like 'common sense'--it is hard to isolate and tabulate. In Other Half-Rome's presentation, it becomes a hegemonic weapon with which to bludgeon opposing attitudes, to the extent of destroying sympathy for Guido. At this point the ideological battle overlaps the personal construction. The Guido with and through whom Other Half-Rome identifies as other is also the sign for ideologies against which Other Half-Rome's discourse struggles.

The ideological confrontation includes the use of public opinion, couched in free direct speech:

> 'Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list,
> But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
> Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
> Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
> Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
> Were there the value of one penny-piece
> To rattle 'twixt his palms - or likelier laugh,
> Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe?'
>
> (II.420-27)

In this excerpt, Other Half-Rome places the ideological construct in the category which is closest to a character and which contains least trace of narratorial presence. Other Half-Rome removes any trace of the introductory reporting clause, thus producing a freer form with only the speech marks to indicate a mediating presence. The 'character' apparently speaks to us more immediately than if the processes of mediation were more obvious. By reducing the distinction between direct speech and narrative report, Other Half-Rome creates the impression that they are inseparable and relatively indistinguishable aspects of the one state--in this case, public opinion.[9] The character is lexicalized as "a friend" (III.423) and sets out to ridicule Guido by insinuating that anyone who doesn't hold with the "friend's" belief system must be a "dullard". The damning attitudes conclude with a rhetorical question. ("Why ... would the Count, think you...?" III.423-7) A mere passive acceptance of this question is to accept its axiological basis, because it is rhetorical: it deliberately seeks no response. Meanwhile, Other Half-Rome stands aloof, pretending merely to be an objective narrator of events, rather than as a political identity involved in the process of constructing the ideological significance of events.

It is at the political level that the greatest differences between Other Half-Rome and Guido may be observed. These differences underlie the ideological battle that rages throughout Book III, notwithstanding the personal similarities

between the two which were noted earlier. Slinn defines Other Half-Rome as "a sentimental bachelor steeped in the traditions of literary romance [who appropriates Pompilia] as ideal Woman - fragile, passive, innocent, intuitive" (Discourse of Self 163). This idealization serves Other Half-Rome a greater purpose than merely to provide an outlet for his sentimentality. Slinn observes elsewhere that courtly romance provides Other Half-Rome with an authority in language (182). Courtly romance is the ideology he uses to construct his discourse with respect to Pompilia. Inevitably, then, Other Half-Rome's discourse will conflict with discourses that adhere to dissimilar ideologies. These most obviously include Guido's and Half-Rome's which, as we saw in Chapter Two, attach that authority to the social formula of *honoris causâ* (Discourse of Self 182).

Within Other Half-Rome's ideological construction of the courtly love tradition, individuals are assigned specific roles. Pompilia, for example, is constructed by Other Half-Rome as possessing stereotypical virtues. He sees her as fragile ("A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise" III.5) who, despite being the child of a prostitute ("This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped" III.215), is rescued from vice by Violante's motherly instincts. According to Isobel Armstrong, Other Half-Rome describes Pompilia in terms of "soothing, easy romanticism":

> She was "a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole/Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,/Filched by two exiles and borne far away" (III.234-6), and so became a bloom--sentimentality and sexual euphemism unite here--"To be toyed with by butterfly or bee" (III.245).[10]

Guido and Paolo are ideologically constructed as furtive kidnappers of the passive victim who had lived in a pre-lapsarian "garden plot" (II.233) of virtue with her 'parents'. In Other Half-Rome's political construction, Pietro is the Adam (III.169) rather than Guido of Half-Rome's insistence. Violante remains the Eve for both Half-Romes, but for Other Half-Rome the serpent (III.471) is connected with Paolo, and thus by association with Guido. The sexual innuendo, which

Armstrong notes, further reinforces Other-Half-Rome's political construction of Guido and Paolo as intruders within the Garden of Eden. The butterfly is an apt description of the vain priest, who earlier gave,

> ...his great flap-hat a gloss
> With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
> The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
> Setting the stockings clerical again
> (III.264-7)

But Other Half-Rome's reference to Guido as a bee is more malefic. He draws an obvious parallel between the serpent who stings, and Guido the killer. There is also an evil element to the phallic implication of penetrating and stinging, especially since Other Half-Rome constructs Pompilia as pure and saint-like, and Guido as the antithesis.

Other Half-Rome idealizes Pompilia as a saint (III.111) who remains alive by divine intervention (III.7). He constructs his personal self on the basis of this idealization, but in asserting his self-presence, Other Half-Rome finds that his discourse contends with opposing ideologies. His appropriation of the Garden of Eden myth provides Other Half-Rome with a model with which to locate the 'characters' within his narrative of self. Book III becomes more than a personal struggle with the other to locate his self; the narrative becomes a political struggle for dominance of ideological discourse. Through the external social structure of courtly romance, Other Half-Rome hopes to be able to fix 'truth' and authority within language.

In one sense, Other Half-Rome remains aloof from the struggle that takes place at both the personal and ideological levels. I argued earlier that the Other Half-Rome and the Guido who confront each other dialogically in the concluding few lines of Book III do not exist on a personal level at earlier stages of the narrative. Other Half-Rome was required first to locate his other and then to construct his own self through that other before--paradoxically--he could claim 'autonomy' for his self. Little wonder then, that the nebulous auditor of Book III

confuses some critics: Other Half-Rome finds the "Sir" insufficient for his purposes as other through whom to construct his own identity.

