

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

A CHARMING SYMMETRY: POMPILIA'S MULTIPLICITY

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

Tina Marie Sutton

1987

ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Acknowledgements

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

CONTENTS

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

CHAPTER ONE

READING AND REPETITION : THE RESPONSE TO POMPILIA

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

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

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

I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III

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

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

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

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

Detailed criticism of Pompilia's monologue is relatively recent as so it comes as no surprise that the most sustained account of Pompilia's sainthood is provided by Kay Austen in 1979.²² She catalogues the reasons why Pompilia should be viewed as a saint by contending that Pompilia's life both fulfills the requirements for canonization by the Catholic Church and follows the patterns of sainthood in saintly legends. Unlike earlier critics, who perceive Pompilia's saintliness as due to extreme goodness, innocence and naivety, Austen maintains that saints have superior understanding and intelligence, aspects which have not been attributed to Pompilia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Camp is more perceptive than other critics of the time, because he looks more closely at the monologue for evidence of Pompilia's biases, rather than accepting a tradition of criticism which does not question the equation of her monologue with truth. He finds that Pompilia herself admits her distorted views and that this distortion "makes it impossible to believe she sees truth 'in its genuine contours'" (Camp, p.360). However perceptive Camp is for his time, even he ultimately fails to investigate fully the consequences of an acknowledgement of personal interests on Pompilia's part. It is left to Herbert Tucker²⁶ and William Walker twenty years later, to pick up where Camp left off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(ll.905-13)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and finds in 11.3-7 evidence of Pompilia's capability of regarding the world with more understanding than many critics are willing to allow:

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

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

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

'Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
And the soft length, -lies in and out your feet
And laps you round the knee, - a snake it is!'
And so on. (11. 124-28)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER ONE:

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

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

24. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book ed. Richard D. Altick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), XI.453-54. This edition is a reproduction of the first edition of the poem published in four volumes between 21 November 1868 and 27 February 1869. Although Robert Browning made extensive revisions for subsequent editions, Altick makes a case for the superiority of this version. All subsequent references to the poem refer to this edition. All line references pertain to Book VII unless otherwise specified.

25. W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968).

26. Herbert Tucker, "Mnemonic Imagination in Shelley and Browning", Studies in Romanticism, 19 (1980), 285-385.

27. Gridley, p. 70 cites William DeVane, "The Virgin and the Dragon", Yale Review, 37 (1947), 44.

28. Doherty, Critical Heritage, p.329.

CHAPTER TWO

"Artfully Ordered Confusion": A Theory of Romantic Irony.

I

As we have seen in the previous chapter, William Walker suggests that Pompilia has a number of motives for speaking and that these affect the content and style of her monologue. Walker argues that Pompilia "like the other speakers of the poem, speaks out of the contingencies of a specific situation."¹

Walker also considers the notion of character, referring to the conventional reading of character as "some kind of fictional totality of consciousness identical with itself which has certain definite characteristics." In opposition to this reading he points to the views of Nietzsche and Derrida, who, instead of treating character as a unified whole, emphasize the discontinuities, "a multiplicity of fictional selfhood" (Walker, p.61). Walker thus calls for a reading which could incorporate the traditional (constructive) view of character into a Derridean deconstructive reading.

However, rather than providing us with any answers as to what such a reading would involve, he returns to the notion or theory of character, continuing to question the ability of language to reveal character. The question of which reading would allow for the discontinuities in Pompilia's monologue remains unanswered. It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest that a reading based on the principles of Romantic irony is one possible answer to the question Walker poses. In this chapter a theory of Romantic irony will be expounded which will then provide the theoretical background for a detailed reading of Pompilia's monologue (chapter three), and for a discussion of Pompilia as Romantic ironist (chapter four).

Traditional and deconstructive notions of character, as mentioned by Walker, have been discussed in connection with Romantic irony by Janice Haney and Paul Hamilton. Janice Haney maintains that irony can

be used to reconstruct or deconstruct and she cites Wayne Booth as an example of a reconstructive reader and Paul de Man as an example of a deconstructive one. The difference between these two approaches hinges on their views of meaning. Booth believes in a fixed centre:

There is a stable centre that underwrites even the most ironic of surfaces and a good reader reconstructs that meaning, center of statement.²

De Man, on the other hand, maintains the impossibility of 'true' or fixed meaning. For Haney, neither of these alternative positions adequately accounts for Romantic irony, whose aims are transcendental rather than polemical.

Paul Hamilton compares deconstruction and Romantic irony in his article "Romantic Irony and English Literary History". In discussing the ability of new critical practices to uncover new and productive meanings in earlier texts, he states:

Modern tactics of critical deconstruction make us especially alive to romantic ironic techniques ... The modern theory resuscitates the dead art.³

Insofar as Hamilton claims that deconstruction is an agent of presence as much of dissolution,⁴ and therefore is constructive as well as deconstructive, his view of deconstruction is closer to Romantic irony than Haney's view.

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to compare Romantic irony with deconstruction, it is nevertheless interesting to note that Haney and Hamilton recognise the way techniques of irony can be allied to both traditional and deconstructive readings. Before moving on to explain a theory of Romantic irony in order that it can be applied to Pompilia's monologue, it is necessary to observe that Romantic irony has already been used as a model for reading Browning by Clyde de L. Ryals in Becoming Browning, a discussion of Browning's early poetry.

II

Ryals begins by noting the principle of becoming that is prominent in Browning. Browning's world is continually in change and whereas the Romantics used imagination to instil change and produce a harmony of opposites, Browning transcends the discord by accepting the opposition. This principle of becoming is manifested in philosophical irony whose foremost theoretician is Friedrich Schlegel. Philosophical irony denies absolute order and sees the universe in terms of an interplay between the finite and the infinite. Man can never attain full consciousness of the infinite, but by self-consciously realizing and acknowledging his limitations he may transcend them:

Life, then, persists in, and is developed by a continual reversal of order and disorder; the world is always being shaped so as to be destroyed and shaped anew.⁵

This philosophy is termed ironic in that it simultaneously urges the pursuit of the infinite while acknowledging the impossibility of obtaining it. As Ryals points out, the poet is doubly susceptible to this irony because as well as being bound to finite limitations because of his mortality, he works with language that is a structured system and as such cannot hope to capture the chaos of an infinite becoming.

