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GUIDO'S USE OF METAPHOR IN
BOOK XI OF THE RING AND THE BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Little has been written directly on the use of metaphor in The Ring and the Book, although there are four critics who do make some attempt to discuss the effects of Browning's extensive use of figurative language. Each of these critics acknowledges his inadequacy in this area and is satisfied with simply asserting a proposition.

Altick and Loucks in their book, Browning's Roman Murder Story¹, admit their differing views on the way metaphor is used in The Ring and the Book, and therefore make their observations individually.

The "first author" suggests that each metaphor is used so extensively and in such contradictory contexts that any metaphor which entered the poem with "generally well-defined connotations" ceases to have any clearly defined meaning by the time it has been used by a number of different monologuists. Thus, "The protean quality of language has been amply demonstrated, but so has the weakness of language as a dependable means of communication. Metaphors, it turns out, are at the mercy of human motives..."².

Metaphor, in the view of this author, becomes an inadequate means of communication and an unreliable moral indicator. For example, the Adam and Eve myth is used extensively in the poem, and in normal usage the serpent is accepted as a symbol of evil. However, by the time the poem has ended the serpent has been used to describe Guido, Violante and Pompilia by various speakers. Since this symbol of evil cannot be used to adequately describe both Guido and Pompilia, the symbol or metaphor ceases to have value as a moral indicator.

The implications of this view are complex. If we consider the poem in terms of plot, then metaphor becomes somewhat irrelevant, since it cannot assist us in our attempt to form a judgement of the protagonists. But if we consider the poem in terms of what the author is trying to reveal about the problems of language and communication, then the undermining of the meaning of metaphors becomes crucial. This will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

The "second author"³ takes a position which seems to contradict the approach that has just been discussed. His claim is that the metaphors in the poem do, indeed, function as moral indicators. His argument falls into two main areas. Firstly, he establishes "primary figurative roles"⁴ for each character and demonstrates that they are fitting. Secondly, he maintains that basic character norms are established very early in the poem, so that we are able to assess the value and accuracy of a metaphor according to the human nature of the speaker. So, knowing that Guido is a liar from the information given us in Book I we do not place any confidence in his descriptions of Pompilia as a "hawk" or a "plague".

There are several problems with this position. The first is that it presupposes a predetermined set of associations connected with each image which exist independently of the poem. This position has been questioned by recent theorists as we shall see shortly. Also, it fails to explain why we react negatively to Guido's veiled allusions to himself as Christ⁵ and yet blandly accept Pompilia's association of herself with Mary⁶. Both Pompilia and Guido are claiming association with someone who is mythically considered to be "sinless" and therefore both associations are quite preposterous. The views of this author also assume that the characters in the poem are unquestionably defined as good or as evil from the beginning of the poem, a point which is yet to be established. Even if we could establish such a point, figurative language has essentially been made redundant by this approach, no more than a linguistic flourish to embellish a point already made. The idea of giving primary significance to some images at the expense of others also raises many difficulties since such a selective process may be coloured by the expectations of reader or critic.

Steven Walker⁷, on the other hand, sees Browning's use of metaphor as far more functional to the structure and meaning of the poem as a whole. His argument is that the ambiguity generated by the dynamic quality of the metaphors reflects the ambiguity of characterisation and structure in The Ring and the Book:

[Browning's] imagery's unique strength parallels the structural strength of a poetry which characteristically juxtaposes conflicting views of reality. Browning

generates much of the vitality of his poetry from the friction of competing images.⁸

Walker's discussion is general, focusing on the poem in its entirety, and he almost ignores the existence of varying speakers. He concentrates instead on the fluid process of the imagery. His discussion of the way images tend to dehumanise or degenerate is compelling, as is his illustration of how some of the imagery undercuts itself, thereby revealing a skillful irony.⁹

Walker, in a sense, extends the observations of the first approach to metaphor which is outlined in Altick and Loucks. He suggests that the fluid, contrasting and conflicting associations of each image illustrate an actuality about the poem and about life in general: the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty generated at all times by varying perspectives. This leads to not non-sense but a relentless irony which resists resolution.

There are, however, some implications of Walker's approach which need to be considered in further detail. In discussing the imagery that applies to Pompilia he observes that even when a negative metaphor is applied to her the reader will "extract positive connotations of defencelessness and innocence"¹⁰ from it. He also notes that Guido and Pompilia share the largest number of metaphors but that each parallel image serves to emphasise the contrast between their two natures. If this is so, if we do apply all the negative connotations of an image to Guido and all the positive ones to Pompilia then we need to discover and assess the grounds on which we do this. It may be that the metaphors are not so integral to the meaning of the poem, but that we already have an established judgement of the protagonists which is independent of figurative language. Consider this further statement:

...stray hawks, spiders and virtually any other image with a trace of negative connotation, even when explicitly in reference to someone else, may gravitate to the hapless Guido.¹¹

There is no discussion of why this happens. Why should the reader attach all negative images and associations to Guido? There seem to me

to be two possibilities. Either we must accept that the reader makes his own judgement independent of metaphor, or we must look carefully at the selection of metaphor by various speakers - that is, we must consider the context in which different metaphors are placed. Our judgement may be affected not, for example, by what others say about Guido but by what he says about himself, and by the images he uses to do so. The function of the various narrators and modes of self-reflection seem crucial in any analysis of The Ring and the Book. For the major characters in the poem - Caponsacchi, Pompilia and, in his final monologue, Guido - speak largely in order to come to some understanding of their lives and personality through metaphoric language.

So it is from Roy Gridley's two articles, "Browning's Pompilia"¹² and "Browning's Two Guidos"¹³ that I wish to launch my discussion. Gridley's exploration of the way these two characters use metaphor to describe and discover their past lives as they approach death is thought-provoking and perceptive. Starting with Pompilia, Gridley demonstrates from the text of the poem how she resisted any attempt to understand her life because of her belief in her own ignorance and her desire to forget evil. However, pressed by her confessor she discovers, or is given, or remembers images on which she can build some conception of her life. Guido in the same way is striving to discover "something changeless at the heart of me/ To know me by, some nucleus that's myself" (XI.11.2392-3). In Gridley's terms Guido discovers the wolf image through ironically twisting the accepted symbol for the Papacy and grasps the image in a sudden realisation of his own nature. Armed with this identity he can then interpret his personality in terms of that metaphor, his past in terms of its implications and others around him by their relationship to it. Pompilia is thus described in terms of a passivity that contrasts with the instinctive life-force of a wolf. Pompilia similarly, states Gridley, plucks images from her childhood, from art and from friends to explain her life and in doing so comes to 'realise' her true nature and that of those around her: "...she is familiar enough with the imagery surrounding Mary to **name** as well as **recognise** herself in that role."¹⁴

According to Gridley, Pompilia does not simply identify with Mary, but she recognises her identification with Mary. Having done this she can then fit others into the myths that she establishes - Guido becomes

Satan, and Caponsacchi, St. Michael¹⁵ - or in the romantic myth which is proposed by Conti, she is the princess and so Guido becomes the dragon and Caponsacchi, St. George¹⁶. Once she has established her place in a particular myth the other characters fall into place and in this way she comes to understand and recognise her own goodness and Guido's existence as pure hate. This in turn explains for Gridley Guido's behaviour to her, since pure evil can only be repelled by goodness or godliness.

The question which I would ask here is whether it is in fact possible to **discover** the truth about one's self through the expression of metaphor. Does Guido actually discover that he is, in truth, wolfish, or does he **create** an identity based on the wolf image? Is it possible that the particular symbols chosen by Pompilia and Guido have no inherent correlation with actuality? And finally, we would have to consider whether there was any inherent meaning in events or in personalities which could be discovered.

This, of course, is a controversial area, and one which will be considered more fully in the following chapter. I wish first to assess the function of metaphor, considering theories of language and knowledge in their historical context, and then to see how one particular theory of knowledge - that of Nietzsche - relates to Guido's second monologue, Book XI of The Ring and the Book. I will consider how Guido uses language, the motivation behind his metaphorical construction, and finally ask how well this construction stands up when faced with annihilation.

Footnotes

¹ Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 266.

² Altick and Loucks, p. 266. The specific author is not identified.

³ Altick and Loucks, p. 267. The author, once again, is not specified.

⁴ Altick and Loucks, p. 268.

⁵ Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, 1st Edition, ed. Richard D. Altick (Middlesex Penguin Books: 1971), Book XI, 30-31a, 204-5, 596 and 2304-5. All quotations from The Ring and the Book will be taken from this edition, and where possible line numbers will be given in the text. Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from Book XI.

⁶ Book VII, 77-81, 1690-93, 1845.

⁷ Steven C. Walker, "The Dynamic Imagery of The Ring and the Book," SBHC, 4, i (1976), 7-29.

⁸ Walker, p. 10.

⁹ Walker, pp. 10-14.

¹⁰ Walker, p. 12.

¹¹ Walker, p. 13.

¹² Roy Gridley, "Browning's Pompilia," JEGP, LXVII (January 1968), 64-83.

¹³ Roy Gridley, "Browning's Two Guidos," UTQ, XXXVI (October 1967), 51-68.

- ¹⁴ Gridley, "Browning's Pompilia," p. 70. Gridley's emphasis.
- ¹⁵ Book VII. 1216-19.
- ¹⁶ Book VII. 1324-5.

CHAPTER ONE

While the theory of metaphor has been of some interest to most philosophers since Aristotle the only theorists to whom it was a principal area of serious study were the rhetoricians. Only in the last century has metaphor become of primary concern not only to rhetoricians and philosophers but also to linguists, psychologists, educationalists and literary critics. Until recently figurative language was generally seen as being of significance only to literature, an area of study which did not impose itself upon the other disciplines of human enquiry. With this in mind it is therefore rather surprising to begin a study of the theory of metaphor and discover that in the debate concerning the idea of the function and identity of metaphor there are representatives from a wide variety of disciplines. Sociologists, linguists, cognitive psychologists, anthropologists and scientific philosophers as well as literary theorists have joined in this ancient, and until most recently, peripheral debate. The approach of each discipline is necessarily unique and, while it is all of interest, not every approach is relevant to an applied study of the use of metaphor by a particular poet. It is of some value, however, to outline the broad paths of the literary and philosophical debate, so that the assumptions and theory of each critic may be seen in a clearly defined historical context.

One of the major problems of concern to any student of metaphor is the diversity of terms, upon which there is little agreement among theorists. In the interests of clarity, therefore, I have adopted in this introduction the terminology of Andrew Ortony (in the introductory essay to his collection of articles Metaphor and Thought, CUP: 1979)¹. In particular, the distinction he makes between constructivist and non-constructivist theories provides a useful framework for surveying the otherwise disjointed and diverse studies of metaphor theory over the centuries.

If we limit this discussion to the function of metaphor, as opposed to the issue of what metaphor is, we must of course start with Aristotle who discussed the function of metaphor in the Poetics and the Rhetoric². He saw the function of metaphor generally as ornamental, a pleasing aesthetic flourish serving to embellish a literal argument. Types of metaphor were carefully organised into categories according to their

mode of transference (the details of which are not relevant to this discussion and so will not be expanded on more fully). Metaphor was a way of giving one thing a name which belonged to something else, and so was seen as a special category of language, something essentially deviant in terms of common language. Aristotle believed metaphors to be implicitly based on the premises of analogy and as such were suspect rhetorical tools, generating not clarity but ambiguity and confusion. This being the case, metaphors were better confined to the realms of art, they were not the tools of serious debate. In Ortony's words, Aristotle categorised metaphors as "not necessary...just nice."³ The function of metaphor was considered a matter of delight, not an acceptable method of seeking or creating truth.

It is from Aristotle that non-constructivist theories of metaphor developed, and Aristotle's basic premises were barely altered. Non-constructivist theories view metaphor as generally unimportant, as a special category of rhetoric, divorced and deviant from literal argument. Metaphors are the tool of the poet, one who would persuade or delight. Metaphor would not be an adequate medium for one who endeavoured to express some objective fact or argument since it hinders precision and engenders ambiguity, using language in a way that is irregular. Literal language was of more use for communication and scientific discourse, while figurative language could be left to those artists who enjoyed ambiguity. Metaphor could be pleasing but its function remained aesthetic.

The concept of metaphor as ornamentation prevailed through the Classical period, finding its fullest expression in Quintillian who summarised and reorganised Aristotle's categories of types⁴. This categorisation and attitude remained prevalent until the late eighteenth century. Possible exceptions may be found in the literature of the medieval period, but in terms of the theory of metaphor (as opposed to the way metaphor was actually used in literature), attention focused on the classification of metaphor as a rhetorical device, an example of this being Geoffry de Vinsauf's Poetria Nova. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was clear instruction delivered as to how metaphor should be used. With plain style being preached from the pulpit metaphor was seen as a distorting deviation from the truth, and with Dr. Johnson's dictionary and enthusiasm for clarity, metaphor was

firmly categorised, acceptable among the poets as long as it conformed to Aristotelian classification.

The most striking aspect of such non-constructivist theories is the absolute distinction between literal and figurative language and underlying this distinction is the assumption that literal language could be precise, that words could have a direct, commonly understood denotation and that this denotation had some direct relationship with the external object which the word represented. I am, perhaps, pushing the implications of such an attitude to their furthest point and one is unlikely to find such an uncompromising position in any critical theorists of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, elements of this attitude still underlie - unacknowledged - much literary criticism.

Metaphor, then, according to the theories just outlined, is a way of retreating from or of blurring reality. For the constructivists, however, metaphor has a more honourable place in language usage. Metaphor, for these theorists, is a way of creating or of discovering reality; it may not be a mode of disorientation but a method of discovery. The idea of a direct relationship between language and the external object was being challenged by the eighteenth century, and it was this challenge which began to undermine the non-constructivist assumption that there was a clear distinction in the quality and function of literal and figurative language. The Romantic period in English literary history initiated a shift in the field of literary, and therefore metaphor, theory. The obvious place to begin an account of this shift is Coleridge, but there is value, I believe, in looking at the philosophical climate which preceded Coleridge. Hawkes, in his book on the development of the theory of metaphor, sees Vico as the natural predecessor of Coleridge⁵. However, one might just as validly take a brief look at the writings of David Hume⁶.