Similarly, on an ideological level, the Other Half of Rome is in the process of acquiring significance by engaging in a powerful hegemonic struggle against Guido and the word of Half-Rome. Book III is the process by which this opposing ideology of courtly romance--which in its turn may be represented by the sign 'Pompilia'--constructs itself. Hence it is significant that the speaker appropriates 'public opinion' through which to develop his orientation towards society in general, and towards the murders in particular. Other Half-Rome is a sign in the process of construction, for himself as speaker, and for society. Whatever their political orientation, future speakers in The Ring and the Book will contend with the voice of Other Half-Rome, because the languages of their discourses have become imbued with his word.[11] Courtly romance will henceforth be a political ideology relevant to discussion of the Comparini murders. Other Half-Rome has constructed events within the social and institutional structure of courtly romance, which encourages certain interpretations and meanings to be arrived at. Irrespective of whether future speakers agree, disagree, or--ironically--even ignore Other Half-Rome's political position, it remains an actuality. For a future speaker to ignore Other Half-Rome's ideological perspective after it has become one of a selection of available political viewpoints is, in a sense, a deliberate political act that acknowledges that viewpoint. Hence, Other Half-Rome's perspective is a dialogical and political force which imbues language with 'meaning'.

The significance of Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome as signs in constant hegemonic competition within Roman discourse can best be observed in Book IV. Tertium Quid becomes the necessary consequence of competing ideological forces, which are powerful, pervasive, and incompatible. A reader could be forgiven for anticipating that Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome will find their synthesis in this third speaker.

Notes

1. C.S.Finley, 'Robert Browning's "The Other Half-Rome": A "Fancy-Fit" Or Not?' Browning Institute Studies 11 (1983): 133.

2. R.D.Altick and J.F.Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 42 and n.4.

3. M.R.Sullivan, Browning's Voices in *The Ring and the Book* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969) 41.

4. M.M. Bakhtin, Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990) 36, 51.

5. E.W.Slinn, "Some Notes on Monologues as Speech Acts," Browning Society Notes 15.1 (1985): 3.

6. M.M.Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 315.

7. See G.N.Leech and M.H. Short, Style in Fiction (London: Longman, 1981) 318ff for details of speech and thought presentation as a narrative technique.

8. T. O'Sullivan et al, Key Concepts in Communication (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

9. Style in Fiction 323.

10. I. Armstrong, "*The Ring and the Book*: The Uses of Prolixity." The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 188.

11. As noted in Chapter One, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to follow up this argument. However, it is recognized that this assertion would have to be proved early within any larger course of study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tertium Quid's Denial of his Social Origins

I

Book IV has traditionally been interpreted as the narrative of a man who unsuccessfully attempts to impress his audience. Dialogism does not dispute the critical variations on this reading, but supports them in differing ways. This chapter suggests that, like the two previous speakers who create the meaning of their selves through discourse, the speaker Tertium Quid is also the site for a struggle of personal and political language. Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome strive for stability of meaning for themselves through their dialogical battle for identity via their interlocutors and via opposing discourses. However, Tertium Quid is even more complicated. He is a person attempting to locate himself through the other, but he is also a sign for the process of struggle itself. This semiotic claim may be axiomatic for any speaker (fictional or real), but Browning has made it a special feature of Book IV, specifically through his choice of name for the speaker.

II

Book IV contains the most obviously foregrounded interlocutors of the opening triad. Tertium Quid acknowledges and responds to his audience in his first words. Half-Rome also directly addresses a "Sir" in his opening line, but clues to that person's significance are scattered sparsely throughout the narrative. Tertium Quid has two main interlocutors--a cardinal ("Her Excellency")[1] and a prince ("His Highness")--of whom we become immediately aware. Their titles alone provide important information. Within the first sixty lines of Book IV the audience is enlarged to include a Marquis (IV.57). There is possibly even a second cardinal ("Her Eminence" IV.55) because Tertium Quid suggests a move to the window seat so that he and his listeners do not bother a cardinal at the bassett-table (IV.54, 57).

R.D.Altick and J.F.Loucks describe Tertium Quid as a "raconteur" who lectures in "an aristocratic drawing room, where a *soirée*, well populated by ecclesiastics, is in progress".[2] Similarly, Mary Sullivan describes Tertium Quid as playing to his audience in "the glittering mirror-panelled salon of a Roman Palace" where, in addition to the Prince and the Cardinal, others "drift by and listen to the talk or look up to eavesdrop for a moment".[3]

This general impression leads W.E.Buckler to claim that the "audience plays a more pervasive role in Tertium Quid's monologue than in the two previous ones...."[4] In one sense, Buckler's observation is misleading because he restricts the sense of pervasion of the audience to its degree of visibility. As Chapters Two and Three illustrate, the role of an audience is crucial to the production of a speaker's own identity as a self, irrespective of its visibility. Without an audience--real or notional--there can be no speaker and hence no narrative. Even Other Half-Rome, whose interlocutor is marginalised to the extent of near-invisibility, constructs himself dialogically through the other. Nevertheless, in Book IV the audience's role is certainly more *obvious* because of the obsequious addresses to them.