Philosophical irony is a dialectic in which the contradictions remain unresolved while being held in the mind simultaneously. For Browning, according to Ryals, the importance lies in the interplay between the contradictions since it allows for the evolution of "higher spiritual, moral, and artistic states or conditions" (Ryals, p.5).

Ryals sees Browning's theory of the poet, as expounded in the 1851 Essay on Shelley, as an example of philosophical irony. Browning wants to combine two types of poet, the 'subjective' and the 'objective' into a whole poet who exhibits both modes. Ryals continues:

The whole poet beholds the universe, nature and man "in their actual state of perfection in imperfection"; looks to "the forthcoming stage of mans being"; and presents "this

idea of a future man". Rejecting "ultimates" and aspiring always toward a "higher stage of development", he strives "to elevate and extend "both himself and mankind... In brief, the whole poet is the poet of becoming, the kind of poet that Browning himself evidently wished to be (Ryals, p.6).

Browning also, Ryals says, regards the uncertainty of the present and possibility of change as a positive thing allowing for the constant 'making and unmaking' of meaning and potential for increased self-awareness which emphasises the important principle of becoming.

Ryals draws attention to specific aspects of Browning's work which he wishes to use as illustrating the principle of Romantic irony: Browning's "constantly evolving forms,... preoccupation with language, ... the consciousness of his characters that they are themselves dramatis personae in the process of constructing and deconstructing scripts" (Ryals, pp.7-8). Browning's art exhibits a form of irony which is a way of thinking that allows the opposing principles of objectivity and subjectivity, finitude and infinitude to co-exist. It is a "composite image of man as infinite and free in imagination and thought but finite and bounded in understanding and action" (Ryals, p.8).

Ryals elaborates his proposition further by analysing selected earlier poems of Browning. While it is necessary to acknowledge Ryals as a starting point, it is also necessary to elaborate upon his theory of Romantic irony in order to provide a more definitive theoretical background. For this purpose I rely heavily on Lilian Furst's Fictions of Romantic Irony, especially Chapter Two "The Metamorphosis of Irony" and Chapter Nine "In Search of a Theory".⁶

III

Furst begins by noting the difficulties which surround a definition of irony of any kind. The difficulty lies in the range of situations which irony can cover and in its non-specific nature. It is not a term which applies to a definitive and unchanging quality. Simple irony may be defined as a discrepancy between reality and appearance, but irony is not usually as straightforward as this. As

Furst notes, there are often a number of choices to the right meaning or interpretation, none of which are certain. For the ironic mind there are no absolute or final answers but only "contingencies, incongruities and relativities" (Furst, p.12). Irony is ambiguous.

These aspects of irony are contained in the etymology of the word which "associates it directly with the idea of the mask, for it derives from the Greek word for a dissembler."⁷ This notion of a mask raises further questions about irony particularly pertinent to The Ring and the Book, where all the monologuists are constituted by a linguistic mask through which they attempt to persuade the auditor of the rightness of their view. The reader has the problem of attending to the linguistic mask in order to discern discrepancies in its production. The ambiguous nature of language further complicates the picture, but it is the only means we have of judging. As Browning says, "how else know we save by worth of word?"⁸ So there is a difficulty in establishing the exact nature and extent of irony and also the intention or implication behind it.

The problem is somewhat more complicated with Romantic irony since it is far more than a rhetorical device. It is, rather, a philosophical stance - as numerous critics have pointed out. Anne Mellor, for instance, speaks of Romantic irony as "a mode of consciousness or a way of thinking about the world that finds a corresponding literary mode."⁹ Stuart Sperry sees it as "a state of mind or disposition"¹⁰ and for Janice Haney "Romantic irony is essentially aesthetic and metaphysical - not rhetorical, nor grammatical" (Haney, p.311).

To understand Romantic irony and the width of its application it is necessary to trace its development and origins. Romantic irony emerges in the last decade of the eighteenth century in Germany, particularly in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel who is generally acknowledged as being its main exponent. It arises out of the political background of the time and develops from the philosophy of Kant and Fichte. The emergence of Romanticism and the new novel form at this time were also seen as contributing factors to the rise of Romantic irony. Schlegel brings these factors together in Athenaeum fragment 216:

The French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy and Goethe's Meister are the greatest tendencies of the age.¹¹

The French Revolution is crucial to the development of Romantic irony, since there emerged from it a feeling of possibility and hope that new orders could be established and old ones abolished. It generated a feeling that change was a positive value, and constant change or flux is a dominant feature of Romantic irony. There was much sympathy for the French Revolution in Germany but the unification of Germany had not yet taken place and, as Muecke points out,¹² Germany consisted of hundreds of territorial sovereignties and therefore lacked the unity needed for revolution. However, this did not exclude the possibility of change altogether and the Germans turned inward to achieve an 'intellectual revolution' which also partook of the spirit of the age.

Fichte's philosophy was part of a development of thought starting with Kant and extending beyond Fichte to Locke, Condillac and Herder. Kant's Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason, 1787) led to the questioning of the epistemological capabilities of man. The distinction between the phenomenal (that which could be known) and noumenal world (that which could not be known) brought about an increasing questioning of absolutes and a more open and accepting attitude towards the essential infiniteness and vastness of the universe in which not all could be explained or understood. Kant's questioning of the basis of our knowledge and the undermining of absolutes diminished the authority previously inherent in objective judgement and instead placed emphasis on the subjective.

Fichte further emphasized the subjective by stressing that reality depended upon the perceptions of the ego as proposed in Grundlagen der gesamen Wissenschaftslehre (The Science of Knowledge, 1794). The perceiving subject becomes the centre and the self becomes increasingly conscious of itself and so, as Hamilton explains in quoting Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre, "this attitude in which 'the a-priori and the a-posteriori... are merely two points of view', breeds an ironical regard for reality in which the self always holds in reserve a consciousness richer than any objective definition or

expression to which it may seem to be submitting" (Hamilton, p.15). In the dialectic between ego and non-ego, self and reality, it is ego and self which are dominant. Furst sees the following aspects of Fichte's philosophy as being important to Schlegel's theory of Romantic irony: the dialectical movement is important as a paradigm to Schlegel's theory, the emphasis on self-consciousness and the infinite degrees of self-consciousness are important in that they illustrate a movement between poles of self absorption and total detachment, and lastly, the subjectivity of Fichte reinforced the emphasis away from absolutes and thus reinforced Kant's philosophy.

Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" also had its effect on Schlegel because of its concern with the ambiguous nature of language. Language and meaning are not cemented together and therefore there can be no absolute meaning. The automatic accepting of a word as representing some unquestionable absolute was undermined and a questioning of the way language works developed as part of a philosophy of language which began to explore the relationship between semantics and epistemology. If words do not convey exact meaning, then not only is knowledge uncertain but so is our means of expressing this knowledge. If it is not certain what words mean, then it is even less certain, in terms of irony, to say the opposite of what is meant:

If words are used with uncertain meanings as Locke saw, even rhetorical irony cannot function as the simple, stable device it is generally taken to be. (Furst, p.40)

For Locke, as Anne Mellor points out,¹³ there is no necessary connection between the objects and the words people use to express them.

Condillac and Herder furthered Locke's ideas. Condillac emphasizes language as the medium of thought to the point where words have an independent existence of their own. While Fichte stressed the individual subject as the center of perception Herder, in his 1772 Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache (Treatise on the Origin of Human Speech, 1772), privileges the communicating being over the signs he is using. As with Fichte, the subjective is again stressed and so now the uncertainties about objective knowledge, privileging of the subjective, and uncertainties about language combined to yield

uncertainty about the way individuals use words. So in modern terms the late eighteenth century was aware of the disjunction between sign and referent and of the unreliability of language to convey exact meaning. This had an effect on irony, as Furst explains:

The discovery of ambiguities in all words is a potent factor impelling towards more radical and enveloping constructs of irony that mirror the essential paradoxicality of existence. The intuition of the instability of meaning paves the way for the metamorphosis of irony. (Furst, p.42)

Along with the political and philosophical position of the time, Furst sees the development of Romanticism and also the novel genre as affecting the metamorphosis of irony. The emphasis of Romanticism on flux, change and growth along with introspection, are also characteristics which lie at the centre of Romantic irony. Chaos, indeterminacy and alternating contradictory or opposing positions are often starting points for Romantic art from which harmony or transcendence to a new state evolve. The assertion and negation involved in attaining this harmony is also a paradigm for the way Romantic irony works. The principle of evolution and change is important in both Romanticism and Romantic irony. A growing self-awareness was important to Romantic irony and self-consciousness and inward looking speculative thought is an aspect of Romanticism.

The development of the novel form provided an ideal genre in which the theory of Romantic irony could develop. The novel promoted self-consciousness or self-reflexivity in that as narrative it often seemed close to 'reality', inviting the reader to comment based on his own situation. In addition to this the reader was often addressed directly (as in Tristram Shandy), which had the effect of blurring the borderline between fiction and reality. The reader simultaneously believes in the illusion yet realizes its fictional nature, and so develops detachment and involvement of a kind that characterizes Romantic irony. In another sense, the play with form allowed for irony between the author and his fiction. This is exploited particularly with relation to the narrator and his narrated story where he makes the reader aware of the various levels of fiction involved. In traditional irony the narrator is on the reader's side. By phrases, jokes, images or changes in tone which indicate the use of irony, the

narrator implies a 'true' meaning which lies below that which is stated. The narrator may insist on his own fictional nature in Romantic irony, or "sport with the illusion he is creating", thereby disrupting expectation (Furst, p.47). The reader is then more the victim of the joke than 'in on it' as is the case with traditional irony. In any case there is irony in the sense that the narrator points to the fictionality of his own work when he is himself fictional.

Furst points us back to the notion of the mask. The mask takes over the persona of the narrator and control is lost. The narrator becomes a "gamesman who delights in sporting with his creation" (Furst, p.230), or in Mellor's words he "simultaneously creates and wittily mocks" the work before him (Mellor, p.17). Insofar as the narrator does these things the actual story he is telling becomes subordinate to the way he tells it; the narration dominates the narrative; the process of telling rather than what is told becomes emphasized, and meaning becomes less clear and more confused in the dislocation caused by the movement between the narrator and the different levels of narrative. The result is that the reader is left to contemplate the paradoxes or inconsistencies of the narrative, often arriving at the conclusion that there is no ultimate meaning or certain truth to be found, and this is certainly the case with Romantic irony. In questioning the levels of fiction and the so-called fictionality of the narrator, the reader is alerted to his own role in the creation of the text. A heightened self-consciousness on the part of the reader, Furst observes, may further lead to questioning the power of his mind not only to engage in the creation of fictional characters, but also in fictions of self, for in Romantic irony a state of constant becoming allows constant modifications of self, just as a narrator may have many masks.

Romantic irony, then, emerges from the political, philosophical and literary background of the time. Muecke surmises that the "compost from which Romantic Irony grew may be summarily characterized as a combination of an intellectual ferment...a heightened self awareness...and a recognition and acceptance both of the complexity and contradictoriness of the world and of the obligation to come to terms with such a world" (Muecke, p.191).

IV

Having looked at the background of Romantic irony it is now necessary to approach it more directly. As I have already noted, one of Romantic irony's origins lies in philosophy, and insofar as Romantic irony is a way of thinking, it recognizes the limitations of the human condition, the limitations of knowledge and of language. It maintains the need for man to create, conceive of his own identity but also to decreate, to avoid "excessive commitment of the fictions of one's own mind" (Mellor, p.11).

Schlegel himself has said "Philosophy is the real homeland of Irony" (Schlegel, p.148), pointing not only to the origins of Romantic irony in philosophy, but also to the nature of irony which, like philosophy, has the ability to deal with the world at large, not just with literature.