I choose Hume for two reasons, firstly because he emphasises the creative function played by individuals in the process of perception, questioning the absolute distinction between subject and object in perception and therefore, by inference, the distinction between literal and figurative language. Secondly, Hume stresses the importance of the imagination as a tool for perception and thus is linked closely with Coleridge's thought.

Hume, following the empirical tradition, was concerned with the questions of how we know and what we know. Considering consciousness to be the recipient of impressions which were caused by the senses, Hume concluded that not only do different people experience different impressions but that the objects that we become aware of through impressions can only be known to exist when we are there to experience them as objects of our consciousness. This is not necessarily to say that they do not exist outside of our consciousness but that we cannot know whether they exist. Therefore, we can have no knowledge of anything outside of the realms of our immediate sensory impressions. For Hume this presented an obvious problem since it is evident that we do not think of our experience of the world as simply a series of fleeting sensory impressions, and we believe in a world that is external to and independent of ourselves. Why is our conception of the world so different from our actual experience of it (assuming that Hume's theory of consciousness be correct)? Hume needed some bridge to account for our beliefs.

Hume's answer to this was the concept of the imagination, the faculty by which we construct a familiar, stable and permanent world. This remarkable faculty, according to Hume, stores up ideas and images which it can produce whenever necessary to fill in the gaps left by purely sensory impressions. We believe that the ideas and images with which we fill up these gaps in actual experience are the thing in itself (that is, we believe that the image produced by our imagination is the same as a sensory impression) since the images which we produce are similar to the objects which they are emulating. The imagination does not supply images at random: if we receive the impression of a lamp and then turn away, the image which our imagination will supply will be lamp-like. This regularity of appearances gives us the idea that the image which we have of a thing when we are not looking at it is the thing in itself. We ourselves, therefore, contribute a vital part to our knowledge of the independent world ... always assuming that there is such a thing. We supply the belief that objects may be separate from ourselves and that they are able to be known. Our belief in permanent, external objects may be illusory, the product of our imaginative images; nevertheless, this illusion is indispensable.

For Hume this was a disturbing conclusion since it undermined the concepts of logic and reason, these things being seen, consequently, as being built on false assumptions. Yet Hume is important as the initiator of ideas which would later be developed into language theory. If the mind is not entirely passive but is to any extent creative in the area of perception, then the idea of literal or objective language becomes suspect. The distinction between external and internal, between observer and object begins to crumble and the extent of man's creative function in his mode of perception and expression becomes more questionable. Coleridge picked up the premises of this sceptical philosophy and extended them into the area of literary criticism, revealing their implications for language.

For with Coleridge we move from the area of pure philosophy to the realms of language theory. As Hawkes says, in Coleridge

...is that ultimate realisation...[that] the Imagination will take linguistic form, and that that form is obviously manifested in the sort of association of ideas which generates metaphor...Coleridge conceives of metaphor as Imagination in action.⁷

We have moved here from Hume's theory of imagination as a fundamental part of human perception to the imagination as it shapes language. The interplay between human creativity and the external object remains similar, but the function of the imagination changes and becomes an aspect of language as well as perception. This may be inferred from Hume but it is made clear by Coleridge. For Coleridge, the (secondary) imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create...it struggles to idealise and to unify."⁸ Coleridge takes up and extends Hume's idea that the imagination imposes a form and continuity upon the material of sensory impressions. The imagination may break down the material of sensation and give it a new shape; it re-creates the ordinary world of perception in its struggle to find a unity, a universality. The creative aspect of language and perception is thus further stretched. Yet the idea of unity and organicism works in opposition to this emphasis on creativity. The counter stress on organicism in Coleridge's writings suggests that there are connections, there are unities between external objects which, through the process of

disassembling and recreating, may be **discovered** rather than created. Language is now seen as a process of discovery through its ability to reveal underlying unities present in the outside world. "Reality" becomes the process by which man's mind is projected into external forms through the disassembling and reconstructing force of the imagination. It thus becomes more difficult to distinguish between the subject and the object, between the perceiver and the perceived, although they remain separate entities which are fused in the process of perception and interpretation.

Metaphor becomes significant here in that it is a primary tool for indicating the unity, hitherto unperceived, between two unlike objects. This role is a distinct move away from the Classical or non-constructivist theories of metaphor. Metaphor is no longer seen as a way of ornamenting previously stated truth; neither is it a way of joining clearly distinguished categories of thought into a single, illustrative image. It is, rather, a way of discovering and revealing a unity of association through the perceptive faculty of imagination, and thus it becomes a more free, more functional and more radical concept. The distinction between literal and figurative language is thus thrown further into question. We can no longer describe something "literally" for in order to perceive and describe we must to some extent be pioneers, discoverers, we must unravel associations and relationships, and to see and describe these associations we are thrown into a world of metaphor as an aspect of perception. We cannot avoid metaphor; metaphor is a way of perceiving the world.

When we move from Coleridge to Nietzsche we face immediate problems. Since Nietzsche vehemently or ironically attacked any attempts at forming systems of philosophy it would be unreasonable of us to expect him to be a systematic philosopher. His attitude to language was mainly implicit in his writings and his direct remarks concerning the nature of knowledge were scattered and brief. Even to discuss his views is to imply some consistent system, but, keeping this in mind, we can at least look at the directions in which he pointed⁹.

Nietzsche takes man's involvement in perception a step further than Coleridge. For Nietzsche the external object could not inform the internal imagination and there could be no relationships to discover.

Here we move even more fully into the realms of language and metaphor than we did with Coleridge. Metaphor is no longer seen as simply a method of disassembling and restructuring a relationship already inherent in an external, independent thing: metaphor is a way of artificially creating a meaning or a form in the chaos of experience which we have no reason to believe contains any inherent meaning or structure:

There is no 'real' expression and **no real knowing apart from metaphor....Knowing** is nothing but working with favourite metaphors.¹⁰

Nietzsche denies that we can assume any thing apart from its expression in relationships, and this leads us to our dependence on metaphor. Were it not for metaphor, for our ability to create and convey relationships through language, there could be no concept of self and no meaning or structure within that which is perceived. We cannot discuss or conceptualise anything except in terms of the manner in which we stand related to that thing, and that thing has no known existence or meaning except in relation to the perceiver. These concepts, self and other, can only exist meaningfully in as much as they can be made to relate through language. This is not necessarily to say that there is no such thing as an external, independent world; the problem simply is that we cannot reach it or know it. We cannot distinguish between what the mind contributes to the world and what is in the world; we cannot know what things would be without the contribution of our own interpretation. We cannot, therefore, assert with any certainty that our metaphors 'discover' that which is a part of the external world.

Nietzsche then took this a step further, saying that the world was in eternal flux, without shape or significance, so that all meaning, structure and form is the contribution of man's language. All meaning is therefore a human creation or construction, a process of making the meaningless meaningful:

...all meaning...is a result of human **making**: the joy in shaping and reshaping - a primaeval joy! We can understand only a world that we ourselves have made.¹¹

The self and the other thus become interdependent for just as no thing can be discerned except in relation to the self, so the self or consciousness cannot retain any meaningful existence except by measuring itself against some other, and both distinctions, that of self and that of other, can only be created by language. Through the use of metaphor we create ourselves and the other out of the infinite flux.

There is a major difference between Nietzsche and Coleridge to be seen here: for Coleridge the mind discovers unity or relationships; for Nietzsche the process is wholly creative. Only language can create distinctions in the flux and only by making these distinctions can man create his own consciousness:

The drive towards the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself.¹²

It should be evident from all this that Nietzsche, in classifying all language as creative, asserted that all language is figurative, in that it expresses a relationship. But man commonly makes a distinction between language which is creative or figurative and language which is literal or objective. How can this be accounted for? According to Nietzsche, in distinguishing the literal from the figurative, we are simply distinguishing between familiar and novel metaphors, for "knowing is nothing but working with favourite metaphors". What we accept as facts are

A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred and embellished, and which after long usage seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions...metaphors that have become worn out...to be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors.¹³

The distinction between literal and figurative, between the true and the imaginative, depends on the historical moment which we occupy, and the ruling myth or metaphor which governs the society of that

moment. As such it is subject to time and change. We might use the example of the human body. If we are governed by the myth of science we see the human body as a machine and anything which implies intention or intuition in relation to the body is therefore seen as figurative. But if we change the governing metaphor to the Christian mythology of the body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, then anything which describes the body as programmed or mechanical is figurative. The use of a particular myth or metaphor thus defines the system by which we establish literal or figurative meanings. It remains evident from this that **all** meanings are grounded in metaphor and must therefore be regarded as figurative. Metaphor itself can no longer be classified; there can be no 'good' or 'bad' metaphors in an Aristotelian or Johnsonian manner. Metaphors can only be familiar or unfamiliar, and all are arbitrary and inadequate.

Metaphor must be inadequate, because it makes arbitrary and deceptive distinctions in what is essentially the amorphous process of experience. Metaphor can only grasp at aspects of experience or appearance, suppressing the ambiguity contained in Wholeness. Nothing can be constrained or conveyed in its entirety by the structures of rhetoric and the rules of grammar, and so metaphor becomes a compulsively distorting process. Furthermore, for this reason, language must also be in constant process, never complete, categorising the movement not the moment of thought. We can never dispense, for the sake of a continuous concept of ourselves, with a concept which must incessantly be re-formed, with the process of striving for metaphors, the expression of artificial relationships. As such all truth is a continual shaping and re-forming process by man through metaphor, a process which, however inadequate and distorting, we cannot dispense with for we have no other method at our disposal with which to shape and reshape ourselves and our environment. "To experience", says Nietzsche, "is to fictionalise" and furthermore, to resist insanity, the collapse into non-self, man must wilfully forget that this shaping is a fiction, metaphor, the lie of language:

Only by forgetting that he himself is an **artistically creating** subject, does man live with any repose, security and consistency.¹⁴

Let me then summarise the premises of Nietzsche's views on language. The basis of all language is metaphor, even to the extent that the distinction which we make between literal and figurative language depends simply on which dominant metaphor we employ. Metaphor creates the only knowable truth; there can be no concept of self or of other except through language, and yet it is a distorting medium, selective in the structures which it creates and imposes. For the sake of sanity, reference and meaning, man must pretend to himself that he is not dependent upon and determined by metaphor. Metaphor is the process by which we create our own fiction of identity and sanity.

Nietzsche's theory of language may seem a long way from Guido's second monologue, but I hope to illustrate, as this discussion progresses, the relevance of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge to the psychological horrors which Guido faces in his twelve hours in the death cell, and to the speech which Guido makes, in his last struggle for identity. Guido's insights into the limitations of language are more readily understood in the light of Nietzsche's concept of the function of metaphor, while Guido's final desperation acquires a new significance when seen in the context of his long struggle with language.

Footnotes

¹ Metaphor and Thought, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

² see Ortony, p. 3.

³ Ortony, p. 3.

⁴ This discussion of non-constructivist theories of metaphor is largely influenced by Terence Hawkes, Metaphor (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972).

⁵ Hawkes, pp. 36-40.

⁶ For further information see Mary Warnock, "Nietzsche's Conception of Truth," Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought, ed. Malcolm Pasley (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1978).

⁷ Hawkes, p. 43.

⁸ S.T. Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", The Portable Coleridge, ed. I.A. Richards (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 516.

⁸ See bibliography for details of Nietzsche sources and interpretation.

¹⁰ F. Nietzsche, Philosophy and Truth, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 50-51.

¹¹ F. Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: 1967), p. 272.

¹² F. Nietzsche, Philosophy and Truth, pp. 88-9.

¹³ F. Nietzsche, Philosophy and Truth, p. 84.

¹³ F. Nietzsche, Philosophy and Truth, p. 86.

CHAPTER TWO

Moving from Nietzsche's theory of language to a direct analysis of a specific text we must now consider the relevance of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge to Guido's use of language in his second monologue, Book XI of The Ring and the Book.

I wish first of all to examine briefly the reasons given by various critics for Guido's extensive use of metaphor. Some are strongly of the opinion that Guido is using metaphors for the sake of deception and trickery, and in this case it becomes necessary to analyse carefully from the text Guido's awareness of the nature of metaphor and his motivations for constructing his speech. After looking at his motivations I wish to consider whether Guido uses metaphor in a creative or deductive way; in other words does Guido's use of metaphor confirm Nietzsche's view of the construction of metaphor being a creative endeavour? Finally, in this Chapter I will carefully look at the way in which Guido constructs an identity through metaphor.

Many critics have commented on the profusion of metaphor in The Ring and the Book. Altick and Loucks, for instance, refer to the poem as "a dense network of association, analogy and attribution - similitudes ranging from the explicit and the plainly applicable to the hazily implicit"¹ Such a dense use of metaphor need not surprise us if we consider Nietzsche's belief that metaphor was essential to human thought, perception and existence:

The drive towards the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself.²

Given the complex process that each monologist is involved in, metaphor must be the fundamental method by which each speaker attempts to make meaning of past events and of his own involvement in those events. For some of the critics, as we have seen, this elaborate and extensive use of metaphor is seen as a positive, dynamic venture which reflects the incessant activity of language striving to catch meaning, trying to reach an interpretation, but never being quite able to com-

that process (see Steven Walker³). For others,⁴ it is an example of and a process by which language is used for deception and trickery. For Nietzsche, of course, metaphor is all these things: unavoidably distorting and an incomplete process because incapable of grasping 'things' in their entirety. But although metaphor is an inherently distorting medium, to accuse Guido of using metaphor for the purposes of deception seems to assume that he is aware of the nature of metaphor, an assumption which must be carefully documented from the text. Metaphor would be classed as deceptive if it were to be used by a speaker to represent the absolute truth when he knew that that was not possible. Consequently, any argument that claims that a speaker is using metaphor for the purposes of deception must depend on the speaker's awareness of the process of metaphor. It is too harsh a judgement, embodying too great an irony to be lightly levelled as a criticism of a speaker without careful analysis of his awareness and motivation.