Sullivan observes that Tertium Quid refers to his interlocutors "by their respective titles, *'Excellency'* and *'Prince,'* no less than twenty-two times in the course of his speech, and at least a half-dozen other times by less specific titles, *'my wise friend,' 'Sirs,'* and the like" (58). This compares with the ten references to *'Sir'* by Half-Rome, and the three or four (depending upon edition) by Other Half-Rome. The danger, as this chapter will show, is therefore to concentrate specifically on Tertium Quid's relationship with the Cardinal and the Prince, and to ignore the semiotic and dialogic significance of 'Tertium Quid'.

As his name suggests, Tertium Quid is "something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things but distinct from both."[5] The Tertium Quid of Book IV most obviously contains elements of the two preceding speakers. Yet, because his context and motivations are so different from theirs, he can never be a mere product of them.

Robert Langbaum dismisses him as merely someone who "has been the whole time speaking to impress certain Princes and Cardinals."[6] Langbaum's dismissal of Tertium Quid is meant pejoratively, but he accurately defines Tertium Quid's narrative in at least one respect. His word "impress" contains the sense of stamping or leaving a mark or indentation, including an impression upon the mind or senses. There is also the notion of exerting pressure, and of affecting or influencing strongly, or even to press in or to throng about (SOED). These definitions all describe aspects of Tertium Quid's urgent need to "impress" his salon audience. However, in keeping with his name, such descriptions of Tertium Quid leave him still "undefined". He remains, simplistically, the speaker who attempts to advance himself (IV.1639), as Langbaum intimates in choosing to accept the speaker's final word on it. Langbaum also fails to address the issue of how successful Tertium Quid's narration has been. There is no investigation into the effect of Tertium Quid's 'impression' upon aristocratic society's subsequent attitudes and reactions. Admittedly the evidence of effect is scarce; there is only the Pope's narrative since the lawyers do not inhabit the same circles as princes and cardinals. Yet Langbaum's methodology ignores the dialogic evidence of political implications which speech has on subsequent discourse, aristocratic or not, of future speakers.

Some literary critics circumvent Tertium Quid's lack of definition by attempting to define him through Browning. L.White locates Tertium Quid as "more successful, perhaps, than Other Half-Rome in judging the case impartially, but his is far from the objective assessment that he believes he is providing his audience."[7] White notes that Tertium Quid "is the poet's own creation [i.e. he is not an actual personage from the *Old Yellow Book*], his function being the discrediting of an arid, wholly rational approach to truth and of the uncommitted, safe, self-promoting existence that is often concomitant to such an approach" (118). White is insinuating that Tertium Quid is, in a sense, a persona of the poet; that because he is "functional" his discourse is authored from without Book IV. This is tantamount to suggesting that Tertium Quid be read differently from Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome, the sources for whom were actual personages.

Sullivan freely admits to the "calculated design" (Browning's Voices 72) of Tertium Quid in attempting to advance himself socially, but she extends the motivation of the speaker further than do many critics. Sullivan argues that Tertium Quid's speech plan is the result of his identification with Guido's near-aristocratic stance as opposed to the lower social status of the Comparini. "His only strong emotion is a scorn for the common man, whom he sees constituting the unreasoning mob of Rome," she observes (58). Sullivan's approach does not privilege Tertium Quid's emotions over his self-interest in personal advancement, but it does constitute a more concerted attempt at "defining" Tertium Quid than is evident in many criticisms. It positions Guido in a similar social *milieu* to Tertium Quid, and places Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome on the side of the "mob". Such ideological considerations help to contour the definitions of Tertium Quid far more satisfactorily than does sole reliance upon his career ambitions.

Buckler attempts to develop a personality profile of Tertium Quid in a different manner. Buckler describes,

> an older, truer aristocracy that has either abandoned leadership in a new, rapidly changing, idea-crackling age or, from a paucity of numbers and a tendency to massage traditional values that have themselves fallen into disrepute, has lost the capacity to monitor adequately a burgeoning present and future. (Poetry and Truth 90)

This aristocratic old guard includes the Prince, the Cardinal, and other listeners with whom Tertium Quid must ingratiate himself if he is to even remain within that level of society, let alone to ascend within it. This interpretation points to a Bakhtinian political struggle for survival through the word. It posits Tertium Quid as more than just a person who, through suspended disbelief, we picture struggling for identity. Tertium Quid becomes the representative site for the political struggle itself.

Buckler contrasts the "older, truer aristocracy" with the younger and newer members--those whom the Pope calls "brisk juniors" (X.1995). According to Buckler, they

> ape the rituals of the older, truer aristocrats, but there is an identifiable strain of vulgarity in their cynicism, self-conceit, punctiliousness of manner, and haughtiness towards the putative lower classes, including the "burgess-life" (IV.65) from which they may themselves be sprung. (90)

Buckler argues that Tertium Quid has these "manifest markings" and itemises a "storehouse of imagery" of twenty-three separate quotations (90-93) which cumulatively "mirror a mind deeply dyed with the experience of a product of the lower orders of society." That is, Tertium Quid's origins are in "the very 'mob' towards which he shows such violent contempt" (90).