Romantic irony conceives of the word as constructed from an infinite chaos from which man must attempt to construct order. Schlegel writes in his essay entitled "On Incomprehensibility":

And isn't this entire, unending world constructed by the understanding out of incomprehensibility or chaos. (Schlegel, p.268)

This chaos-order movement constitutes genuine being, as opposed to what Behler terms 'systematic order' which "is a mere shadow of life"¹⁴ - "The highest beauty, indeed the highest order, is yet only that of chaos."¹⁵ Man cannot perceive the total infinite chaos because of his limited and finite perceptions. To try and capture chaos is to deny its infinite nature and produce stasis which would distort its continually changing nature, and therefore deny its essence. Instead of denying the chaotic nature of the world, Romantic irony attempts to capture its movement by alternating between chaos and order, by creating and decreating. The Romantic ironic piece of art must join together chaos and order to become:

artfully ordered confusion, [a] charming symmetry of contradictions, [a] wonderfully perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony.¹⁶

Man can make some attempt to transcend his finite place in an infinite world of chaos by being in a constant state of becoming. The self is not unified or stable but is constantly changing, constantly creating and decreating itself. Self is always in process. Under Romantic irony, as Haney says, "in a moment, man can change his mind and stand everything on its head" (Haney, p.317). This aspect of self or identity-in-process is demonstrated in Schlegel's writings:

'durch sie' [i.e. Ironie] 'setzt man sich über sich selbst hinweg'¹⁷
 ('by means of it' [i.e. irony] 'one transcends oneself').

Irony is:

'setzen Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung',¹⁸
 (constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction).

Schlegel maintains that man approaches divinity through this process of becoming because in its enlarging process of creation and decreation it allows for the establishment of new relationships:

Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become God, to be human, to cultivate oneself are all expressions that mean the same thing. (Schlegel, p.200)

The ability to sport with your own creation is seen as God-like and the creation of literature by human intellect and imagination is also seen as replicating the divine act of creation (Furst, p.27). Structures of identity, like the structures of literature, emphasize the process of creation rather than the finished product.

The aim of a Romantic ironist would be to produce a literature that would accept and express the ironies of art and the human predicament. In order to conform to the ideal of Romantic irony as a process of becoming and in order to transcend its own finite and fixed character, the author must be committed to both the presentation and undermining of a work of art. The author becomes absorbed in his work but simultaneously indicates his detachment from it. He moves between the enthusiasm of creation and the scepticism of destruction and this movement produces what Schlegel terms a "progressive universal poetry" (Schlegel, pp.175-76), which is hailed as genuinely romantic. Anne Mellor sums up the whole process:

Having ironically acknowledged the effectiveness of his own pattern of human experience, he romantically engages in the creative process of life by eagerly constructing new forms, new myths. And these new fictions and self-concepts bear with them the seeds of their own destruction. They too die to give way to new patterns, in a never ending process that becomes an analogue for life itself. (Mellor, p.5)

Schlegel's answer to the form which was most suitable to this artistic theory was the fragment. The fragment form is open and dynamic and therefore "exemplifies one aspect of Romantic irony" (Muecke, p.184). Wheeler points to two reasons why the fragment form was suitable. First, it represents the limitations of language which cannot represent the whole, and second, it involved the reader actively by making him create the relationship between the fragments rather than having the theory presented to him in a cogent whole. Wheeler links the aspect of Romantic irony which sees the reader as creator, to Novalis and Jean Paul Richters' belief that the author could not present the reader with the whole truth but only "set him in the direction of truth."¹⁹ In Discourse on Poetry Schlegel is interested in forms which "set against one another quite divergent opinions, each of them capable of shedding new light upon the infinite spirit of poetry from an individual standpoint, each of them striving to penetrate from a different angle into the real heart of the matter."²⁰ Certainly the fragment form allowed for this purpose. Thus in the work of art Romantic Irony can manifest itself as:

a process of simultaneous creation and decreation: as two opposed voices or personae, or two contradictory ideas or themes, which the author carefully balances and refuses to synthesize or harmonize. (Mellor, p.18)

The idea of being able to hold two contradictory positions in mind at the same time is reminiscent of paradox. Schlegel acknowledges this: "Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great" (Schlegel, p.149). For Schlegel, paradox allows the combination of extremes and is a spur towards progression in that it is a floating stance rather than a fixed position.

Schlegel emphasizes parabasis and has stated that irony is a permanent parabasis.²¹ Paul de Man interprets this as meaning a 'self-

conscious narrator', the author's intrusion that disrupts the fictional illusion" (De Man, p.200). It points to the author's self-conscious recognition of his work as fiction, recognising his involvement in continuing to create it, yet also his detachment in recognising it as illusion.

As we near the end of some attempt to explain Romantic irony we find ourselves still somewhat lacking a firm definition. At least part of the reason for this is that any view of Romantic irony is 'created' insofar as each reader must establish his own links between the fragments. However, Janice Haney goes some way to achieving a succinct definition of Romantic irony by modifying Lee M. Chapel:

Romantic Irony thus became a metaphysic and an aesthetic that affirmed multiplicity, growth, and change while recognizing the momentary need for unity, stability, system and illusory substance. In this way, Romantic Irony aspires to ideal significance: its meaning is contradictory; its structure dialectical; its medium, the language of reflection; its style antithetical; and its aim, self-discovery through transcendence. (Haney, pp.314-15)

V

This chapter began by discussing William Walker's call for a reading which would accommodate the contradictions in Pompilia's monologue. His account of traditional versus deconstructive theories of character already suggests a Romantic ironic reading of 'Pompilia' and this is further suggested by Paul Hamilton and Janice Haney who link the construction and deconstruction of character with Romantic irony. Before moving on to a detailed reading of Pompilia's monologue which uses Romantic irony to account for apparent discrepancies, it is useful to summarize characteristics of Romantic irony which have been discussed in this chapter.

Romantic irony is much more than a rhetorical device, it is a way of thinking which has its origins in philosophy. Romantic irony posits the universe as existing in a state of chaos from which man seeks to create order. As the nature of chaos is continual change, any attempt to order chaos produces stasis and thus denies its essence. Because of man's finite knowledge and the limitations of

language it is impossible to capture the infinity of chaos. Man can never capture the whole truth. However, man can transcend his finite limitations by acknowledging them and by existing in a state of becoming. The process of becoming involves a continual movement between order and chaos, a continual creation of self and identity followed by an undermining or decreation of self. To hold any one fixed position or identity is to deny the process of change inherent in chaos. A continual revision of identity means that the self is not a unified and integrated whole, but is instead characterized by process and multiplicity which allows for heightened self-consciousness and a greater understanding of self. The notion of a self-in-process with its implicit contradictions lies at the heart of an understanding of Pompilia's monologue.