Guido's final monologue is an ideal subject for such detailed analysis. His use of metaphor is extensive and elaborate, and motivated by two distinct needs. While his awareness of how metaphor functions will be dealt with later, his motivation must be looked at in this early stage. Firstly, Guido is trying to convince his confessors, the Abate and the Cardinal, that he should not be executed. Secondly, he is trying to create a self with which to face and endure death. His use of metaphor therefore has two distinct functions, to persuade and to create. In the first situation, his attempt to save his life, he may or may not be attempting to deceive. In the other instance, that of creating a self, he is honestly attempting to contain a truth about himself, however deluded that attempt may be. Guido may, indeed, be speaking manipulatively in the context of his attempts to obtain a reprieve, but should such role-playing fail he is at the same time faced with a more ghastly need to make "some nucleus" which is changeless after death.

His oscillation between these two motives makes his reasoning complex and disjointed, and makes it difficult to assess the extent to which he is aware of the inadequacies of language processes. Some critics, Margaret Doane⁵ for example, attempt to simplify this complexity in Guido's motivation by ingenuously identifying and distinguishing

between passages where he is speaking solely to himself and passages where he is mainly addressing his confessors. A distinction is thus made between interior and exterior monologues. Such a distinction may simplify things for the critic, but it disregards the powerful complexity of the monologue, avoiding the intricate interweaving of motivation and metaphoric associations. The two directions of argument are closely bound since it is largely by identifying, confirming and justifying his self that Guido hopes to convince his confessors that he should not be killed. A critical view that separates the two motivations also ignores the astute manner in which Guido manipulates various associations surrounding each image, as we shall see shortly. The two motivations are distinct and yet interdependent. This complexity of motives does not apply only to Guido in The Ring and the Book. It is most evidently applicable to Caponsacchi, who during the trial, aims to reveal Pompilia's innocence and to strive for "authentic self-awareness"⁶. It is also true of Pompilia who aims not only to justify her behaviour but also to "discover or create an order and a meaningful context for her life"⁷. These speakers, in discussing and describing their place in the events which surrounded this murder, struggle to come to some understanding of themselves. If we accept Nietzsche's claim that the formation of metaphor is essential to the human consciousness for a creation of selfhood, then we should not be surprised by the dense pattern of images created by each of these speakers. Only by defining themselves in relation to their concepts of others and external events, that is, by metaphor, can they create some self, as we are reminded constantly by Nietzsche. For Guido this creation of a self was imperative; motivated by a more time-laden need than most of the other speakers it is necessary for him to create an identity that will outlive death.

For Guido to discuss any interpretation of the drama in which he has been involved, he is compelled to use metaphor, since any meaning by definition resides in the relationship established through metaphor. Keeping in mind Nietzsche's premise that the world is a meaningless flux, we can see that the process of discussion is creative to the extent that those events and individuals which he discusses can contain no inherent meaning in themselves. By creating relationships through language Guido creates meaning for both his self and for those things to which he stands in relation.

To illustrate that Guido's use of metaphor is in fact creative let us look briefly at Gridley's discussion of the way in which Guido uses the crucial wolf metaphor. Gridley basically takes the Coleridgean point of view concerning the function of metaphor, in claiming that Guido, in his monologue, is in the process of discovering the truth about his own personality. The emphasis is on discovering and finding.

Guido's 'personal search' in the course of the monologue is one of **finding** the words to express his unique experience.⁸

He discusses the way Guido comes upon the wolf metaphor: "he is betrayed by the extension of a metaphor into calling himself a wolf"⁹. Gridley then looks at the way Guido progresses from using the Pope's traditional image as shepherd, to denying the application and appropriateness of this image, and terming him rather a sheep thief:

Your self-styled shepherd thieves!
A thief - and how thieves hate the wolves we know:
(11.434-35)

It is at this point, according to Gridley, that Guido "discovers that he must express his own enmity towards Innocent with the image of a wolf"¹⁰, and by doing this he discovers and expresses the true nature of his personality - he is, by nature, wolfish. This argument needs to be considered carefully. If we accept the idea that Guido is forced into declaring his enmity towards the Pope, he still had a variety of related roles that he could have associated with himself, in relation to the Pope-as-sheep-thief, which would have expressed that enmity. He could have described himself as the shepherd (and thereby continue his own analogy of himself as Christ that he used mainly in his first monologue). Or, in keeping with his oft-asserted role as victim, which many critics have emphasised, he could have described himself as a lamb or a sheep. The point is that he chooses an image out of a possible variety of metaphors which could have been associated with the sheep-thief. It might be argued that in accepting the wolf image he accepts an image given to him by the Pope. However, the point remains that he chooses to accept and retain the metaphor - he accepts little else that the Pope advocates - when he is free to do otherwise. In using the wolf metaphor,

therefore, Guido does not make an unavoidable discovery of his own nature which he falls upon by the accident of extending a metaphor. Guido has made a definite choice to retain the wolf metaphor within the sheep-thief-wolf relationship for a variety of motives which I shall explore shortly.

His later exclamation in relation to that metaphor of "How that staunch image serves at every turn!" (1.1179) may not be an exclamation of "excited discovery"¹¹, but an ironical acknowledgement of the linguistic expansion which he is exploring. The element of choice involved reveals the extent to which his articulation of metaphor is an act of creation, not an act of discovery. While the use of the sheep-thief image for the Pope may limit his choices, he is nevertheless in a position to choose the metaphor which conjures up the associations which he wishes to use or exploit. He then chooses to extend the image of the wolf as he does no other metaphor in his long monologue - another area of choice is exhibited here - but not because it is necessarily the truth about himself. There is no "true meaning" to his self: there are simply a variety of ways of making that self meaningful. Guido chooses to explore this particular image because it "serves" his complex purposes as part of the creation of a meaningful self.

Having established that Guido's use of metaphor is a creative process, I think it is useful at this point to consider in detail the way in which Guido creates a self through metaphor. The process is two-fold. It involves a breaking down of those structures which stood in relation to the images he used in Book 5, his first monologue and a construction of a new self through different images. In order to negate or nullify those concepts of self such as husband, cleric, aristocrat, landlord, he has first of all to break down the meaningfulness of the institutions which stood in relation to them (and which thereby gave them meaning). He thus attacks the meaning of marriage, Church, Society and Justice. At the same time he begins to create a new self by choosing images on which to construct a new identity, images which progress from the sacred and conventional to those which are secular in their associations and are related to strength. As the process of destruction and construction which we are about to explore, develops, a psychological tension is revealed within Guido, two opposing drives operating internally, one of which seeks freedom and chaos through the destruction

of meaning and one which seeks to create an order and coherence by the creation, through metaphor, of new meaningful relationships and structures. Guido needs to break down the old metaphor system which he has used until this point in order to be free to construct a new identity or coherence as self. By rejecting and making meaningless his existing beliefs and structures, his imagination is freed to create a new conception of self, society, God and an afterlife.

It seems practical to begin with an analysis of the way in which Guido destroys the meaning of those institutions by which he has hitherto defined himself. It may seem a little odd to describe terms such as "husband, noble, priest" as metaphorical. Yet if we accept Nietzsche's extended definition of metaphor we will see that these terms do fit such a definition¹²), since they are a way of describing and defining relationships. A man may use the term 'husband' to define himself, to give himself meaning in relation to a particular institution. It is a process by which he creates meaning for himself. It is therefore just as important to analyse the creation or destruction of this term as it is to examine the way in which the wolf metaphor is applied or withdrawn. While this latter term may be widely accepted as a metaphor in the more generally understood meaning of the word metaphor, we can see that in Nietzsche's definition both 'husband' and 'wolf' serve the same function and exhibit a similar process.

Guido begins his second monologue with an approach, manner and metaphors that closely resemble his tactics in his first monologue. The first five lines illustrate this:

- two good Tuscan names;
Acciaiuoli - ah, your ancestor it was,
Built the huge battlemented convent-block
(11.2b-4)

He begins by demonstrating his familiarity with the Tuscan aristocracy and the historical development of the Church. On this basis he asks for aid:

"I do adjure you, help me, Sirs! My blood
Comes from as far a source" (11.15-16)

"Sirs, I beseech you by blood sympathy, (1 .19).

His obvious and single motive at this point is still to save his life, relying on the claims of the aristocracy and Italian pride. As this vein continues, he appeals to the Church, and the law, showing how they have failed him. He then appeals to friendship:

Sir Abate,
Can you do nothing? Friends, we used to frisk;
What of this sudden slash in a friend's face
(11.86b-88)

When this also fails ("I call your two hearts stone", 1.135) he realises the significance of the presence of his two old friends, and it is here that his motives for speaking begin to become complex. As he describes the red machine which must send him to his death, he becomes fascinated by the process of producing death and obsessed by the potential lack of permanence and continuity which he faces:

A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch,
Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
Behind him! (11.320-322a)

This metaphor contains all the horror of a violent death and the significance of "hole" and its associated "hideous" underlines his fear of nothingness. It is here that he realises that if he continues to define himself as he has been doing, in terms of social institutions, then in death he will indeed become a hole, something without meaning, nothing. At this point he begins to construct a self outside the definitions he has hitherto accepted, and to do this he begins to dismantle the meaning of those old institutions by which he has defined himself.

Guido discusses throughout the entire monologue the way in which the law, society and the Church have failed him, but his most extensive dismantling of the meaning of those institutions comes quite early in his speech (11.515-848).

Having discussed the inconsistency of the law in the beginning of the monologue, ("ah, but times change.../ I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place", 11.276-277) which in itself throws doubts on the meaningfulness of the process of justice, since it is hard to see how a thing can be right at one time and wrong at another, he begins in line 515 to consider the basis of justice, the principles on which it is founded. His discussion of Felice's execution undermines the concept of a law which appears to impose its decisions arbitrarily. He then attempts to give a new meaning to the law which allows him to stand outside it, no longer defined within its terms as a criminal or as an innocent man:

All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such licence and conformed to law:
Who breaks law, breaks pact, therefore, helps himself
To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit, - pain beyond his share:
For pleasure is the sole good in the world,
Anyone's pleasure turns to someone's pain,
So, let law watch for everyone, - say we,
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
And nickname the reprisal, envy makes,
Punishment (11.524-534a).

Here Guido is questioning the moral labels that we apply to people, making those labels seem hypocritical and a justification for our method of restraining self-interest. He is not questioning the idea that such a social pact is wrong: he is just showing how moral terms disguise the true nature of the system. Envious 'reprisal' is disguised as 'punishment' and that which gives too much pleasure to one person is called 'wicked'. Rejecting these terms as fictitious and deceptive, Guido then refuses to submit to moral demands that he should repent of his so-called crime:

I broke bond,
And needs must pay price - wherefore, here's my head,
Flung with a flourish! But, repentance too? (11.543b-545).

In terms of the sharing out of pleasure, he admits that he did indeed break the law, but, seeing the true basis of law (as he constructs it), he refuses to admit to moral guilt; he admits to being anti-social, but not to committing an immoral act. For this reason he can stand outside the law, break the social pact, and still reject the concepts of damnation or repentance:

my creed's one article -
'Get pleasure, 'scape pain, - give your preference
To the immediate good, for time is brief' (11.767-769).

He thus breaks out of the social institutions of justice and social order, and ceases to define himself by moral, social and judicial terms.

He applies a similar process to the Church, discussing hypothetical situations to show that Christianity has no meaning except as an historical episode which has long since passed, and that it has no effects on social behaviour. He begins by discussing the Church's avarice, casting doubt on the Church's honesty and charity, and then accuses the Church of propagating a faith which is a dramatic and conscious illusion which is widely recognised as such. In this way he questions the truth and the inherent meaning which the Church claims to have:

feigning everywhere grows fact,
Professors turn possessors, realize
The faith they play with as a fancy now,
And bid it operate, have full effect
On every circumstance of life, today (11.589b-593).

Those who profess to believe in Christianity know it to be mere fancy, merely an artificial way of imparting meaning, without any fundamental truth - even though it claims to be The Truth - and yet they use it for profit, power and for the sake of giving meaning to their existence. It is a conscious illusion paraded as the truth. Christianity does not alter the way one behaves; unbelief would make no difference. Men might

realize
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite -
Set it to work on life unflinchingly,

Yet give no symptom of an outward change:
 Why should things change because men disbelieve?
 (11.598b-602)

Hypothesising about a series of possible situations, Guido gives several interpretations to each episode, showing that Christianity is just one way of interpreting events and that it is imposed by those who know how arbitrary it is for the purposes of maintaining the social and judicial system which Guido has already "shown" to have no inherent moral basis:

Christ's Gospel changes names, not things,
 Renews the obsolete, does nothing more' (11.362-3)

Jove's rechristened God - (1.365b)

Guido claims that this fictional status of Christian morality is so widely recognised that he can call all believers "Born-baptised-and-bred Christian-atheists" (1.709b) who act on "frank faithless principle" (1.708b). He juggles with contradictory meanings that reduce Christianity and all Christians to the realms of the ridiculous, a totally acknowledged but disguised fancy which is entirely irrelevant to life, except as it supports and sustains the social pact. Those who ask him to conform to such a system are asking him to "keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever/ Lie in the latest gasp of me" (11.414-415).

In his analysis of the way the Church acquires and retains its power Guido seems to be highly aware of the way in which language works, that is, by giving a meaning through metaphor which is inadequate and fictional. He explores the way in which language may be used to manipulate society through its capacity to impart meaning - in this case in a conscious and deceptive manner, in order to maintain the social order through a fictional moral system. Guido once again rejects this system, allowing himself to stand outside the labels of the Church, freed from the label of moral evil (at least to himself) and freed from the labels he has used up until now to give himself meaning in relation to the Church - Christian, priest and so on:

I think I never was at any time
 A Christian, as you nick-name all the world,
 Me among others (11.1914-1916).