Analyses such as Sullivan's and Buckler's accept the superficial verdict of most critics that Tertium Quid is ambitious, and that his personal agenda includes attempting to "impress" the Prince and the Cardinal. However, this more critical focus on Tertium Quid's motivations extends to defining the speaker as more than just "related to but distinct from" the *Weltbild* of the previous two speakers. Tertium Quid takes on a distinctiveness of his own, which is also separate from that of the authoring poet; indeed, Tertium Quid in his own right authors a new reading of The Ring and the Book first by producing himself.

Tertium Quid can be defined in six distinct ways. Three of them are as personal concepts, and three are as political concepts. Tertium Quid is most obviously seen as a subordinate speaking to superior members of the aristocratic class. In this role, he can be defined as a cleric or perhaps an administrator, junior in status, experience, age, and influence. As an extension of this view, Tertium Quid can be seen in a second--the most commonly held--way: he is an ambitious member of the aristocratic class who seeks advancement. Thirdly, Tertium Quid may be viewed as a person originally of the lower classes ("a burgess nearly an aristocrat" himself perhaps? IV.344) who now attempts to locate and define himself dialogically through and with his aristocratic interlocutors.

Ideologically, Tertium Quid is a signifier for three different concepts. He represents, as Buckler suggests, the political struggle between old and new

aristocracy. Secondly, in class terms he is a site for the political struggle between lower and upper classes. And most obviously, Tertium Quid contains the political contest between the discourse of Half-Rome (itself a signifier for the ideologies of Guido) and Other Half-Rome (Pompilia).

It is not necessary to privilege any particular 'Tertium Quid' over any other. By naming the speaker thus, Browning has transgressed the boundaries between the personal and the political, and located the speaker as related to, but distinct from, "other known things"--however we chose to interpret those other things. Further, the sign points towards, but never equates with the referent. Each reading will at once be valid, but be liable to deconstruction, because Tertium Quid is a sign. Its signified is produced--both within and without the framing of Book IV--through discourse, which is itself definable only through other signs. On these terms we may now examine 'Tertium Quid' in detail, proceeding in both personal and political directions.

III

Tertium Quid's initial task is not to advance himself as Langbaum *et al* suggest, but to establish his own self. The first seventy lines of Tertium Quid's narrative are dedicated to the proposition that he is one of the aristocracy and is not one of the lower classes.[8]

Tertium Quid proposes this notion by juxtaposing the lower classes with himself and his present audience. He lexicalizes the opposition as "reasonless unreasoning Rome" (IV.11) versus the "authoritative word" (IV.9) of "qualified persons" (IV.10). Tertium Quid opens his narrative by yoking his voice with that of the Prince ("as his Highness says" IV.1). This attaches the authority of the Prince's word to Tertium Quid's own discourse. It is deliberately not clear exactly when the reported speech of the Prince ends and Tertium Quid's own discourse begins. The effect that Tertium Quid hopes to achieve is to incorporate sufficient of the discourse of his interlocutors into his own as to blur distinctions between his self and their selves. Tertium Quid strives for an apparently

monological discourse, in which his interlocutors might accept his voice as their own. Then he hopes they will define themselves dialogically against the voices of lower Rome.

To this end, Tertium Quid adopts a detached and reasoned approach, which he intends will contrast with the "natural" (IV.66) emotions and passions of the "roaring" (IV.12) mob. However, Tertium Quid's construction of self rests upon two premises that may, but do not necessarily, hold true. He presumes that his interlocutors will accept his voice within their own discourse rather than rejecting it as a dialogical other, belonging perhaps to the very "mob" whom he denigrates. Secondly, Tertium Quid assumes that, like him, his interlocutors construct their selves in opposition to the voice of the mob. Tertium Quid implicates his interlocutors in his personal process of construction ("we lift the case/Out of the shade into the shine" IV.6-7) and also resorts to open flattery:

> Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
> Would settle the matter as sufficiently
> As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
> And Judge the Other, with even - a word and a wink -
> We all know who for ultimate arbiter.
>
> (IV.49-53)

The last comment is a surreptitious reference to the Pope. It is deliberately--perhaps melodramatically--delivered to highlight the sense of familiarity Tertium Quid wishes to engender between himself and his interlocutors. We can expect that during the remainder of this narrative, Tertium Quid will expend considerable energy in speaking both with, and through, the voice of his interlocutors. He will attempt to produce a discourse as similar--as he is consciously able--to that of the aristocracy, and as different as he is able from that of the lower classes. Tertium Quid identifies his verbal wit as the key to assuming what he perceives to be the discourse of his interlocutors: an impartial, intellectual superiority. He hints at this in his plea for their indulgence:

...if I fail

.....

To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man!