NOTES

1. William Walker, "'Pompilia' and Pompilia", Victorian Poetry, 22 (1984), p.61.
2. Janice L. Haney, "'Shadow Hunting': Romantic Irony, Sartor Resartus and Victorian Romanticism," Studies in Romanticism, 17 (1978), p.309.
3. Paul Hamilton, "Romantic Irony and English Literary History" in The Romantic Heritage: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Karsten Engelberg (Copenhagen: Copenhagen University Press, 1983), p.23.
4. See Hamilton: "Deconstruction produces new content..." (p.30).
5. Clyde de L. Ryals, Becoming Browning: The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning, 1833-1846 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), p.4.
6. Lilian R. Furst, Fictions of Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
7. Furst, pp.6-7. Furst is citing Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authority, p.120.
8. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, ed. Richard D. Altick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), I.837, p.45.
9. Anne K. Mellor, English Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.24.
10. Stuart Sperry, "Toward a definition of Romantic Irony in English Literature" in Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition, ed. George Bornstein (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1977), p.5.
11. Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments, ed. and trans. with an Introduction by Peter Firchow

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p.190.
Hereafter referred to as Schlegel.

12. See D.C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), p.187.
13. See Mellor, pp.3-4.
14. Behler, "Introduction" to Friedrich Schlegel, Dialogue On Poetry and Literary Aphorisms, trans. Intro. and annotations by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p.11. Hereafter referred to as Dialogue on Poetry.
15. Cited by Mellor, p.7.
16. Dialogue on Poetry, p.86. Mellor cites this p.18.
17. Furst, p.27, cites Lyceum fragment No. 108 (see Schlegel, p.156).
18. Furst, p.28, cites Athenaeum fragment No. 51 (see Schlegel, p.167).
19. Kathleen Wheeler, German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.11.
20. Dialogue on Poetry, p.55. Mellor cites this p.22.
21. Cited by Furst, p.28 and Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", in Interpretation: Theory and Practice ed Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p.200.

CHAPTER THREE

POMPILIA ON POMPILIA

The title of this thesis refers to Pompilia's multiplicity, the variety of aspects which constitute her character. Schlegel's phrase 'charming symmetry', which appears in the title, points to the opposing sides of Pompilia's personality - the naive and experienced, the passive and active, the innocent and manipulative - and to the charm which dominates her personality. Chapter one of this discussion considered mainly the positive side of Pompilia's character; therefore in order to restore the balance which symmetry suggests, it is necessary now to dwell more heavily on the flaws in Pompilia's position in a discussion of her monologue.

Section one of this chapter discusses the first one hundred and seventy-nine lines of Pompilia's monologue, showing how it works as a continuous piece of narrative. Line 179 is chosen as the finishing point for this analysis, because by this time Pompilia has introduced all the main characters in her life. The second section approaches the monologue thematically, considering Pompilia's perception and description of herself, her use of irony, her relationship with her audience and her relationship with Guido and Caponsacchi. In the final section varied aspects of Pompilia's character are brought together in order to show how they are dominated by the overall charm of her personality.

Examples of Romantic irony occur throughout the following discussion. Romantic irony allows for the various aspects of Pompilia's character which are inconsistent with each other. Contradictory traits can co-exist in Romantic irony and if we allow for this in Pompilia, we gain new insight into Pompilia's character. Examples of Romantic irony are discussed as they arise; a more general discussion of Pompilia as Romantic ironist occurs in Chapter Four.

I

The Background: lines 1-179

Pompilia's concern to establish her own identity from the outset of her monologue immediately contradicts those critics who claim that Pompilia speaks for no particular reason but to tell the truth. In addition to this, her concern with the reaction of her audience and her awareness of irony in these opening stages, point to a Pompilia who is from the beginning, more sophisticated than most critics are willing to allow, although she does experience a growth in understanding during her monologue.

Pompilia endeavours to define herself initially by stating her name and age:

I am just seventeen years and five months old,
 And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
 'T is writ so in the church's register,
 Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
 At length, so many names for one poor child,
 - Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
 Pompilia Comparini, - laughable! (11.1-7)

In the recitation of factual details Pompilia seeks confirmation of identity, but what she finds instead is discrepancy. Her rather grand list of names is incongruous beside the image of 'one poor child', 'just seventeen'. The word 'laughable' is evidence of Pompilia's recognition of the ironic distance between her name and her situation. It is a simple enough recognition and if we are not willing to allow that this use of irony is a conscious strategy designed by Pompilia to win the audience's sympathy, we must at least acknowledge that Pompilia is capable of recognising irony at this point. In terms of Romantic irony, the word 'laughable' undermines or decreates the identity established by the list of names. Identity based on name being undermined, Pompilia then sets up identity based on her role as wife and mother - "I had been a mother of a son/ Exactly two weeks" (11.13-14).

At this point Pompilia's preferences enter her account as she

tries to influence future accounts of her life. She clearly prefers to identify herself with her role as mother. She would have the fact that she was mother of a son recorded but would have them omit "all about the mode of death" (1.11). The accenting of the mother role also anticipates Pompilia's identification with Mary later in the monologue.

Pompilia often uses imagery to help explain some aspect of her life. The marble lion at the entry to San Lorenzo is, Pompilia maintains, an ominous sign, but of what she does not explain at this stage of her monologue. Her phrase "I used to wonder" (1.21) suggests either that she no longer wonders in the sense that it no longer bothers her, or that she no longer wonders in the sense that she now knows what it signified. The ferocity of the image gives a sense of impending doom to Pompilia's account. Retrospective recounting of events allows Pompilia to imbue the events with aspects that they may not have had before. She maintains that it was an ominous sign when she was small, or is it rather that she sees it as an ominous sign now and uses it to gain sympathy? The ferocious lion, after all, does characterize her relationship with Guido, and knowing the events already enables the audience to make the connection themselves, responding with sympathy for Pompilia.

Many critics claim that Pompilia has no awareness of her audience or that her contact with them is at best tenuous. However, at 11.35-36 Pompilia addresses her audience directly, asking them to take note of the few things she has told them: "All these few things/I know are true, - will you remember them?" This appeal to the audience is followed by a statement aimed at winning sympathy from them:

Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
To count my wounds, - twenty-two dagger-wounds,
Five deadly, but I do not suffer much -
Or too much pain, - and am to die tonight.