Having freed himself from the meaning imposed by the Church, he is free to experiment with interpretations of himself and his life from a variety of religions, to associate many possible meanings with himself. He can claim to be a natural man or a "primitive religionist" (1.1917) and interpret his actions in that light. He can claim to be a follower of Jove (1.1934) in order to give himself power or mythological status, or he can experiment with the implications and possibilities of an Ovidean afterlife (11.2043-2070). This gives him a magnificent freedom and the potential to create his own meanings and interpretations, in place of those given by society. He emphasises that such new meanings cannot change events or things, they can only change the interpretation of something. To some extent he loses this awareness of the inadequacy of language as his monologue progresses, failing to recognise the extent of his own investment in the process of imparting meaning - but this will be considered more fully later in this discussion.

By challenging the meaning of the social order, of law and Christianity, and by undermining the Church's concept of morality, Guido frees himself from terms that made his self and his actions meaningful in relation to those institutions. He thereby gives himself the freedom to consider or create new terms, new names, new metaphors and new meanings for himself and for his life and death.

As he frees himself from his old system of metaphor Guido begins to build a new system of images based on new associations and relationships. The two processes are intertwined; he does not firstly destroy the old system and then begin to construct the new. Rather the processes are interdependent and reveal the psychological tension mentioned earlier.

His earliest metaphors are based on the Christian or chivalric codes, revealing that he is still dependent on the old institutions as a way of giving meaning to himself. He is

Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own,
As Mary's self (11.30-31a).

These images have associations of Christian morality and total innocence in the Christian sense of lack of sin. In this same early section of the monologue, which is remarkably sparse in imagery (in contrast to the greater body of the monologue), he also defines himself as a "gallant" (1.38) and a noble (1.92), and the references to Roland and Oliver (11.304-5) place him distinctly in the aristocratic, chivalric tradition. References to the chivalric tradition are generally limited to this earlier section of the monologue, but references to himself as Christ change distinctly in tone as the monologue continues. These earlier references - "Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own" (1.30) - may be taken as unironic, a straight-forward if histrionic claim that he is as innocent as Christ in the moral sense. As his monologue progresses, however, his references to himself as Christ become increasingly ironic and based on associations other than sinlessness or innocence. In line 596 his remark "Before I work this wonder" is an indirect reference to himself as the miracle-worker, the Christ, and yet the association is obviously ironic since he is referring to his ability to give new meanings to situations which undermine the concept of faith. The association of Christ that he is manipulating is not that of innocence but of power. In his parodic parable (11.2304-5) he puts himself once again in the position of Christ¹³ and the emphasis once again is on power, this time Christ's power to burn the damned and to reap the virtuous - only here, of course, Guido burns the virtuous. Although these references are ironic, Guido has moved in his use of metaphor from associating himself with Christ as sinless, a moral quality, to Christ as power, which he uses in an amoral sense. The same may be said of the reference in 11.204-5 ("those who use the sword shall perish by the same"), where Christ is once again the judge who determines the fate of the world. This transition in the way Guido exploits the associations of Christ, moving from associations of moral innocence to associations of amoral power, reflects a very definite trend in the way Guido's use of metaphor alters in the course of his monologue. It is possible to observe a turning point in his use of metaphor to define himself in lines 400-45. In this passage he shifts from defining himself in terms of good or evil, to defining himself and those around him in terms of weakness or strength. This transition hinges on the wolf-sheep

metaphor. In lines 400-405 he is still describing himself as a sheep and the Pope as a bad shepherd:

And now what does this Vicar of the Lord,
 Shepherd o' the flock, - one of whose charges bleats sore
 For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns?
 Law suffers him put forth the crumpled end, -
 His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,
 And thrust the shuddering sheep he calls a wolf,
 Back and back, down and down to where a hell gapes!
 (11.400-406).

In this way he associates innocence and moral helplessness with himself, and morally negative associations with the Pope. He is attacking the Pope for calling this sheep a wolf and thereby calling a passive and innocent victim a dangerous evil. Between lines 434 and 444, however, he rejects the sheep image for himself and describes himself as a wolf. As we have already discussed, he **chooses** to agree to this role out of a variety of related roles, and this becomes the major image upon which he begins to create a meaning for himself. There is a subtle shift in the metaphoric associations being manipulated here, though, and it is crucial to the way in which Guido continues to create his identity. By making himself a wolf and making the Pope (and other members of the Church hierarchy) into sheep thieves he makes void any moral dichotomy between himself and the Church. In terms of this traditional Christian metaphor neither he nor the Church can, by this extension of metaphor, be seen as morally good; rather, they both are now seen as morally reprehensible, destructive and anti-social. This shift engineers a turn in the argument by breaking down the distinction between good and evil which every speaker, including Guido himself, has used until this point, and allowing a new dichotomy, based on strength and weakness, to be developed. From this point onwards Guido noticeably develops images of strength to represent himself, rather than images of conventional good or evil. This is quite in keeping with his motivation to retain continuity, since if death is inevitable there cannot be much satisfaction in convincing yourself that you were in the right: it is far more imperative to convince yourself that you are going to survive. And this is what Guido aims to do for himself.

This development of images of strength does not make Guido the devil incarnate, although he is vitally aware of the complex associations relating particularly to the wolf metaphor which may make him appear so. And he makes subtle use of this complexity and ambiguity. Allowing for the possibility that his confessors are perhaps unaware of the way in which he has over-ridden and made meaningless the moral dichotomy between the Church and himself, he still plays on the evil associations of the wolf image in order to make himself appear to be morally degenerate so that they will not execute him for fear that he will go to hell. However, it is evident that these are associations that he is not truly dependent on, and he plays with their reactions, at one time reminding them that he is only manipulating language:

All's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric!

One must try each expedient to save life.¹ (11.851-852).

His exploitation of metaphoric associations is solely a way of saving his life; it is no longer a way of making his life meaningful and he is using the other associations of the wolf metaphor for that purpose. At other times he consciously and mockingly plays on their fears, fears which are inevitable given the moral system shared by the Abate and the Cardinal:

"Do n't fidget, Cardinal!

Abate, cross your breast and count your beads

And exorcise the devil, for here he stands

And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,

Daring you drive him hence!" (11.553b-557a).

This jesting manipulation of their formulaic Christian fears reveals that associations of evil are not ones that he is taking seriously, and the tone of this extract emphasises this point. Such play-acting is simply a plot to save his life; it is not a part of the identity he is constructing. Having nullified the meaning of Christian moral distinctions, he can now represent himself as the devil and Christ in the same breath, if he pleases, and if it serves his purpose of constructing a strong self. Indeed he asserts both possibilities in his manipulation of meaning throughout the poem. The rich associations of metaphor with their manifold possible meanings allow him to exploit a complex irony,

to use a single metaphor to intimidate his confessors into believing him evil. Many critics have been fooled by this device, asserting that Guido claims that he is evil throughout the second monologue. In fact, Guido is representing himself as amoral, but allowing his metaphors to work in a dual fashion, due to their associations, in order to save his life. There is, of course, another level of irony that works against Guido which we as readers can enjoy: he is blithely unaware of the associations of deceit and treachery that also cling to the metaphor and apply themselves to their user. However, this will be considered more fully in Chapter Three.

The metaphors of strength which Guido builds up are not confined to the wolf image, although he expands this to its fullest potential. He describes his heart as "that stone wall" (1.918) and himself as a "steel man" (1.1027) with all the appropriate associations of impermeability and strength. Even the image of himself as gardener (1.1100), which on the surface may not have connotations of strength, in its extended sense gives him power over Pompilia, since it is in his power to "tend" her or to condemn her to a "weed's fate". In other words, in terms of this particular metaphor, he has the power to destroy her. One image that he returns to several times is himself as horse trainer (11.1041, 1362 and 1395), which gives him the power of punishment or death over Pompilia who will not conform her will to his own. He develops and identifies with these images of strength to such an extent that he begins to resemble the Duke of Ferrara in his belief in his power over events and lives. Compare the Duke's comments in "My Last Duchess" - "This grew; I gave commands,/ Then all smiles stopped together"¹⁴ - with Guido's similar confidence in his own power and control: "This wife of mine was of another mood.../ Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her" (11.1428-1430). He is judge, jury and executioner with power over life and death. This confidence in the metaphors which he employs continues to ebb and flow throughout the monologue. Although at times he does acknowledge the process he is involved in, these times become rarer as his speech continues. At line 1910 he describes himself as an Ancient Roman - or Tuscan - warrior and allies himself with Roman mythological gods, and this alliance leads him to a dramatic celebration of the fate of the strong when metamorphosed in Ovidian terms: "the strong become a wolf for evermore!" (1.2051).

Freed from the Christian concepts of an afterlife, he dismisses the idea of hell as "Childish, preposterous, impossible" (1.2047) and proposes an afterlife where one becomes completely one's self, and that, for him, is an extension of the wolf metaphor. At this point Guido is probably at his closest to claiming that he has sole control over meaning, life and death, since it is **his** interpretation of the individual which will become a truth after death. Since he has defined Pompilia as weak through the metaphors he has applied to her, she will be metamorphosed into a "puny stream". He alone has control over the fate of individuals, according to the images which he employs. And as he has described himself in terms of strength, then he will indeed become truly wolf, not simply described as a wolf:

Let me turn wolf, be whole and sate, for once -
Wallow in what now is wolfishness (11.2054-5).

He is faced with the choice of stifling the wolf and becoming man, or becoming completely wolfish. It is interesting to note that at this point he seems to have changed his attitude to the function and nature of metaphor. Earlier in his monologue, when he was attacking the metaphorical base of the Church, for example, he seemed aware that metaphor was a creative, arbitrary process which gave meaning to essentially meaningless events. Yet now he is claiming that the wolf metaphor is not arbitrary, that it is the truth about himself and that the wolfish associations which he is attributing to himself are true aspects of his own nature. In believing that he is inherently wolfish he has moved from a Nietzschean to a Coleridgean view of language. He has begun to believe in his own rhetoric, has become totally caught up in the web of words which he has been spinning. What some critics have seen¹⁵ as an anticipation and hope for the purgatorial process is, surely, a stinging, ironical rejection of that process: "Do I ring the changes right?/ Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!" (11.2060a-2061). He is suggesting a process as his confessors see it. In their eyes he is deformed. According to their metaphorical code he must go through a purgatorial process to be **informed** of their interpretation of events and of himself and so be **conformed**, to that system. Since Guido has been claiming sovereignty over interpretation and is therefore unlikely to be impressed by an alternative interpretation, and since he has been rejecting any idea of conformity throughout his entire

monologue, we must conclude that he is being deliberately ironic about this view of things. He has, instead, proposed a system based upon a metaphorical creation of himself and of others which allows him autonomy of interpretation, of imparting meaning, and continuity, strength and power after death. It is not surprising in this light that he claims that in the afterlife he could 'twist' Pompilia's soul, "as erst her flesh,/ And turn her truth into a lie -" (11.1682b-1683a). He has proposed, and believes that he has created through his language, an immutable self that will have power over others even after death.

He retains this positive, powerful position for most of the remainder of the monologue. In line 2223 he describes his heart as a stone, with its associations once more of stone, impermeability and lack of movement, and later, with further irony, he refers to himself as the "fulcrum stone" in order to attempt to bribe the Cardinal. The fulcrum is an interesting image since it has, once more, the associations of one who makes decisions, who has a decisive power. Guido is losing an awareness of his own passivity in the face of death and the unknown quality of life after death; he is beginning to forget that it will be others who will decide whether he lives or dies, to forget that it is only his language that allows him this illusion of power. Despite two more references to his use of metaphor (11.2316 and 11.2318-2320), his construction of a meaningful, strong and immortal self is becoming more imperative and less conscious of itself as a process of construction. He begins to believe that he has actually given himself the power to continue after death, that those associations of metaphor that he is manipulating are in fact referential truths about himself. He can now believe in something essential, unchanging and meaningful about himself, in "something changeless at the heart of me/ To know me by, some nucleus that's myself" (11.2392-93).

This changeless something in which he now believes is dependent on images such as the wolf metaphor which have given him power over death and the possibility of a fulfilling after-life. This confidence is entirely outside any Christian context, showing the success with which he has, to himself at least, dismantled the meaning of the Church, and constructed a new meaning of his own. He has filled that "hideous hole" (1.321) which he earlier feared, before the linguistic process began in earnest. What he fails to recognise is the fact that his belief depends

on the continuity of language, and his ability to continue constructing meaning. His inability to recognise his immense investment in the **process** of constructing meaning is highlighted in his discussion of art:

Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!

Being incomplete, the act escapes success. (11.1559-1560).

What Guido fails to recognise at this point is the fact that the artistic, creative process that he is involved in with his long speech, this process of creating and imparting meaning to his life, his death and his self is dependent upon the fact that it is incomplete. It is only by continuing this process that he retains control over events and over himself. It is only for as long as he can, unopposed, strive for meaning (a process that can never be complete), that he can continue to exist, as we are reminded in Nietzsche's words, quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

The drive towards the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself.¹⁶

Guido's continuity depends on the incompleteness of the process; it is this incompleteness which allows him to "succeed". While Guido may have considerable insight into the way in which language works, and may be adept at using it to his own advantage, his understanding of it, at this point in the monologue, is undoubtedly limited.

He builds up his imagery into a climax which reveals most densely the associations that he has been depending on - strength, power and endurance. He is a "strong tree" (1.2405), an Athenian drinking bulls-blood, he is a strong man "honest and bold". There is a striking simplicity in the imagery here. The ambiguous, dual associations of the metaphors have been stripped away, as if he has ceased to care whether he is executed or not, so strongly does he believe here in his own, constructed after-life. Only the associations of strength, power, masculinity and fearlessness remain. Obviously this is the "nucleus" that Guido believes is in himself; yet the density of the imagery reflects

the futility of his attempt to turn the associations he has manipulated into actual attributes of himself.