(IV.58, 60-61)

As has already been discussed in reference to Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid's speech plan is not an intellectual game to wile away leisure hours. He is involved in the process of constructing his self in relation to interlocutors with whom he wishes to identify and by whom he wishes to be accepted. It is nothing less than a struggle for survival as self. (Actually, self as he would like to see himself reflected through the other.) Tertium Quid seeks to create congruence between his voice and theirs. At the same time, as Buckler argues, he wishes to speak in personal and political opposition to the lower classes, from which he may have emerged. Tertium Quid concludes his opening gambit with a "contempt" for the lower classes which is "encompassing and emotionally violent" (Buckler 88). In consecutive lines, he labels them as "mob," *"plebs,"* "commonalty," and "burgess-life" (IV.62-65). And this in addition to a string of earlier condescensions, such as "dolts and fools" (IV.10). Tertium Quid would have his interlocutors believe that he, too, is "some man of quality" (I.928), yet dialogically he must also be identifying strongly with the mob if he finds it so necessary to define himself in contradistinction to them. Hence, they assume the role of other to his self: he speaks in response to the prior and anticipated word of the mob as much as he does to his interlocutor Prince and Cardinal.

Tertium Quid provides evidence of his familiarity with the language of the mob. As noted earlier, Buckler identifies a network of images which, when taken cumulatively, tell "a critical subterranean story" (90) of Tertium Quid's probable origins. For example, Tertium Quid describes how the Franceschini family in Arezzo is "old/To the degree they could afford be poor/Better than most" (IV.356-8). To illustrate his description, Tertium Quid chooses--significantly--a domestic metaphor, complete with graphic detail:

Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
To cater for the week, - turns up anon
I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb:
Then back again with prize, - a liver begged
Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked, -
He's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup
(IV:360-67)

For a would-be noble, Tertium Quid exhibits a remarkable familiarity with the details of market-place transactions and kitchen frugality. His speech rather too easily handles the subject matter--poultry limbs and entrails--for a member of the gentility. Tertium Quid draws the illustration out to eight lines, with great attention to accuracy and detail, suggesting experience far beyond his ability simply to illustrate a story appropriately. One is forced to question when he could know these details if he had not emerged from the mob.

His interlocutors' reactions to Tertium Quid's narrative are not easily gauged. Yet as dialogism insists, a speaker's language will always be affected by the word of the other. In this case, Tertium Quid assumes that his voice is accepted within the greater discourse of his interlocutors and their social class. This blinds him to discrepancies and even to overt dissent when the Prince and the Cardinal do indicate disagreement or distaste with what he says. Shortly after Tertium Quid's previous poultry description, he launches into another culinary metaphor designed to illustrate that both Guido and the Comparini cheated each other, but also gained profit from the deal:

As when a cook ... will Excellency forgive?
Strips away those long loose superfluous legs
From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
(With your respect, Prince!) - balance has been kept,
(IV:542-6)

The Cardinal immediately balks at the return to kitchen terminology, perhaps by a grimace or some other form of non-verbal communication, if not by an outright exclamation. Tertium Quid asks forgiveness for broaching the subject yet again, but nevertheless plunges on with obvious relish. His use of the word "folk" is out of character in the speech of aristocracy. While the word does not specifically exclude gentry, its use tends towards the colloquial, and pertains especially towards the "people". (Examples of its use in the SOED include "feeble folk," "poor folk," and "young folk.") Tertium Quid cuts his diatribe short in response to some reaction by the Prince. The severity of the Prince's disapproval may be gauged by the abruptness of Tertium Quid's apology to the Prince--the exclamation mark underscores its intonation--and his abandonment of his diverting illustration. Unlike, for example, Half-Rome, who appears to read and respond to his interlocutor's every lift of any eyebrow, Tertium Quid blunders on with a tale he presumes captures the imagination of his interlocutors, and in what he assumes is their discourse. Whereas Half-Rome perceptively reacts to his interlocutor's answering voice as other, evidence suggests that Tertium Quid does not listen and react to the Prince or the Cardinal nearly as closely.

Tertium Quid sets up a dialectic at the commencement of his narrative which polarises the aristocracy with the plebeians. The opposites are exemplified by, respectively, reason and unreason. The most damning indictment upon Tertium Quid's construction of self is when he suffers a loss of logic. In a coldly logical analysis, Tertium Quid examines the legal and legitimate processes by which Guido sought justice and redress (IV.1543ff). In parallel fashion both Tertium Quid and Guido "flourish wit and common sense" and ply their "logic doughtily" (IV.1550-1). But as Guido becomes "a-glow with ire,/Boiling with irrepressible rage" (IV.1554-5) so paradoxically does Tertium Quid, who loses himself in the "furious bull" extended metaphor he develops for Guido (IV.1559ff). Tertium Quid himself becomes reasonless and impassioned as the bull image takes over not only Guido but his own discourse (IV.1563-79). Tertium Quid has regressed to the discourse of the other--the unreasoning plebeians of Rome.

No wonder, then, that when Tertium Quid blinks back into the spatio-

temporal reality of his present audience, he finds them perceiving him not as a speaker of the same discourse, but as a voice of another:

> In truth you look puzzled as ere I preached!
> How is that?
>
> (IV.1580-1)

Tertium Quid switches back immediately into a calm, balanced and intellectual discourse, naively resuming his narrative. Unbeknown to Tertium Quid, the damage has cumulatively been done. The Cardinal, who has already exhibited boredom by inattentively watching nearby card-play (IV.1485), is soon to leave the speaker and join a game. The Prince, too, will shortly excuse himself and retire from the salon.