(11.37-40)

Her courage in the face of such awful wounds is conveyed by a matter-of-fact tone which in its coolness and apparent lack of emotion, heightens the pathos and maintains the audience's sympathy. We cannot say that Pompilia is definitely aware of these strategies and

is consciously employing them but, as discussion during this chapter will show, Pompilia uses sophisticated language devices and is aware of more complicated issues than her apparent innocence and naivety would allow for. We must therefore allow for the possibility that Pompilia does use sophisticated language devices and question Pompilia's use of such devices, just as we would question the use of them by any other monologist in The Ring and the Book.

Pompilia's role as mother of Gaetano becomes one of her main ways of giving meaning to her life. By speaking of her relationship with Gaetano, she seeks to achieve some understanding of her life. Pompilia's maternal nature is stressed. Her love for him means she needs to be persuaded to let him go even though it is for his own safety ("Why take on so? Where is the great loss?/ These next three weeks he will but sleep and feed;" 11.50-51), and accounts for her eagerness to believe that the lethal knock at the door is the country-woman bringing him back early (see 11.59-62). This belief is contradicted by Pompilia, however, when later in the monologue, Pompilia-as-lover dominates Pompilia-as-mother and she asserts that it is Caponsacchi whom she expects to see. In this early part of her monologue Pompilia wants to be identified as a caring mother. There is a shift, however. Pompilia's expressed concern for Gaetano shifts to a concern for how he may see her in the future. This is essentially a shift from concern for Gaetano to concern for self.

Technically, if Pompilia's concern is only for others she should not be worried about what Gaetano will think of her in the future. Lines 68-81 reveal that Pompilia is very concerned with her image. It is important how Gaetano sees her and also, we may assume, how others see her - audience, Pope, Caponsacchi...Pompilia's speech takes on a self-conscious aspect as she tries to manipulate her audience in order to produce her image as she would like it to be: "Therefore, I wish someone will please to say/ I looked already old though I was young " (11.72-73).

Pompilia does not want to be seen like other girls of seventeen "who titter or blush" (1.70), but rather as a mature woman despite her tender years. She would like the audience to say that she looked

nearer twenty. This comment (1.75) works two ways. It suggests that Pompilia is maturer than her age might indicate, but at the same time twenty, although a respectable age to Pompilia, is probably not very different from seventeen in the eyes of the audience. Pompilia's youth then is further emphasized by the fact that she does think twenty older.

Pompilia suggests that she is no more like a flirtatious teenage girl than the statue of the Virgin at the street corner. This is Pompilia's first use of the Virgin image which she will use throughout the monologue. She sees that the Virgin with the baby broken off resembles her own situation in that she is separated from Gaetano. The statue exists in a lonely niche and is of thin white, glazed clay. The loneliness is reminiscent of Pompilia's isolation in times of need and the whiteness of the clay is contiguous with the paleness which has been associated with Pompilia by other speakers throughout the poem, particularly Caponsacchi.

Pompilia's use of the Virgin image at this point seems straight forward enough, adding pathos to her account of her life and emphasizing her purity and holiness. However, as her monologue progresses it is interesting to note how she identifies more and more with Mary, pointing to comparisons and similarities which are less credible than her initial use of the statue. I am referring specifically to the notion of a virgin birth by which Pompilia can deny Guido's paternity of Gaetano. In a sense this wish is natural enough because of Guido's brutality and because she regards sexual submission to Guido and the consummation of her marriage as a mistake on her part (see 11.847-73), even though she had little choice. I will look at the use of the Virgin comparison more closely in Part II of this chapter.

Pompilia bemoans her inability to write because it means she cannot write something for Gaetano to read after her death. This wins sympathy from the audience, especially the remark "Had they a whole day to live out like mine" (1.184) which reminds the audience of just how little time Pompilia has left and how much she is suffering. It is interesting to note that Pompilia introduces the issue of

whether or not she can write at a point where it wins sympathy for her. She does not at this point, refer at all to the controversy about the letters she is alleged to have written to Caponsacchi. By the time Pompilia does confront this issue, the idea that she cannot write has already been firmly planted in the audience's mind at 11.82-83, making the acceptance of her illiteracy more possible. Again, it is not possible to establish with certainty that Pompilia is aware of this effect, but we must endeavour to keep open such a possibility if we are to regard her as sceptically as we do the other speakers in The Ring and the Book.

Pompilia continues to stress her distinctness wishing now to place herself above other girls through emphasizing the uniqueness of her name (1.85). She seeks to establish some identity which is distinct and lasting, in order to have something by which Gaetano can remember her: "But then how far away, how hard to find/ Will anything about me have become /Even if the boy bethink himself and ask!" (11.87-90).

Pompilia now begins to consider briefly Guido, essentially denying his existence in relation to Gaetano. She moves from saying that Gaetano never had a father that he knew, to considering that he never had one at all. She does not mention Guido by name, but we know the marriage was consummated and since she wishes to deny sexual relations with Caponsacchi, we can only presume it is Guido she is referring to. The statement that Gaetano never had a father he knew is easy enough to follow, since Guido has never seen Gaetano and is likely to be executed for the triple murder, and so will never see him at all.

The next line is more problematical, "nor ever had- no, never had, I say" (1.92). The repetitiveness of the phrase gives it emphasis and strength which is consolidated by "that is the truth" (1.93). Pompilia moves out of the literal and into the metaphorical here since (excluding the possibility of a second Virgin birth), Gaetano must have a father. To call some metaphorical meaning 'truth' is to reassess what the word 'truth' means - this indeed is the central problem of The Ring and the Book. Truth here lies in other

than the literal aspect. We should be aware that Pompilia may be also using truth in a less than literal sense in other places during the monologue.

Pompilia shifts the issue of parenthood from Gaetano's situation to her own. Discussion of Gaetano's parents reflects Pompilia's concern about her own lack of parents and her unknown heritage in terms of her natural parents. Again, it seems to be the relation between name and identity which Pompilia is particularly concerned with:

...no family, no name,
Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers
Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
They must not be my parents any more. (11.96-99)

The phrase 'it seems' points to a difference between the literal and the actual as is the case with the paternity of Gaetano. Literally, that is biologically, Pietro and Violante are not Pompilia's parents. However, they are in terms of emotional bonds. The question of truth in relation to 'true' parents also seems to be a comparative issue.