And of course the attempt is futile, since the self, according to Nietzsche, cannot have meaning in itself, but can only be given meaning by the fleeting use of language, a constant process or flux which cannot capture meaning and which does not have the immortality which Guido has tried to establish. Guido has attempted to use a transitory, inconstant, mutable **process** to give a meaningful immortality to a thing, to his self, and so was doomed to failure. When faced with death, he comes to this realisation, and the articulation of his panic, perhaps even of his insanity, will be discussed in a later chapter.

Footnotes

¹ Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 226.

² F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in the Non-moral sense," Philosophy and Truth, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 88-9.

³ Steven C. Walker, "The Dynamic Imagery of The Ring and the Book," SBHC, 4, i(1976), 7-29.

⁴ Altick and Loucks.

⁵ Margaret Doane, "Guido is Saved, Interior and Exterior Monologues in Book XI of The Ring and the Book," SBHC, 5, ii, 53-64.

⁶ E.W. Slinn, Browning and the Fictions of Identity (Totawa N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1982), p. 122.

⁷ Roy Gridley, "Browning's Two Guidos," UTQ, XXXVI (October 1967), p. 65.

⁸ Gridley, p. 61. My italics.

⁹ Gridley, p. 60.

¹⁰ Gridley, p. 62.

¹¹ Gridley, p. 60.

¹² Nietzsche, pp. 82-3.

¹³ Matthew, 13, 24-36.

¹⁴ "My Last Duchess," 45b-46a.

¹⁵ see Margaret Doane. Also Robert Langbaum, "Is Guido Saved? The Meaning of Browning's Conclusion to The Ring and the Book," VP, 10, 289-305.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, pp. 88-9.

CHAPTER THREE

In engaging in the process of destroying old metaphor systems and creating new ones, of forming a new concept of self through metaphor, Guido is forced to reinterpret those things and individuals which stand in relation to his newly constructed identity. So, in defining himself as wolf Pompilia becomes a sheep or a lamb; if he defines himself as a stone or as fire she becomes water. The process of creating a new self necessitates a new interpretation or creation of the meaning and function of others through the associations of the metaphors used by the speaker in the situation. Of course this imperative still allows for an element of choice, since the role selected for the other, while being limited by the metaphorical system which he is applying to himself, still permits him to choose the area he wishes to highlight as a contrast to himself. For example, consider the image of the gardener (11.1090-1109) which has already been referred to. The image serves to underline elements of strength and power in Guido: he has the choice to tend or to destroy the plants growing in his garden. His choice of image for Pompilia is limited by the metaphorical system of gardening. But within that system he has a large number of possible images he could apply to her. If he wished simply to emphasise his attitude to her as an enemy he could have described her as a slug or a butterfly. But in associating Pompilia with a weed Guido highlights passivity, weakness and malformity in his wife which heightens the contrast of weakness and strength which he wishes to establish. The choice of metaphor is limited, given the metaphorical context, but there is still considerable choice involved which allows Guido to maintain the conflicting relationship between himself and his wife, of his own strength and her passivity.

By continually adding to the paired images which establish this weakness/strength relationship Guido gains confidence in the dichotomy, convincing himself that he is inherently strong, and that Pompilia is inherently weak. He ignores the fact that he has created this dichotomy through metaphor, that these attributes may not be inherent in the characters involved. Until he begins to make this claim for himself of strength (11.405-445) and begins to explore the wolf/lamb images he uses no imagery to describe Pompilia, even though he does use metaphorical

associations to describe himself. His attempts to define himself as morally good and Pompilia as morally bad in Book V have failed him, and so he avoids any consideration of Pompilia in a moral sense as he begins his speech. But when he decides to establish strength as an attribute of this new concept of self that he is creating, then he needs to associate weakness with Pompilia. Only by defining Pompilia as weak can he lend any credence to himself as strong, even in his own eyes. This is not only because he sees their two natures as naturally opposed, antagonistic, opposite poles of any dichotomy¹, but also because he needs to believe that he has defeated her in life and in death, in order to convince himself of his own strength. He needs to triumph over what he sees as her potential to dominate, to retain dominion over truth, and to assuage his own fear of this he has to interpret things in such a way as to deny her such power. His fear that she will triumph over the interpretation of events comes out quite late in the monologue:

whom find I

Here, still to fight with, but my pale, frail wife?...
 She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,
 Come and confront me - not at judgement seat
 Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
 And turn her truth into a lie, - but there,
 O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,
 Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak,
 Tell her own story her own way, and turn
 My plausibility to nothingness! (11.1676-89).

This is what he fears in her, her capacity to interpret and give meaning to events which will threaten his own control over meaning. She can turn his credibility, that is, the meaning he has created, into "nothingness". For this reason, since the capacity to interpret past events is all he has left to him in terms of identity and control, he must defeat her, and he does this by giving himself, through his use of metaphor, immense power over Pompilia, by defining Pompilia as weak and himself as powerful. His appetite for imposing his own "truth" upon events is as strong as Pompilia's and will eventually destroy her "truth":

I'm my wife outright
 In this unmanly appetite for truth,
 This careless courage as to consequence,
 This instantaneous sight through things and through
 This voluble rhetoric, if you please - 't is she!
 Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew,
 Also the folly for which I slew her! (11.170b-176).

He killed her for her determination to interpret and give meanings to events in a way which was different from his; such determination was anathema to him, and therefore a direct threat to his control over meaning. It is necessary here for him to supercede the interpretation of events which she uttered on her deathbed, and he can only do this by using metaphor to make her insignificant and powerless in comparison to himself. Her truth was "folly" in his eyes, and now he must kill her capacity for interpretation which lingered until her very death.

To give himself this power, then, he must create and maintain for Pompilia associations of weakness. While the lamb image may have traditional, Christian associations of moral innocence, in the context in which Guido uses them the associations which are highlighted are those of victim, ignorance, passivity and weakness:

My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
 She bleated, bleated (11.2302-03a).

Here Guido emphasises Pompilia's inability to control events, with the inference not yet clearly drawn of her further inability to control meaning. The other metaphorical roles that are associated with Pompilia, given Guido's purposes and his establishment of the wolf image and other metaphors related to strength, are those of domestic or helpless creatures - a heifer (1.976), a kid (1.1120), a brood bird (1.1321) and a pullet (1.1423). Roy Gridley observes

Pompilia and the Comparini become colourless and neutral objects: Pompilia has 'milk for blood' and is 'cold and pale and mute as stone' (1.1310); she is 'a nullity in female shape...[An] insipid harmless nullity' (1.1111).²

If we can pick up the "mute as stone" statement, Guido here has rendered Pompilia incapable of speech and therefore lacking in any control over meaning or interpretation, since only through using language can an individual assert any power in that area. Pompilia is therefore not only incapable of controlling events, she is also incapable of imparting any 'truth' to events, of giving them any meaningful interpretation. So completely does Guido come to believe in this dichotomy of weakness and strength, that as a natural extension of the wolf/lamb imagery which he returns to continually as the most refined expression of the distinction which he needs to make, he actually decrees an afterlife based on these distinctions which he has created:

Byblis in fluvium, let the weak soul end
 In water, sed lycaon in lapum, but
 The strong become a wolf for evermore!
 Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
 Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank!
 Let me turn wolf... (11.2049-2054a).

He now believes that the metaphorical associations which he has created will have power after death, his created meaning will become objective fact. He will indeed be able to "twist her soul as erst her flesh,/ And turn her truth into a lie" (11.1684b-1685a). His interpretation of past events and personalities will, after death, become more powerful than Pompilia's interpretation since she is weak and he is strong, as will be revealed by their metamorphosis into the very images that Guido has used to create the distinction between them. Guido, by asserting images of weakness in relation to Pompilia has assumed mastery over interpretation.

This whole process is ironically undermined, however, by a complex element within the metaphorical structure which Guido has constructed. Guido seems to be unaware of this, although Langbaum says that Guido is uncertain as to whether Pompilia is "weak or strong"³. Although, as we have seen, Guido juxtaposes inter-related images of strength for himself and weakness for Pompilia there is an ambiguous element within many of the images related to Pompilia which allows for the possibility that Guido may be the victim and Pompilia the stronger of the two. This aspect of Guido's use of metaphor seems to have been missed by many of

the critics. Let us look at an excerpt from Gridley which has already been quoted in this chapter. Gridley attempts to show⁴ how images of colourlessness or neutrality and weakness are applied to Pompilia. I would not question the idea that Guido does apply such images to Pompilia, but we need to look at the complexity of the lines which Gridley quotes from Guido's monologue. He quotes two specific metaphors: "cold and pale and mute as stone" (1.1311) and "a nullity in female shape...[an] insipid harmless nullity" (1.1111). Let us now look at these lines in their proper context:

She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
O'er the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
Strong as stone also (11.1309-12a; my emphasis)

and

what you call my wife
I call nullity in female shape,
Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague" (11.1110b-1112).

When we see these quotations in context the ambiguous quality of the imagery becomes clear. The first three adjectives applied to the stone metaphor do imply weakness and powerlessness, but the final adjective, which Gridley chooses to omit, reveals the complexity of Guido's attitude to Pompilia. Stone is also strong, resistant, impermeable, qualities in Pompilia which infuriated her husband. Soon after this ambiguous comment, Guido expands on the associations of strength which pertain to the stone metaphor: "I see the same stone strength of white despair" (1.1323). Here the emphasis is wholly on strength, and the adjective "same" underlines that quality of constancy, while the colour white implies something which is untouched, unmarked and uncontaminated, another aspect of strength. Pompilia has a constancy, a strong impermeability which Guido seems to lack.

In the second quotation we see a similar ambiguity. After calling her a nullity, something so weak that it ceases to have any significance, Guido calls Pompilia a "pungent plague" - something which has

undoubted power and strength, something which may cause death. This ambiguity is further asserted in 11.1343-6:

I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
Set her on to conceive and execute
The preferable plague...how sure they probe, -
These jades, the sensitivist soft of man .

This plague, then, is not weak; it can attack the most vulnerable part of a person, in this case Guido's belief in his capacity to impart truth into events, and it is destructive if insidious. The word "execute" has a double function here, having the overt meaning "to carry out" and the associations of "causing death". Pompilia has the capacity to cause her husband's death, at least that is the way he sees it. In this case she has demonstrated that capacity by so threatening Guido's belief in his capacity to impart meaning that he kills her, and by then giving a deathbed interpretation of events which leads Guido to be condemned to death.

There are many examples of this ambiguity in the metaphors of apparent weakness that Guido applies to Pompilia. Guido describes Pompilia as a "taenia", a tapeworm (1.1604), something apparently small, pale and weak which may cause death in a man. A more significant example comes in 11.2071-79:

Ay, of the water was that wife of mine -
....Occupy your patch
Of private snow that's somewhere in what world
May now be growing icy round your head,
And aguish at your foot print - freeze not me

Although the metaphor of water symbolises weakness in Ovidian terms, as Guido has already explained, the water may become ice, something which may freeze, and thereby destroy him. He evidently fears this destructive force as is clear from the strong stresses on that final imperative "freeze not me", although it may be that he believes so much in the linguistic power that he is manipulating that he honestly believes that through such imperative language he may stop this destructive power that Pompilia seems to have. The implication is, however, that having

described himself as strong, as a powerful, violent, erupting lava, he sees that she may freeze the ferocious heat of that lava - the weak evidently has an impressive and fearful strength here!

It is ironic that at times when he is most clearly and positively asserting, through metaphor, his own power and Pompilia's weakness, his claims are destroyed by an extension of the many metaphors which he has employed. Indeed, in the example of the lava/ice metaphor, the extension of the metaphors has effectively reversed the associations, and the strong is now at the mercy of the seemingly weak. Only rarely can Guido hold on to this firm relationship of himself as strong and Pompilia as powerless. This may be why he returns so constantly to the wolf/lamb metaphor. There can be no such drastic shifting of the metaphorical associations in this image, and it is perhaps significant that Guido rarely takes the risk of describing himself as a wolf and Pompilia as a lamb at the same time (the two associations are usually made separately). It may be that he cannot safely assert even this metaphorical system without considerable caution.

Perhaps the most striking example of this ambiguity which is in the images applied to Pompilia comes in the final section of the monologue. At this point, as we have seen, Guido is most consciously and powerfully asserting his own strength, as he has created it. Two images of Pompilia fit unobtrusively among the imagery which Guido assembles here, in his finest assertion of uncompromising power:

I grow one gorge
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk' (11.2402-5).

The image of pale poison shows a clear ambiguity: Pompilia is "pale", insignificant, colourless. And yet she is also a poison, something which has the potential to destroy him. While he may say that he is rejecting her, he is still recognising her potential for destruction, her power over life and death. The wreath image requires further consideration. At first sight a wreath may appear to be pretty, insignificant, but there are at least two associations to the word which imply its destructive quality. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, it has

the association of a funeral wreath which would imply that he has already been destroyed by her, that **her** interpretation of events on her death bed has already determined his death. This would mean that his power of imparting meaning through language had already failed in the face of the way Pompilia had given meaning to those events. If this is the case then he is destined for Christian damnation, since she gave meaning to the past in a Christian context. His assertions of power over Pompilia in life and death would therefore be void, his attempt to create a meaning for himself and the events of the past would cease to have meaning.

The other possible interpretation of the wreath image would be that it is a parasitic creeper that winds itself around the strong tree and will therefore lead to that tree's destruction. The wreath is, therefore, like so many of the images that Guido applies to Pompilia, seemingly insignificant but insidiously destructive. Thus, when Guido seems to be most uncompromisingly asserting his own strength and power, there is, built into the metaphorical system the potential destruction of that strength by something that deceptively appears to be weaker.

Guido does not appear to be aware of this ambiguity in the metaphors which he applies to Pompilia, although there are times in his monologue when he does overtly acknowledge Pompilia's strength:

I advise - no one think to bear that look
 Of steady wrong, endured as steadily,
 - Through what sustinment of deluding hope?
 Who is the friend i' the background that notes all?
 Who may come presently and close accounts?
 This self possession to the uttermost
 How does it differ in aught, save degree,
 From the terrible patience of God? (11.1371-1378).