IV

Book IV concludes with the Cardinal and the Prince walking out on the speaker--one to play cards and the other to retire home. Judging by Tertium Quid's parenthetical summation, the narrative has not been successful:

> (You'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
> After my teaching the two idiots here!)
>
> (IV.1639-40)

However, we have seen in this chapter that dialogically he is rather more than merely a junior member of the aristocracy who must ingratiate himself to maintain and improve his position. As referent, the speaker Tertium Quid may indeed not have been successful. But, as was noted earlier, Tertium Quid is not renowned for seeking or noticing responses by those who attend to him. Bakhtin writes that,

> an actively responsive understanding of what is heard ... can remain , for the time being, a silent responsive understanding....

> Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener.[9]

We simply do not know what the views of the Cardinal and the Prince towards the Comparini murders are, or will be-not at this stage in The Ring and the Book anyway. We get a fair indication of their reactions to Tertium Quid's immediate narrative through his dialogical reactions, and their final abrupt departures. But princes and cardinals, too, need their 'others' through which to perceive and construct their selves. This is particularly so if they represent an older tradition which fights a rear-guard action, as Buckler posits, against newer and younger members and ideas. The speaker plays an important role in the re-construction and maintenance of the older aristocratic order. The Bakhtinian responsive understanding that the Cardinal and the Prince may have of Tertium Quid's version of events need not necessarily be synonymous with total agreement. We may safely presume that Tertium Quid has 'taught' his two interlocutors, but that what they have learnt may not necessarily coincide with what the speaker intended.

Tertium Quid intended presenting a received version of events. His intentions are plainly made:

> The long and the short is, truth is what I show:-
> Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
> To give the mob an inkling of our lights.
> (IV.1618-20)

His contempt for "reasonless Rome" is clear in that final line. He also indicates his belief in the unified voice of the aristocracy, failing to observe any contention between his own voice and that of his interlocutors--or even to consider the possibility of it. His narration has been a presentation rather than a re-presentation. His claim to veracity ("truth is what I show") suggests that he discounts the validity of even considering other interpretations. This is despite his avowed attempts at presenting a balanced and logical report of the murder story. Tertium Quid presents what he considers to be the fixed reality of events,

although in the 1889 edition, Browning changed the verb and modified the claim to "truth seems what I show".[10] The change softens Tertium Quid's essentialism, and gives him a more calculating motivation. This is more consistent with a character who attempts to impress his interlocutors. Equally, it can be argued that the later edition's pragmatism is not entirely commensurate with Tertium Quid's inability to hear the dialogic responses of his interlocutors. I find that the narrow-minded essentialism of the "truth is ..." to be more consistent with his character than is the more realistic and calculating "truth seems..." of the later edition. Either way, Tertium Quid orchestrates events rather than replays them. He is assisting in the ideological construction of future speakers by imbuing future discourse with prior meaning. Even if they totally oppose Tertium Quid's meanings, future speakers in Rome will be required to dialogically contend with his prior utterance in their own speech acts.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the effects of the open triad of speakers upon later narratives within The Ring and the Book. However, we may safely extrapolate that "Advocate This," "Fiscal That," and "Judge the Other"—not to mention "We well know who"–all become aware of the Comparini murders long before they are required to deliver public verdicts. Prior to the murders, Paolo unsuccessfully "made interest with the Pope" (IV.1334) to declare in favour of Guido. No further detail is given in Book IV, but we can surmise that the Pope is not without his own personal sources of information. News of the Comparini murders would soon have reached him and have renewed his interest, particularly because of the nature of the Roman scandal, and because of Paolo's previous approach. We can reasonably speculate that the two lawyers, the judge and the Pope would all hear of the murders through the rumours and gossip of their social circles well before they were formally briefed to perform their respective civic and professional duties. However impartial the formal briefings they later receive (and that impartiality is itself a moot point), they have first each constructed an ideological version of the murder story in the discourse of the respective classes. The Pope and the judge[11] would be most likely to receive a version of Tertium Quid's "teaching"--the Pope probably directly from the Cardinal. Tertium Quid must know that the Cardinal is highly likely to have direct and immediate access to the Pope. He therefore speaks in response to the

word of the lower classes, but also in anticipation of the word of the Cardinal, and--through him--the Pope. Yet, as already noted, Tertium Quid blindly assumes that his voice is monologic: on behalf of his interlocutors, but without responding as listener to them, he uses what Bakhtin terms the "authoritative word".[12]

Tertium Quid attempts to foreclose on any possible further dialogue through what he presupposes is the capacity of the authoritative word for finalization. It demands "that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own" (Dialogic Imagination 342). Therefore Tertium Quid expects that at the conclusion of his narrative, the Cardinal will "pronounce" a verdict that will give "the mob an inkling of our lights" (IV.1632, 1620). Bakhtin writes,

> The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. (Dialogic Imagination 342)

Ironically, Tertium Quid himself privileges the authoritative word, which is indicative of his humbler origins. Like the lower classes, with whom he attempts to contrast himself, he is in awe of the discourse he tries to imitate. The "word of the fathers"--that is, an authoritative verdict in the salon by a cardinal or a prince--would enable Tertium Quid to 'formulate' his *own* opinions "out of the shade into the shine" (IV.7) and construct himself through the aristocratic discourse. Instead, his interlocutors do not deliver, and Tertium Quid is left at the end of Book IV with his own "neither this nor that" discourse and opinions: neither of the lower classes, nor of the "hierarchically higher."