Pompilia wants to break with the confusion of the past where things are not what they seem and so names Gaetano after "a new saint to begin a new" (1.103). She says, "something put it in my head/ To call the boy 'Gaetano'" (11.100-01). This is one instance of a kind of voice from nowhere or divine message which Pompilia feels she receives at different points in her life. Another example is the perception of her pregnancy (11.1225-56: see also Part II of this chapter). Pompilia wishes Gaetano better protection than she got from the old saints she is named after (1.107). Her tone at this point hints of disrespect, not an attitude conventionally associated with Pompilia, whose piety is rarely questioned.

Pompilia switches from one position to the completely opposite stance at 11.108-09. Having pondered the ways Gaetano could remember her accurately (in a way that she would wish to be remembered), Pompilia now hopes Gaetano will regard the history of her as "somewhat dreamed / And get to disbelieve it at the last" (11.108-9). Indeed her life is becoming, even for herself, "sheer dreaming and

impossibility" (1.112), probably because of its horrific nature. Pompilia's inability or unwillingness to remember things at certain points is both plausible and convenient. It is understandable enough that a person who has undergone the horrors Pompilia maintains she has, will block out certain events too painful to remember. However, Pompilia's vagueness appears to be rather selective at points, and is often in sharp contrast with certain atrocities which she can remember in vivid detail. I do not wish to contend Pompilia's assertion that she finds it hard to remember, but suggest that increasing self-awareness during the course of her monologue may mean that Pompilia can use this aspect to her own advantage.

There are points in the monologue where Pompilia admits that she has more understanding now than she had previously in her life. She notes that previously she had never noticed the uniqueness of her life:

All seventeen years,
Not once did a suspicion visit me
How very different a lot is mine
From any other woman's in the world.
(11.113-16)

The recognition of her innocence in the past brings Pompilia to an awareness of her vulnerability at the hands of others during her life, particularly before her increased experience of life at the hands of Guido. She comes to see herself as victim of things which she could not control. Pompilia often characterizes herself as victim, particularly through the lamb/sacrifice image. The lamb image presents her as innocent and powerless, a picture which represents only one aspect of Pompilia, but which she chooses to accentuate. Pompilia uses images to describe Guido which other speakers have used but which she chooses to use and develop in connection with Guido. At 11.124-128 Pompilia defers responsibility for the use of the snake and wolf image and has her friends ask "Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,/ How comes that arm of yours about a wolf..." (11.124-25). These images could refer to Guido or to Pietro and Violante - the end result is the same, Pompilia is seen as innocent victim. Pompilia is doing well at this point to remember these images from the past, a time when, according to her, she did not understand them and had no

reason to think ill of Pietro or Violante. We only have Pompilia's word that her friends ever said this. Retelling is recreating and allows for additions and omissions. For the reader and the audience the events are constituted by Pompilia's narrative. We are in no position to judge the accuracy of reported speech, only to note its rhetorical effect, how it emphasizes Pompilia's role as victim.

Pompilia becomes bitter and disillusioned at this point, not the all-forgiving Pompilia which conventional criticism describes. Her bitterness is conveyed by her remark, "My own boy can say at least/ 'I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!'" (ll.132-33). Experience has given her knowledge and her remark "Not I, who little used to doubt...I doubt/Good Pietro kind Violante, gave me birth" (ll.134-35), again stresses the difference in terms of knowledge and scepticism between her youth and the present when she lays dying. Experience has taught her not to trust so readily, that things are not always as they seem. The realization of the gap between reality and appearance give Pompilia a sophistication or awareness which contradicts any evaluation of her as totally naive.

Pompilia's bitterness is constituted by the emotive language she uses:

I had never been their child,
Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
Of a woman known too well... (ll. 142-45)

Pompilia's verbal ability begins to be apparent here, signalling a degree of rhetorical skill and sophistication despite her professed illiteracy. The balancing of "an unknown man" against "woman known too well" and of "careless crime" against "crime and care too much" gives a dramatic effect to Pompilia's account. The idea that apparently opposite qualities, "unknown" and "known", "careless" and "care too much", both convey neglectful attitudes towards Pompilia is quite ironic. Pompilia's structuring of these remarks would suggest that she recognizes this in a general way, but she develops a more specific ability both to recognise and to employ irony during the course of the monologue and this has been largely ignored by the critics.

Pompilia finds that she cannot establish her identity as child in relation either to her natural parents or to her adopted parents. Violante and Pietro loved her, "They loved me always as I love my babe/ (-Nearly so" (11.136-37), and yet they disown her, to them she becomes nothing (1.149). Paradoxically, Pompilia has simultaneously two sets of parents and no parents at all.

Pompilia moves on (1.150) to seek identity in terms of her role as wife. However, this means of establishing self is also denied her, not by (in her eyes) her failure to perform the role of wife as Guido claims in his monologue,¹ but because of Guido's failure to live up to the role of husband. Without a husband, there cannot be a wife. It is in relation to Guido that Pompilia's most bitter and scornful feelings emerge:

Everyone says that husbands love their wives
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'Tis duty, law, pleasure, religion: well,
You see how much of this comes true in mine!

(11.152-55)

Pompilia is being ironic. The whole point is that none of these qualities is true of Guido. More than this, Guido is intent on doing the exact opposite of guarding, guiding and giving happiness. He abuses Pompilia, physically and mentally, threatens to kill her, hopes to lead her into a relationship with Caponsacchi which would then provide the excuse to get rid of her, one way or the other (hardly guidance), and makes her life a complete and utter misery. Pompilia's use of irony at this point cleverly emphasizes Guido's cruelty far more subtly than listing them outright; the use of irony shifts the responsibility for the judgement from Pompilia to the audience and so Pompilia does not appear to be directly antagonistic towards Guido. Also, the audience is left to recall from the public rumour the alleged atrocities Guido committed against Pompilia without her naming any in particular. Pompilia shifts responsibility for anti-Guido feeling away from her further by saying "People would fain have somehow proved / He was no husband" (11.156-57). Pompilia implies it is a general consensus of opinion that Guido was no husband when it may in fact be 'Pompilia indeed would fain have somehow proved he was

no husband'. Guido's final brutal act is recounted in short, simple phrases which emphasize its horrific nature: "He did not hear,/ Or would not wait; and so has killed us all" (11.157-58).

Caponsacchi is the last main character to be introduced in this opening passage. Considering the emphasis and praise he receives in the second half of the monologue, his late introduction could be considered surprising and suggests that perhaps Pompilia is deliberately trying to play him down at this stage in order to establish firmly her innocence before discussing her relationship with Caponsacchi. It is the nature of this relationship, after all, which establishes Pompilia's moral character decisively.