I see the same stone strength of white despair (1.1323).

These moments when Guido consciously acknowledges Pompilia's power are rare. He deals with them, as might be expected, through the manipulation of language. The first instance, where Pompilia's patience is likened to that of God, is dealt with in two ways. Firstly, as we have

seen, Guido destroys the meaning of the Church, and proceeds to describe God in so many ways that the concept of God becomes essentially meaningless. Secondly Guido in a sense takes God's place by giving himself the power to decide the fate of those who have died. He does this in discussing an Ovidian fate, where his application of metaphor determines the metamorphosis of himself and Pompilia, and he does this also in his ironic version of the parable of the tares and the wheat where he is the reaper (rather than Christ) and he gathers the tares and burns the wheat. He has thus challenged and destroyed any traditional concept of God and usurped His place. This makes his earlier association of God and Pompilia essentially meaningless.

In the second situation, where Guido likens Pompilia to a stone, he deals with the metaphor by transferring it, with its associations of strength, to himself:

I have bared, you bathe my heart -
It grows the stonier for your saving dew!
You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
In waters that but touch to petrify! (11.2222b-2225).

In this way Guido transfers the strength he has associated with Pompilia to himself, and since they both cannot be strong, since he has so firmly established that they are at opposite sides of any dichotomy, he has essentially taken away Pompilia's strength through his manipulation of metaphor. He has given her power through metaphor and now he takes it away, as if moving metaphorical associations from Pompilia to himself will move actual attributes.

In these ways Guido deals with his overt fears of Pompilia's power. Even so, he does not recognise that Pompilia's strength is not something inherent in her, but something which has been given to her, by him, through his use of language to describe her. The fact that he does not deal with the ambiguous associations of the metaphors he applies to Pompilia in the same way that he deals with these overt moments of fear would imply that he is not aware that he is continually attributing to her the power to destroy him.

Guido's understanding, therefore, is extremely complex and contradictory. He is, as we have already seen in Chapter One, at times totally in accord with Nietzsche's statement that

truths are illusions...metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force....to be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors. Thus, to express it morally, this is the duty to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie with the herd and in a manner binding upon everyone.⁵

He uses this insight into the prospect that what we believe to be true is simply a socially accepted use of metaphor to free himself from the definitions and condemnations of social institutions. He examines these common metaphors, rejects them and so shrugs off moral labels. But he fails to extend this recognition of how metaphors act to his own manipulation of language.

Guido has therefore put himself into a highly ironical situation, exposed by his own earlier insight. He has recognised that the Church changes "names not things", but seems not to recognise that he is doing exactly the same thing. His interpretation of events and of himself is no nearer to the "truth" than the Church's, both are equally arbitrary, both fail in what they attempt to do, and both are forced to resort to the lie of metaphor since this is the only way of interpreting the world. He fails to recognise, as Nietzsche puts it, that

[What matters with words] is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression....The "thing in itself" (for that is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language....This creator only designates the relations of things to men and for expressing these relations he lays hold of the boldest metaphors.⁶

Guido also fails to recognise, because of his fear of Pompilia's dominion over interpretation, that Pompilia, in her death-bed speech, was also using words and metaphors, those inadequate tools, to impose an equally fallacious meaning upon events. Because of this use of

metaphor, he had no real reason to fear her; his fear comes wholly from the destructive associations of the metaphors he has attributed to her. While he may at times become overtly conscious of that fear - and in these instances he can tackle it through language - he is not aware of the subtly corrosive associations in his images of Pompilia, and therefore cannot accommodate them within his linguistic system. He is undermining his aim of creating a strong self and a weak Pompilia as quickly as he endeavours to establish it. Largely unaware that he is dependent upon his construction of metaphor, ignorant of the fallacy of that process, and unconscious of the contradictory and potentially destructive elements within his own linguistic construction, Guido is the victim of a complex dramatic irony.

There is yet further irony, that in describing himself as a wolf, a serpent and a fox, Guido seems to be unaware of the association of treachery and deception that are a part of these metaphors. These associations are immediately evident to his reader and his auditor, and may influence our perception of him (although we must remain aware that these associations are not an intrinsic part of Guido's nature, but remain solely as a function of the language he is employing). This means that the metaphors which Guido is using to describe himself operate on three levels. Firstly they are used for the purposes of their associations of evil in order to convince the priests that he should not be killed because he would die unshriven. Secondly, they are used to construct a powerful identity for Guido in an amoral sense, and the emphasis is on their associations of strength and power. These first two levels Guido is very conscious of, and he uses them with subtle manipulation. However, Guido is not aware of the third level on which the metaphors function, which is that the metaphors also have associations of treachery and slyness which are not powerful connotations at all but aspects of weakness and deception. Guido's insights into language are at times formidable, but his limitations generate a revealing dramatic irony.

And this irony which surrounds Guido's process of creating and imparting meaning leads to an almost inevitable dismantling of that meaning. Guido has failed to acknowledge to himself that in building his identity on metaphors he has simply substituted one set of signs for another, and that both sets are arbitrary. He has failed to recognise

the ambiguous elements within the metaphors he has applied to Pompilia. The process Guido has employed to persuade himself and others that he has sovereignty over meaning in life and in death has within it the seeds of its own destruction.

Footnotes

- ¹ Roy Gridley, "Browning's Two Guidos," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXVI (October 1967), p. 64.
- ² Gridley, p. 64.
- ³ Robert Langbaum, "Is Guido Saved? The Meaning of Browning's Conclusion to The Ring and the Book," *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 10 (1972), p. 300.
- ⁴ Gridley, p. 64.
- ⁵ F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense," Philosophy and Truth, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 84.
- ⁶ Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies...", p. 82.

CHAPTER FOUR

Towards the end of his monologue Guido seems to be reconciled to the idea that death is inevitable, that he has failed to convince the Abate and the Cardinal that he should be freed. In lines 2346-2395 his lyrical conceit concerning the inevitability of death for all mankind and his contemplation of the impact of death upon his being is tranquil and meditative. The tone of these lines is in marked contrast to the lines which immediately precede and follow them. This tranquility comes from the confidence he has in his new interpretation of his character and of society. His statement that "you never know what life means until you die" (1.2373) indicates that through facing death he has discovered the meaning of his life. I use the word 'discovered' here quite intentionally despite my earlier emphasis on the view that language creates rather than discovers meaning, because Guido at this point seems to have lost his awareness of the inadequacy of language. He has put his faith in his linguistic construction and now believes that the strength and the power which he has created for himself through metaphor will continue after death. While he has condemned the Church and Society for creating artificial meanings through language and seemed at times to be aware of the fact that he too was creating simply another possible meaning, he seems here to be confident that he has found the meaning of his life through directly confronting death. He has spent his time while facing death not in recognising and repenting his own evil, as the Pope had hoped he would do, but in dismantling the concepts of good and evil and thereby nullifying the meaning of guilt. Any idea of being reconciled to God has been dismissed by linguistic jugglings with the concept of God; such juggling has given Guido greater power than God and has reduced that hitherto exalted Deity to a meaningless back seat. While other men who rush towards death face powerlessness at the hands of a fictional God, Guido has had the time and the skill to give himself mastery over his own fate in death: "I begin to taste my strength/Careless, gay even; what's the worth of life?" (11.2328-9). And as Guido says, you only know the worth of life when you have the time to face imminent death, as he has.

In the afterlife, he proposes that he will still have a strong position of choice. Just as he made his own decision concerning the true worth of the Pope on earth, seeing his authority as meaningless and

manipulative, so he will assess the value of any authority asserted by God. It is this unhindered power of choice which he sees as one of the essential elements of himself that will remain after death. The man, which he considers to be an "accretion" of his true self, something external and untrue to his "real" nature, will be removed and the power and the strength of the wolf will remain. There is even a suggestion that this power will give him the opportunity to affect others after death. The last line of his meditation, "you soon shall see the use of fire" (1.2395), is ambiguous but I suggest that it allows the following interpretation: Guido appears to be addressing the Cardinal and the Abate once again and, referring back to his earlier discussion of the way all men are heading for death (11.2346-64), he is reminding them that they too will die soon. The problem comes in interpreting the fire image. It seems unlikely, given his ironic discussion of the purgatorial process (11.2060-1) that Guido is taunting them with imminent purgatorial suffering. Since he has rejected the Church's teachings any serious proposal of purgatory seems hardly possible. Therefore we must consider a less conventional interpretation of the image which is found earlier in the monologue. In 11.2062-2070 Guido describes himself, or rather the "true" part of himself which will remain after death, as "fire for the mount" and the "thread of flame". If Guido is extending this metaphor into line 2395, which is possible and applicable since fire is a symbol of his strength and his "real" nature, attributes which he is discussing in this latter part of the monologue, then Guido is at least asserting a certain power after death for himself. Moreover, there is a definite suggestion that he will have power over others since he is saying that the Cardinal and the Abate will be affected by that fire. The meaning of the word "use" in this context is somewhat uncertain but this is at least one way of interpreting Guido's claims for power, and it is entirely in keeping with the lines that follow it.

It must be recalled here that this claim of power is not a claim for evil. The strength which Guido attributes to himself is amoral, simply a force of his personality which he has constructed through metaphor. It is immediately clear that the arrival of the Brotherhood of Death is a severe blow to Guido's artificial autonomy and omnipotence which he has constructed and asserted through his speech. While he had only two silent auditors Guido was in seeming control of the meaning of the world that he wove around himself. Language had become the sole

aspect of existence, an uninterrupted process which had assured his continuity and power. As long as the process of his own language continued without external interference he could attempt to control the meaning of the world, and he could believe in that control. The entrance into that world of something outside his control is therefore, evidently, a tremendous shock.

We, as readers, should not be surprised by this intrusion of something beyond his control for two reasons. Firstly, we have been constantly alerted to the images that showed that the linguistic process which Guido believed to be totally under his control had repercussions beyond his conscious understanding. We have been aware that his confidence in his ability to control his own language was illusory. While he showed himself to be a highly skilled manipulator of imagistic associations, using single metaphors for dual purposes, we have been conscious of other associations of which Guido was not aware and which undercut the dichotomy that he was seeking to establish. Secondly we have been aware of the fallacy underlying Guido's growing confidence in the capacity of language to control events - indeed, he alerted us to this fallacy in his earlier, ironic exposure of the Church. Guido's belief that by employing metaphors of strength and omnipotence he is actually given power over his enemies after death is based on a false understanding of the function of metaphor. Metaphor may impart meaning, out of a series of possible meanings, but meaning remains an aspect of the language, not an attribute of a referent. Within the Nietzschean system of metaphor meaning is a perceived relationship, not an integral aspect of a thing in itself. He can see similar folly in others and so destroy their creed, but there are times when he cannot see it in his own use of language, because to do so would be to face a meaningless void and a consequent loss of identity. The irony is complex here. Guido has alerted his auditors, and hence the reader, to the limitations of language and so the reader cannot fail to recognise the irony of the medium that Guido is trusting and depending on. It is vital, given Browning's concern with language in The Ring and the Book, that Guido's assumptions about the power of speech be fully exposed. This exposure is dramatically evident in Guido's words following the approach of The Brotherhood of Death:

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
 Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
 Is it 'Open' they dare bid you? Treachery! (11.2412-4).

Guido, in this first stage of shock and outrage, is still attempting to impose some control over his environment by using the possessive pronoun to describe the stair by which his executioners are descending. There is a tone of usurped authority as these people over whom he believes he has influence even after death give the sign to commence his road to death and so challenge the very precepts of his power. However, his indignant tone indicates that he still believes he has power. He also continues to reduce the meaning of the Church's rituals by his laughter and by his use of the oxymoron "accursed psalm", thereby continuing to undermine traditional moral and social values.

The real shock occurs when the command comes from an external source to open the door. Astonishment and incredulity are evident in the words he chooses: "Is it 'Open' they dare bid you?". There is amazement here that after twelve hours of his believing in his control of both language and environment someone else can give an order and intrude upon this exclusive territory. The word "treachery" is complex and pivotal. On the superficial level he has returned to the old chivalric code in order to upbraid his auditors for breaking faith with him (in his eyes at least; it is nowhere suggested that the confessors will not execute him until he has confessed; he simply assumes that this is the case). At another level this word marks the inadequacy of the metaphorical structure he has composed. The Brotherhood's command is an invasion of his linguistic control. This invasion is "treacherous" to his metaphorical manipulation. Although he has shown the Church and Society to be meaningless, simply exhausted metaphors, and although he has rejected them and built a new system of metaphors and meanings, the Church and Society have still invaded his control and are about to consummate his death. At this point he is forced to confront the way his metaphorically based destruction of the Church and Society has in no way limited their existence and their power. The literal power of the Church has **not** been demolished: it is still the agent of his destruction.

One would expect Guido to recognise at this point that the system which he has constructed is equally without impact upon events. Whether Guido does reach such an awareness is, of course, hard to determine, but the words that follow suggest that he may be conscious of the fact that he, too, has changed "names, not things". All that is left for him after death, therefore, is that "hideous hole", that nothingness which he faced at the beginning of his monologue. It thus becomes imperative that he should save his life, not only because his vision of a powerful afterlife was built simply on words and was therefore not capable of affecting anything, but because when death comes language fails, and without language there can be no possibility of expressing any relationship - hence no meaning and no identity. Continuity of a meaningful self depends on his ability to control the process of language and unless a clearly expressed relationship is established through metaphor there can be no meaningful Guido. There may be existence, but there can be no concept of self. Guido is in an appalling position. The self that language creates is illusory, simply an arrangement of metaphors, but there is no other way in which to conceive of an identity.

His response is:

Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
 Out of the world of words I had to say?
 Not one word! All was folly; I laughed and mocked!
 Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
 Is - saved me notwithstanding! Life is all! (11.2415-9).