In this sense Book IV is the least satisfying of the opening triad. Tertium Quid has not been successful in locating his other and, through that other, his self. He has not responded to the same extent as did Half-Rome or Other Half-Rome to what Bakhtin calls "internally persuasive discourse"--as opposed to the externally authoritative. In the internally persuasive,

> One's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and

> the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible. (Dialogic Imagination 345, n31)

This is what Tertium Quid believes to be the case between his discourse and that of his interlocutors. But as we have seen, Tertium Quid does not struggle with other internally persuasive discourses of the Prince or the Cardinal.

> Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. (346)

His struggle is with the word of the mob, rather than with that of the aristocracy for whom he would like to be a non-contentious mouthpiece. He seeks a word that has foreclosed on further dialogue, erroneously believing that the discourse of aristocracy is thus finalized.

As a person, Tertium Quid cannot escape the dialogical struggle with the discourse of his past. He is also a sign both of and for personal and political struggle through discourse.

V

Tertium Quid is similar to Half-Rome in his identification with the external structure and discourse of patriarchy. Tertium Quid's ideology becomes transparent not through any clumsy attempts to exonerate Guido; Tertium Quid is too clever and subtle to risk such an obviously partisan approach. Rather, he constructs the Court's verdict, following Pompilia's and Caponsacchi's flight and capture, in patriarchal terms of responsibility. Guido is labelled as "a husband [who] cannot rule his wife" (IV.1226). Responsibility falls on the husband, "whose rash rule/Has but itself to blame for this ado" (IV.1252-3). Tertium Quid exhibits clever political strategy in these examples. Guido's innocence or guilt is presented as an issue completely separate from the structure of patriarchy, which remains unquestioningly the basis for correct social behaviour. If Guido

is culpable, it is for transgressing patriarchal behaviour in not "ruling" his wife in the manner approved of by social hegemony. Tertium Quid's political construction normalizes events as conforming to the ideological status quo. Guido disrupted 'normal' events through his own rashness. Tertium Quid does not attempt to defend patriarchy in his narrative. He silences any contending discourse by ignoring its possibility.

In attempting to ingratiate himself with his listeners, Tertium Quid remains wary of criticising the structures of power which he hopes to join. Consequently, his construction removes the Courts, law makers, and even patriarchal social structures from critical analysis. Tertium Quid's discourse may be seen as political construction in favour of his personal advancement rather than as an attempt to report events leading up to the Comparini murders.

Tertium Quid couches personal identity within political contexts in his account of the "daily bargain struck in the marketplace" (IV.532-3), which he uses to illustrate Violante's marriage of Pompilia to Guido.

> Why sells Jack his ware?
> 'For the sake of serving an old customer.'
> Why does Jill buy it? 'Simply not to break
> A custom, pass the old stall the first time.'
>
> (IV.533-6)

E.W. Slinn observes that "this anecdote illustrates the way people become stuck in external structures which govern their behaviour."[13] Tertium Quid uses the process by which individuals become subsumed within institutional discourse, to further his narrative without having to question its philosophical basis. The marketplace bargain becomes "the way of the world" (IV.532) which, like the 'public opinion' examined in the previous chapter, becomes a 'common sense' ideological construction that attempts to locate itself beyond discourse. Tertium Quid neatly marginalizes any attention upon the underlying patriarchal action in

favour of "a bargain mentally proposed/On each side" (IV.508-9). He avoids a political contest between differing discourses by constructing the marriage as a mutual bargain, and hence places onus solely upon its participants.

Tertium Quid attempts to deflect attention from the ideological basis of his narrative so that his personal word need not be openly contested by other discourses. Yet he is not always as successful in avoiding the political contest because, as Slinn notes, his "very argument is constrained by the structures of his social context" (Discourse of Self 181). In Book IV's penultimate paragraph Tertium Quid expresses concern over Guido's pending torture (IV.1621-31). Guido may be innocent because of his nobility and privilege. But if the Courts do not torture him, Tertium Quid asks what crime would ever deserve torture? So he logically proposes, "Then abolish it!" In this solution, Tertium Quid's personal word confronts the ideology of his hegemonic audience, a situation he has scrupulously sought to avoid throughout the narrative. He chooses to back down by dismissing his solution as "the reduction *ad absurdum*" (IV.1631). Tertium Quid "refuses to pursue his logic beyond the expectations of his listeners, remaining shackled, consequently, to his political context..." (Discourse of Self 181). Tertium Quid cannot hope to win the contest with the dominant discourse. He knows that in such a political struggle the selfhood he has painstakingly constructed could be overwhelmed and destroyed by institutional discourse. Nevertheless, his sense of resentment and anger lingers in his concluding aside a few lines later.

The incident also serves to illustrate how Tertium Quid's externalized identity does not prove to be as enduring and stable as he would hope. By identifying with various forms of institutional discourse--particularly patriarchy and class--he must continually enact social fictions through his language to maintain the social identity he has chosen. He attaches himself to external structures at the expense of his personal word, as the last example illustrates. However successfully Tertium Quid may appear to be governed by external structures, his narrative will continue to betray the occasional traces of the underlying struggle between his personal word and imposing discourses.