He opts for a limited expediency in his panic, rejecting any significance in his monologue but still not completely negating it by repenting in Christian terms. He entirely denies one motivational aspect of his monologue, his desire to destroy an old identity and construct a new one, even though this desire was, as we have seen, a vital part of his speech. In one sense his words **were** folly in that he tried to use language to diminish the literal power of the Church and the law, and to increase his own power in actual terms, making himself impervious to death. In Nietzschean terms, and in terms that Guido himself established very early in this monologue, language cannot do this. Just as the metaphorical system that the Church imposes does not alter anyone's behaviour, as Guido demonstrates, so Guido's metaphorical system has

affected no-one. The extent to which Guido is conscious at this point of this flaw in language is once again difficult to gauge. His sudden reversal may be due not to a conscious awareness of his mistake, but to simple panic. Indeed, there is an irony in the fact that he is not now simply dismissing the last 2400 lines but is changing their meaning. He is giving them a new interpretation or status by saying that they were simply "folly".

The problem he has here is complex. Even if he does recognise that the way he has tried to use words is "folly" and that any attempt to make meaning from them is fictional and will not alter events, he still has no other tool with which to convince his auditors that he should remain alive. He is forced to employ this inadequate medium to retain his life. He must, therefore, continue to suppress any awareness of his own earlier premises about language in order to claim that he can speak a "true word". In a climax of desperation, for the sake of saving his life, he abandons his intellect, claiming to make a statement that is "all truth and no lie". This, in his own terms, is a claim which is impossible to validate.

His next cry, "I was just stark mad - let the mad-man live/ Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!" (11.2420-21), is still an attempt to give meaning to his former speech. The word "mad", like the word "folly", is a metaphor in Nietzschean terms, since it is a word that relates the individual to the norms of society. To a certain extent Guido has indeed placed himself apart from the norms shared by the common man. The fact that Guido can still use language coherently and persuasively implies that he is not at all "mad" in the Nietzschean sense of the word, and his use of language to persuade his confessors indicates that he is still subject to the need not only to defend himself but also to define himself.

However, in the next lines he does lose control of language:

Do n't open! Hold me from them! I'm yours,
I am the Grandduke's - no, I'm the Pope's!
Abate, - Cardinal, - Christ, - Maria, - God... (11.2422-4)

He turns to secular and sacred institutions in a desperate bid to re-establish some relationship and hence some identity. His inability to identify with any of these institutions can only be seen in terms of a return to the premises of the personalised linguistic system which he has elaborated in his monologue. Faced with interpreting his new identity as "madness", he is in effect left with no identity. Given his earlier insights into the limitations of language there is only nothingness remaining, an indescribable world without meaning. He returns then, to some extent, to his earlier purposes, needing not only a way to save his life but also some meaningful identity on which to make a claim for life, for fear he should fall into inarticulate madness, a realm devoid of metaphor. The result of returning to his created metaphorical system induces, at least initially, further terror. He cannot form a relationship based on any of the institutions or individuals that he names, since throughout his monologue he has destroyed the substance of their function - they no longer have meaning for him. Society and justice, symbolised by the Grandduke, have been reduced to mere self-seeking ambition. The Church has been stripped of meaning to become conscious, manipulative folly. Friendship has also been defined in terms of personal gain. Even God has been defined in so many ways that he could not be identified in a crisis. Stripped of the old support systems of Church, State, friendship and law, with his new system of relationships based on empty, inadequate word play, Guido is bereft of meaning and of an identity. His attempt to establish a self through giving himself to and therefore identifying with another, is eventually reduced to gibberish. He is left with nothing against which to identify himself. Standing in relation to nothing, Guido does seem to finally succumb to madness in a Nietzschean sense as he loses his grip on the constructions of language, seemingly abandoning linguistic structures. Consider these extracts from Nietzsche's work:

Only by forgetting that he himself is an **artistically creating** subject, does man live with any repose, security and consistency. ¹

Indeed, if man were aware of living in an originally and fundamentally metaphorical world he would succumb to ... madness. ²

Guido, in this extreme situation, is dramatically aware of himself as subject as is emphasised by the thrice repeated "I am". Forced back on his earlier insight he may also be aware of his creative role in his metaphorical universe and of the dilemma that he can relate himself to nothing.

In the penultimate line Guido loses control over the constructs of language. While the reader may find meaning in this series of names, Guido no longer expresses the possibility of a possessive relationship in any articulate manner; he seems incapable of structuring his words into coherent sentences. This incoherence suggests that he may indeed be succumbing to madness according to the Nietzschean understanding of madness. The final line of Guido's monologue would, of course, seem to controvert this proposition and it has obviously caught the attention of all the critics, especially those who are concerned with whether or not Guido is "saved". Before we look at the critics we must consider the last line of the monologue in terms of the present argument.

Having moved from a futile attempt to identify himself with various social and sacred institutions into an incoherent recitation of names, Guido finally bursts into a carefully constructed, direct appeal to his wife:

'Pompilia, will you let them murder me?' (1.2425).

There are two particular questions that need to be considered here. Why and how does Guido move from incoherence, from loss of language to a very articulate question which expresses a relationship and therefore an identity (that is, Guido as victim and Pompilia as the one who decides whether he lives or dies)? And secondly, the question which has puzzled so many readers, why does Guido appeal to Pompilia, of all people, in his final desperation?

The penultimate line, and the one that precedes it, show a striving to establish a relationship of any description, anything which will provide him with an identity as he struggles in an incoherent vacuum of non-self. The self that he has seemingly established in his monologue has been invalidated by a recognition of that self's metaphorical basis, yet the destruction of the previous social identity in terms of the

destruction of the meaning of those institutions which established that self remains intact. Guido cannot therefore go back to his earliest identity and he cannot entirely return to the one established in his monologue. Yet in returning to an identity based on a relationship to Pompilia, he does return to some of the premises of his monologue, and the strength of his final cry is determined largely by the complex metaphorical associations he has applied to Pompilia in the course of the monologue. Throughout his monologue Guido has defined himself through his relationship to Pompilia, through a dichotomy based on metaphor. The only thing which he has allowed to remain in any meaningful way is his wife; all other institutions and individuals have been abandoned as meaningless. Pompilia remains, therefore, the only thing he can measure himself against. She is the only remaining individual who can give him a meaning, an identity. For this reason, for the sake of giving meaning to his self, he re-establishes his relationship with her. He does so by returning to the metaphorical structure of his monologue.

His appeal to her to save his life is an obvious absurdity in actual terms, since Pompilia has already died herself. Yet in terms of the metaphorical structures of the monologue this appeal makes perfect sense. As we have seen, even while Guido has been asserting Pompilia's weakness there has been an unconscious undermining of that concept of weakness through the ambiguous associations of the metaphors which Guido employed. Not only has Pompilia been defined as strong (eg. the stone metaphor), but also she has also been described as having the power of life and death over Guido (eg. images of poison, plague, tapeworm and wreath). In his spontaneous cry of desperation it is therefore natural that this subconscious apprehension of Pompilia should be tapped. Through his metaphors Guido has defined Pompilia as the only person who can give him an identity and the only person who can choose to let him live or die. This is why he says "will **you** let them murder me". The Church and the State may be about to kill him, but since they have no meaningful status in his eyes, they are only the agents of death - Pompilia is the only one who has remained sufficiently meaningful to make a decision about his continuity.

Once again Guido portrays himself as a victim, but it is in a different sense from the way he has placed himself in that role in his

earlier monologue (Book V). He does not portray himself as the victim of fate, of the aristocracy, the Church or any social institution. He portrays himself as the victim of someone whom he has created through metaphor; he is trapped by language. He has created a woman who has power over his life - his wife. Ironically, Guido is a victim of his own linguistic construction, a fate which, according to Nietzsche, we all share, but which is highlighted in this instance by Guido's insight into the process of metaphor and his necessary suppression of that insight in order to retain sanity and an identity. In the final line Guido suspends his intellectual understanding in order to save his life and sustain a self. The irrational nature of his cry reflects and emphasises the irrational process of creating and sustaining meaning through metaphor. Yet, as has been evident throughout this Book, it is the only method that we have at our disposal.

It must be stressed again that Guido does not appeal to Pompilia as a moral saviour. Guido is appealing to a woman of his own making, not the Pompilia which the Pope described in terms of pure whiteness and innocence. Guido has dispensed with moral references and his relationship with Pompilia is described solely in terms of strength and weakness. Guido appeals to Pompilia not because she is good, or right, or righteous, but because he has created her as strong, as constant, as the immovable stone against which he may define himself.

If we accept the idea that Guido, in speaking "to another purpose quite" (Bk. I, l.1282) in Book XI is speaking in order to create an identity rather than to vindicate or expose his evil nature, then this last cry is the culmination of that lengthy process. His monologue is a struggle with words, with their functions and their inadequacies. The ironies involved in this struggle, his understanding of the fallacy of metaphorical language, his dependency and investment in the construction of metaphor, his realisation of the folly of that investment and the final, desperate suppression of this understanding, all serve to poignantly highlight one of Browning's most pressing questions: "How else know we save by worth of word?"

The greatest irony that Guido faces is indeed this: we can know nothing except through worth of word, and yet this form of "knowing" is no knowledge at all, for "human speech is naught;/ Our human testimony

false" (XII,11.835-6). Our knowing is simply a play with metaphor, and as such is our own creation. The Pompilia that Guido confronts is a woman he has created in his struggle to create a self through metaphor. As such she is not dead, she is the fictional, metaphoric reference against which he can create a self.

Footnotes

¹ F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Philosophy and Truth, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 86.

² Eric Blondal, "Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor," The New Nietzsche, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), p. 172.

CHAPTER FIVE

The implications of the past chapters need now to be considered in the light of recent criticism of Guido's final monologue. I need in particular to address a question which I have hitherto avoided, namely, is Guido saved? This fine moral dilemma has concerned many critics; indeed, Langbaum sees it as one of only two critical issues in The Ring and the Book which are still being debated¹. I intend to approach the issue in two ways. First of all I will consider the question of whether Guido is saved in terms of the present argument. Secondly I want to ask whether Guido's salvation is really of such prime importance, whether to focus on such a problem of plot is to direct attention away from more major themes and problems of The Ring and the Book.

Firstly, then, we must look at this question of whether Guido is saved. An affirmative answer is most strongly asserted by Robert Langbaum and Margaret Doane². Their arguments rest, in the final analysis, upon two major points. They claim that Book XI shows a constant if oscillating movement towards self-understanding which is finally reached in the last line of the monologue, that in his concluding cry ("Pompilia, will you let them murder me?") Guido finally admits Pompilia's innocence and his own evil, and that in doing so he is reconciled to God.

Margaret Doane emphatically argues for Guido's salvation through a development of self-knowledge:

Rather than spending one-fourth of his epic on an unchanging Count, Browning's treatment of Guido sets up his eventual redemption through self-knowledge.³

She sees Guido's salvation as essential to the design of the poem. If Guido is still seen as destined for hell at the end of the monologue, then such a reading

...contradicts Pompilia's hope, Caponsacchi's fear, and the Pope's insight that Guido might be saved...but most of all it contradicts the careful craftsmanship [which allows]...

Franceschini to probe his own actions and motivations to arrive at self-knowledge.⁴

Langbaum, too, is quite certain of Guido's move towards self-understanding; in fact he almost takes it for granted:

If Guido can arrive at self-understanding, then he can go forward to further salvation.⁵

There are several important points to be picked up here. While I have no wish to debate theological issues it is presumably true that if Guido can arrive at self-knowledge then he can go forward to salvation. But this does not mean that self-understanding will **necessarily** lead to redemption - Satan, in Paradise Lost appears to reach an unenviable self-knowledge, but this does not lead him to repentance despite his despair. Salvation is possible, therefore, but it may not even be probable. Certainly, even if we accept the idea that Guido reaches self-knowledge, we must not see Guido's redemption as inevitable. This leads us naturally to a further point of debate which is concerned with whether Guido really does achieve self-knowledge through his speech, and even whether such an achievement is possible at all through language. If self-understanding involves the realisation of some objective truth about the meaning or status of one's personality which may be discovered, then it has been the contention of this thesis that not only has Guido not reached this "truth", but that this truth cannot be found since it does not and cannot exist in any objective fashion. Meaning can only be created, according to a Nietzschean approach to knowledge, it cannot be discovered. What is more, the meaning must be continually created or reassessed, since it is only through a process of constant revision that the self can be defined. Because the self is in constant process any metaphorical representation of that self must necessarily be incomplete. This incompleteness is further compounded by the fact that metaphor can only express a single relationship and so is a distorting medium. To create anything as complex as a human identity is to be incessantly striving for new relationships, new expressions. Man may struggle for an expression of himself that is "All truth and no lie", but such a struggle is deluded since that truth is inherent only in the language that he employs, in metaphorical structure whose link with that which occurs outside of language becomes increasingly more tenuous. The

very idea, therefore, of achieving self-understanding is mistaken - self-creation, maybe, but that is a continual process and by definition cannot be reached or concluded.

Guido's creative movement towards a meaningful self through metaphor has already been explored earlier in the present discussion. He does not discover images that are appropriate to his true nature; he chooses images in order to create an identity from a variety of metaphors that are possible within a certain context. Langbaum also asserts that "self-recognition involves understanding Pompilia"⁶. Once again, it has been one of the contentions of this essay that Guido does not understand Pompilia. Rather he creates a woman who will stand in relation to the self that he is forming for himself. She is the necessary antagonistic aspect of a dichotomy by which he may creatively define a self. As such she may have little reference to the woman Guido lived with for three years.

Given that Guido does not, then, **discover** that he is evil and that Pompilia is good, since such a discovery is not possible in Nietzschean terms, does Guido **create** a self which is evil and a virtuous Pompilia? This once again has been discussed above in Chapters One and Two. Guido clearly rejects moral labels as fictitious and manipulative very early in his monologue. In his first monologue (Book V) his attempt to portray himself as injured innocence and Pompilia as adulterous manipulator and betrayer has failed to impress the judges. In Book XI, his second monologue, he does not, however, as has often been suggested, finally reverse roles and reveal himself as pure malevolence and Pompilia as tortured innocence. The process of language which Guido employs is far more subtle than that, since all of Browning's characters he is perhaps the one with the most intelligent understanding of the functions and flaws of language. Using his insight he attacks the metaphorical basis of the Church, showing it to be merely a support system for the law, a fictitious manipulative method by which the ecclesiastical hierarchy retain control of the general populace. Moral values are thus undermined and rejected as metaphors which may be dispensed with at will. At the same time, by a subtle manipulation of the major metaphor which he uses to construct an identity (the wolf image) Guido transfers the dichotomy of values from good and evil to weakness and strength. The wolf metaphor is thus used to represent not evil but strength and the

lamb metaphor (applied to Pompilia) to signify weakness rather than innocence, for the sake of constructing a meaningful identity. The self which Guido is creating is not evil but strong; if there is evil in him, a concept which Guido rejects as spurious, then he does not become increasingly aware of it. Guido uses the concept of evil only as a way of trying to preserve his life - in constructing a self for himself the concept is completely nullified.

If we approach Guido's second monologue from a Nietzschean view of language the argument that Guido becomes increasingly aware of his true moral nature cannot be accepted. One cannot "become aware", one can only create, and the self which Guido creates is devoid of traditional moral values. Guido may be putting increased confidence into the powerful identity which he is creating through metaphor, but this confidence is far removed from the concept of self-understanding.

Now we must turn our attention once again to Guido's final cry, for here, according to Doane and Langbaum, Guido reaches a peak of self-understanding and understanding of Pompilia, and this is the moment of his salvation.

We should remember that in Browning's dramatic monologues the speaker often in the end repudiates his utterance only to return more intensely than ever to the character he has been developing... Guido's repudiation of his utterance should be understood as his third denial of Christ, the denial that precedes the instant of illumination. The instant may be understood as occurring either in the last line: 'Pompilia, will you let them murder me?' (XI 2427), or in the instant just after.⁷

[Guido's] final words acknowledge and emphasise beings possessing goodness and purity; through his ability to see these values, he will eventually be saved.⁸

If we accept Langbaum's idea that Guido returns to some of the premises of his monologue in terms of the development of his character, then we find ourselves in direct contradiction to Doane's assertions, that Guido acknowledges beings of purity in his final lines. All the

indicators from the text suggest that throughout his monologue Guido has seen the people he names in those final lines not in terms of goodness. Guido has certainly never seen the Cardinal and the Abate as particularly holy men; indeed, Guido has been damningly cynical about both their pasts and their ambitions, showing that he sees them as, at best, not entirely unworldly men. In the same way Guido has never acknowledged any goodness or purity in the Pope; he has denied the Pope's authority and shown his power to be based on a consciously deceptive use of metaphor. God, too, has essentially been usurped, and Christ has been used as a measure of strength rather than a measure of virtue. Finally, it must be stressed yet again, Pompilia has been metaphorically categorised in terms of strength and weakness, and it is the strength which Guido has attributed to her, which he returns to in the end. If we accept the idea that Guido returns to the premises of his monologue – the construction of an identity in terms of weakness and strength – then it is impossible for him to be referring to these individuals in terms of moral virtue. To assert that this is so is to have mistaken the metaphorical basis of his speech and to misapprehend the major function of the monologue. He turns to them for the sake of re-establishing a very precarious identity and ends with Pompilia because she is the only individual whom he has constructed in terms of strength. Guido is not acknowledging goodness and purity; he is clinging to the only strong individual he has created, and he is clinging in despair of retaining an identity, not for the sake of establishing his own moral status.

In these terms, then it is very difficult to see Guido as having attained redemption, because he has made himself into an amoral being, acknowledging nothing but his own weakness, a weakness which is not moral or repentant but which can only be discerned in relation to the strength of his wife, a strength which, in terms of this monologue is his creation. Guido can only be defined in terms of his own language and so cannot be judged by a metaphorical system which he has undermined. Returning to the premises of his monologue as he does in his final cry, Guido cannot be described as saved, for he has dispelled the meaning of repentance and sin.

Indeed, we must ask whether Guido's destination after death is of such pivotal importance as has been claimed. The idea that to see Guido as saved is to justify the design of the entire poem seems to me to be

tenuous. Both Langbaum and Doane, pointing to the concern that the Pope and Pompilia express over Guido's salvation consider this issue to be crucial. Yet if we look at Books I and XII where the poet discusses his major aesthetic problems, and if we consider the Pope's careful philosophical approach to Guido's salvation, we find that the most highlighted problem is not whether Guido was guilty or innocent, or whether he was beyond redemption, but how it is possible to know the answers to these questions. Two questions are raised which seem to me to be of at least as much importance as the question of whether Guido is saved. Firstly, how can we know anything except through language, and secondly how can we use language with any surety when it is evidently an unreliable and deceptive medium? It may be Browning's concern not simply to explore aspects of morality but to highlight problems of knowledge and the flaws of metaphor. Of course these problems may be applied to such issues as morality and salvation, but the discussions of the poet and the Pope and the very structure of the poem invite us to consider these problems in a more generalised fashion.

The problem of how we can know anything is inherent in Browning's discussion of the ring metaphor and of the function and application of art, aspects of the poem which are outside the range of this discussion. But the problem is echoed and focused upon by various speakers throughout the poem. The simple question which the poet asks in Book I, "For how else know we save by worth of word?" (1.837), is expanded upon and discussed constantly. The Pope, who expresses perhaps the most philosophical voice of the poem, considers the issue theoretically at some length, seeing the inadequacies of the earthly life as compared with the pure truth of heaven most poignantly and frustratingly exemplified through our inadequate vehicle of knowledge, language:

The barren words
...more than any deed, characterize
Man as made subject to a curse: no speech -
That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside. (X.348b-51)

The Pope is reflecting upon the fact that there will be no language in heaven because language compels us to employ metaphors which contain untruths; we can never find an adequate expression of a thing in itself, inhibited as we are by the nature of metaphor and our compulsion for

meaning. This takes us back to Nietzsche's idea that the metaphors which we employ will alter our perception and interpretation of events. Consider the Pope's words again:

To the child, the sea is angry, for it roars;
 Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face?
 Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,
 Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law, -
 To both remains one and the same effect
 On drum of ear and root of nose (X.1399-1404).

The same physical phenomena are described and perceived in different ways due to differing sophisticated levels of expectation and differing basic metaphors. Because of these differences the meaning behind the experience is seen differently: for the child the sea is angry and the frost aggressive, while for the man the sea and the frost are seen as emotionally neutral, confirmations of the expected scientific laws. The metaphor is determined by the expectation (which is again governed by socially defined metaphors, for what else is a scientific law?), and thus a meaning is created in a meaningless and, without metaphor, indescribable object or experience. Pompilia discovers this principle through her inability to communicate her vision of Caponsacchi to the women surrounding her, owing to their differing expectations and metaphors. Pompilia, with her need for a Saint George, could only see and therefore could only describe Caponsacchi as a man of purity and courage. The women judge the situation by the effects of that character's actions which they interpret through metaphor, in the light of their own expectations:

Yet where I point you, through the chrystal shine,
 Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
 You all descry a spider in the midst.
 One ways 'The head of it is plain to see,'
 And one, 'They are the feet by which I judge,'
 All say, 'Those films were spun by nothing else' (V11.924-929).

No-one sees, or describes or judges the entire object, a fine example of the prejudice produced by metaphor - the entirety is never grasped. Any description of Caponsacchi is limited by the distorting lie of language

and by the attitude of the speaker, which is again generally attributable to socially shared metaphors.

Guido's need for identity is the motivational force behind his metaphorical manoeuvring. The focus in his monologue needs to be shifted from an objective moral assessment of his words to a consideration of why and how he uses language as he does, for it is this aspect of the monologue to which the theoretical discussions of the poet and the Pope direct us. We cannot discover any definitive truth in a speaker's discourse, we can only assess the manner in which he creates his truth, his meaning. To look for an objective truth with which to judge this murder trial is foolish, as we are reminded in Book X11:

who trusts
To human testimony for a fact
Gets this sole fact - himself is proved a fool; (X11.601b-603).

Learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach:
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false... (X11.832b-835).

We cannot discover truth through another's language since meaning is the creative prerogative of the speaker and as such is not the product of the external experience being described but of the language employed by the speaker and the expectations of that speaker which are again defined metaphorically. Even to employ a simile or a metaphor which does not appertain to meaning but simply to physical description is to distort the object, to highlight certain attributes at the expense of others, and to attribute stasis to matter which is in continual flux.

Our concern, therefore, is not with plot. Guido's salvation is simply an unknown variable in an uncertain and indescribable process of events. As readers we are confronted not only with the moral values of events and motivation but also with the realisation that we cannot judge because we cannot know anything except through language, a knowing which is illusory and unreliable. Guido's monologue is crucial to such a realisation. In Guido's second monologue the concerns about which the Pope theorizes are dramatised.

Although the problem of perception and motivation is present in the structure of the poem, with its varying voices, the problem of language is not entirely evident until we reach Books X and XI. With the Pope, as we have seen, the problem of metaphor is discussed:

Why, can he tell you what a rose is like,
 Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false
 Though truth serve better? Man must tell his mate
 Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
 Knowing his fellow knows the same, - will think
 'He lies, it is the method of a man!'
 And yet will speak for answer 'It is truth'
 To him who shall rejoin 'Again a lie!'
 Therefore this filthy rags of speech, this coil
 Of statement, comment, query and response,
 Tatters all too contaminate for use,
 Have no renewing.' (X.364-75a).

The only means of expressing experience is through language, he says, and this use of metaphor inevitably involves something which is not true. We know that this is so, and the person who hears us is also aware of this, and yet we live in a society which depends upon a suppression of that understanding. Therefore, despite the fact that we all understand the limitations of language, we all subscribe to the belief that each of us is, or is capable of, speaking pure truth.

In Guido's monologue we see this oscillation between understanding and suppression amply demonstrated in a dramatic situation. Here, then, we have an example of the linguistic trap which ensnares us all revealed by the dramatisation of an intelligent and insightful mind attempting to use language to both free and define himself. Let me return to my earlier analysis of the monologue and consider it in the light of the problem of language, in terms of awareness and suppression. Guido begins his speech, as I have shown, by playing the accepted social game with language, claiming innocence and justifying himself in terms of the accepted meaning of various social institutions. Seeing that such an approach achieves nothing, Guido then reveals his insight into language-based manipulation in order to free himself of an identity constructed in reference to those institutions which he sees as being based on an

exploitation of metaphor. Yet despite his insight he is compelled by the necessity of constructing an identity, and by the absence of any other medium, to suppress that insight in terms of himself in order to create a personal metaphorical system against which to identify that self. When twelve hours have passed and a successful self appears - deceptively - to have been constructed, the entire edifice crumbles when he is confronted with the fact that his speech has achieved nothing which can survive death when language fails, and that death is imminent. Faced with the failure of his metaphorical system, he strives for a new system but finds himself in a world without identity, virtually bereft of language. Suppressing again his insight he clings to language, reverting to the premises of his monologue in a cry which reveals the irrationality of language-dependent man. The woman he cries for is dead and powerless, and yet through metaphor he perceives her as all-powerful and unchanging. He cries for a fiction which he has created through metaphor out of a need for identity.

The coils of language curl back on themselves and may, as in this extreme example, retain virtually no contact with anything outside of their own structures. Guido's second monologue displays the psychological despair of facing and avoiding the implications of the true status of our "knowing" and the falsities of language. Faced with loss of language and identity in the penultimate line of the monologue, Guido is virtually succumbing to madness. Pulling himself out of this void behind his earlier metaphorical premises, his words may be seen as foolish, deluded and irrational. Yet not to face either of these possibilities, to simply retain our belief in socially accepted metaphors is to be all these things - foolish, deluded and irrational - as well as unoriginal and dishonest. The illusions of sanity and security rest on our ability to "keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie/ I' the latest gasp" (X1.414-15a). Our knowing, says Nietzsche, is simply an acceptance of clearly established - and, we might say, socially accepted - metaphors. To move away from them is to face madness and despair, and to stay with them is to live in a false security. The trap of metaphor surrounds us.

Guido's second monologue is, therefore, rightly judged as being crucial to The Ring and the Book, but not for the sake of confirming a certain morality as suggested by Margaret Doane and Robert Langbaum.

Book XI of The Ring and the Book throws into dramatic relief the psychological implications of the theoretical problems of language which are discussed elsewhere in the poem. The references to "our" judgement of the trial may be seen to have a teasing quality for it is evident from Books X and XI that we cannot judge. To judge would be to put our trust in language - since that is the only possible basis for our judgement - and to do that is, as Browning says in Book XII, to be "proved a fool" (XII.603b). The question of whether Guido is saved may be of interest but in the end we can never come to an answer. Guido cannot be condemned as a coward, since he more than any other character faces the horrific implications of the snare of metaphor. To argue, on the other hand, for his salvation is simply to see him as conforming to the metaphorically based lie which he has exposed and rejected. Book XI confirms the paradox that "every man is a liar". To give, and put faith in, our own interpretation or version of the story is to miss a major linguistic problem aroused by the text of Browning's greatest poem and, indeed, to prove ourselves fools.

Footnotes

¹ Robert Langbaum, "Is Guido Saved? The Meaning of Browning's Conclusion to The Ring and the Book," *Victorian Poetry*, 10, 289.

² Langbaum, pp. 289-305.

Margaret Doane, "Guido is saved, Interior and Exterior Monologues in Book XI of The Ring and the Book," *SBHC*, 5 ii, 53-64.

³ Doane, p. 63.

⁴ Doane, p. 64.

⁵ Langbaum, p. 291.

⁶ Langbaum, p. 302.

⁷ Langbaum, p. 305.

⁸ Doane, p. 63.

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