Another method of examining Tertium Quid's personal word as political contest is to locate his discourse within the carnivalesque. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque offers a perspective on the collapse of culture, literary text and human history into each other. In Book IV Tertium Quid constructs himself as a spectator of the lower classes, irrespective of his social origins. He surveys and classifies his own antithesis.[14] Tertium Quid extends this contradistinction to Guido. He describes Guido's character in opposition to that of a clown. Count Guido,

> was noble too, of old blood twice-refined
> That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust
> (IV.758-9)

This comparison highlights the antithesis of permanent chronological time as evidenced by nobility and "old blood," and cyclic impermanence of the carnival clown. Furthermore, the clown's coarseness is indicative of the Bakhtinian lower stratum's degrading "grotesque realism." Bakhtin writes:

> Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. (Rabelais 21)

Against these very notions Tertium Quid struggles through discourse, but through them he defines himself in antithesis. As discussed earlier, he strives for monological discourse. Here we see that the monological word apparently offers a political permanence against the cycles of birth, death and renewal. He wishes to construct Guido's monological permanence and attempts this through recourse to what he perceives as the closed word of nobility; yet in the very process Tertium Quid's discourse betrays the antithetical discourse of the carnivalesque.

In Tertium Quid's parlance, the laughter of the lower classes is particularly galling to Guido, which supports Bakhtin's thesis that laughter is politically contentious:

> First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
> Then round us in the ears from morn to night
> (Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
> (IV.599-601)

In this instance the Franceschini household has become "laughing-stock" for the community. Reaction to Guido's plight extends beyond humorous pleasure at seeing the family in a lively fix. The humour arises from the carnivalesque suspension of idealized hierarchial rank. Count Guido Franceschini's nobility does not immunize him from the problems of wealth and poverty, difficulties with in-laws, marital relations, and even imposture. Tertium Quid articulates Guido's concern at the dialogizing of his name through the forces of the carnivalesque:

> - my name
> Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
> A beggar's bye-blow
> (IV.610-12)

Guido's name--among the most personal of words for him--is appropriated by plebeian discourse. Tertium Quid's expression of degradation,

> does not imply merely hurtling [Guido's name] into the void of nonexistence, into destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. (Rabelais 21)

This appropriation is suggested by Pompilia being called a "beggar's bye-blow" which is glossed in The Ring and the Book as "bastard" (659). The dialogizing of Guido's name takes on further meaning subsequently when Half-Rome raises questions about the unborn baby's paternity:

> the future son and heir?
> The unborn babe about to be called mine
> (IV.1084-5)

The inference that the "suspected priest" (IV.1266) could be the father adds carnivalesque parody to the issue of Guido's noble name, as well as to the sanctity of Caponsacchi's priestly vows of celibacy.

As with dialogism, the laughter of the carnivalesque is of little use to the reader seeking "absolutely truth,/Fanciless fact" (I.143-4). The laughter merely points to yet more 'speakers' in Browning's already burgeoning book who struggle to be heard in this Carnival of discourse, and who contest the political terrain of language.

Notes

1. According to the footnote to IV.55 (The Ring and the Book 657) Browning retains the feminine gender of the Italian pronoun for the cardinal: '*Sua* Eminenza' (Her Eminence).

2. R.D.Altick and J.F.Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 44, 43.

3. M.R. Sullivan, Browning's Voices in *The Ring and the Book* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1969) 58.

4. W.E. Buckler, Poetry and Truth in Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (New York: New York Press, 1985) 89.

5. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). All subsequent definitions will be sourced in the text as SOED.

6. R.Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: Norton, 1963) 119.

7. L. White, Meaning "beyond the facts" and Saving "The soul besides": Cultural Transcendence in the Opening Triad of *The Ring and the Book*, Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association 15 (1989): 118.

8. Tertium Quid directly refers only to a singular lower class (e.g. IV.66) yet implies various degrees within it (e.g. "scullions" IV.730; "middle rank" IV.85; and "a burgess nearly an aristocrat" IV.344). In this chapter I refer to the lower classes as plural. Reference to the text should clarify each person's specific 'degree'.

9. M.M.Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) 68-69.

10. See the footnote to IV.1680 (The Ring and the Book 661).

11. There is no court verdict delivered as part of a separate narrative book within The Ring and the Book. Verdicts are contained within court decisions reported in others' narratives. For example, Half-Rome relates that "authority" delivers "her decision" (II.1168-9). Other Half-Rome tells us, "Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke" (III.1376). Tertium Quid narrates, "The courts ... pronounced ..." (IV.1218, 1221). Of the three speakers, only Tertium Quid refers to a person behind the court's authoritative discourse, with his "Judge the Other" comment (IV.52). This suggests a greater familiarity on his part with the court officials and is consistent with judges being members of upper class social circles which Tertium Quid inhabits. Unlike the two Half-Romes, Tertium Quid is probably socially acquainted with judges.

12. M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 342-6.

13. E.W.Slinn, The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry (London: MacMillan, 1991) 180.

14. P. Stallybrass and A. White The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986) 128.

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