Pompilia's main defence of Caponsacchi is by means of attack. Her antagonism towards public opinion and her audience at this point is another example of Pompilia's active role in her own defense and is therefore contrary to the view some critics have of her as a totally passive teller of truths. Pompilia discredits public opinion as unfair by pointing out that they fail to give Caponsacchi a fair hearing, "- men will not ask about, /But tell untruths of, and give nicknames" to Caponsacchi (11.160-61).

Pompilia ensures her audience's attention by addressing them directly ("Do only hear...", 1.163) before she launches into a defense of Caponsacchi based on his role of priest. She seems to imply that priesthood and sex are by definition mutually exclusive. She may wish to imply this but she knows that this not the case, as her experiences with Girolamo have shown (see 1.809). Whereas previously she has wanted to deny the importance of marriage to Guido because of his unhusbandly behaviour, she now very cleverly uses the same device, marriage, to protect her from accusations of adultery -"I am married, he has taken priestly vows" (1.166). Marriage to Guido is simultaneously no marriage at all and marriage enough to mean no relation with any other man than her husband. Whereas the various roles of daughter and wife have previously been shown to be no accurate picture of the actual situation, the roles of priest and wife are suddenly very pertinent, according to Pompilia - and the audience is expected to agree.

Pompilia attacks not only the public's responses to the relationship between herself and Caponsacchi, which Pompilia sees as believing them lovers, but she also attacks their excuses on the basis that since she and Caponsacchi are innocent, they do not need excuses. The repetition of "they say", "they ask" (ll.168-170) gives a tone of mockery by means of mimicry at this point. She is belittling them by this means and by the colloquialism "downright" at l.174, "And downright love atones for everything!" Pompilia's tone shifts from anger at the audience to incredulity that her audience could believe the letters allegedly sent between the two "lovers". Her amazement is conveyed by the matter of fact monotone at this point and by the fact that she seems too stunned to defend herself directly against the accusation of letters which is a crucial issue in the evaluation of her innocence. She moves onto the Daphne image to establish her moral character at a more general level.

An examination of the first 179 lines of Pompilia's monologue already shows a depth of character in Pompilia that is not often acknowledged by criticism. Pompilia introduces the main figures in her life - Violante, Pietro, Gaetano, Guido and Caponsacchi - and makes some comment about the role of each of them in her life. Pompilia's apparent concern for exactness in her opening lines becomes associated with a concern for truth. However, the word 'truth' in itself becomes associated less with facts and more with the validity of emotion and feeling as a means of evaluating the concerns of a situation as the monologue progresses, and so truth becomes a shifting proposition in Pompilia's monologue as it is throughout The Ring and the Book. The conventional view that Pompilia speaks some unbiased 'truth' must therefore be questioned. Pompilia's assertion of a dream-like quality to her life is contradicted by moments of precise recollection and this discontinuity also requires some explanation. Comments or instructions addressed directly to the audience in these opening lines are testimony to Pompilia's concern with audience response and with her concern that they side with her. This is in opposition to the opinion of many critics who maintain that Pompilia is mostly unaware of her audience. Pompilia's identification with the Virgin Mary is already established in these opening passages, as is

her ability to use metaphor. This ability to use metaphor in combination with other verbal skills and rhetorical strategies, such as irony, already point to a very adept monologist.

II

A: Metaphor and Self-Characterization

Pompilia's use of metaphor is a means by which she can explain a particular aspect of herself and impress it upon her audience. The Diana-Daphne tapestry which Pompilia introduces at 1.186 provides one identity for Pompilia and shows us that Pompilia knows how metaphor works. Tisbe takes the place of Diana in the tapestry and Pompilia that of Daphne. Tisbe's role as Diana the huntress is appropriate to her more developed knowledge of the world compared with Pompilia. She provides Pompilia with answers to various questions: for example, when Tisbe defines a cavalier as similar to the Perseus figure in the tapestry (1.390). That Guido does not fit the image is because of Violante's 'incorrect' use of the word rather than because Tisbe provides an inaccurate comparison.

Pompilia takes the place of Daphne who was turned into a laurel tree when she was chased by Apollo:

And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves
 Flourishing out of your five finger-ends,
 And all the rest of you so brown and rough:
 Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?
 (11.193-96)

The metaphor serves to reinforce Pompilia's innocence and sexual purity by the comparison with Daphne. According to Ovid I.452-567, Daphne hated:

the wedding torch as if it were a thing of evil, would blush rosy red over her fair face, and, clinging around her father's neck with coaxing arms, would say: 'O father, dearest, grant me to enjoy perpetual virginity'.²

Apollo speaks to Daphne in pursuit of her, "so does me lamb flee from the wolf; the deer from the lion, so do doves on fluttering wing flee from the eagle; so every creature flees its foes."³ These are the

same images Browning uses during the course of the monologue. Some - the lamb, the wolf, the lion and the dove - Pompilia uses in her own monologue.

The placement of the Daphne comparison in Pompilia's monologue is very opportune, coming as it does just after the introduction of Caponsacchi and the denial of sexual union between him and Pompilia. The Daphne metaphor then, reinforces this denial by suggesting Pompilia's innocent and virginal qualities. This association is made by the reader; Pompilia herself by-passes any explicitness at this point. We cannot know for certain whether Pompilia deliberately uses the Daphne metaphor, but since this is a retrospective account and Pompilia has had time to order her thoughts, we must at least keep alive the possibility.

Pompilia recognises that metaphor is not the thing itself and suggests that her entire life is like a metaphor, not quite real:

Thus, all my life,-
As well what was, as what, like this, was not, -
Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
(11.198-201)

To say that life is a series of metaphors comes very close to Romantic irony with constant creation and decreation of self, self as process. Each new comparison creates a new self which is then decreed when a new image is suggested or an established image is used in a new way. Self is not stable but is constantly changing. To compare yourself to something, to engage in the process of metaphor, is a self-conscious act. You have to evaluate self, that is, be conscious of some aspect of self before you can compare it with something else. This series of metaphors which Pompilia provides in order to explain various aspects of herself, is in contradiction to her stance elsewhere that there is a true self to be discovered beneath these images.

Pompilia uses the lamb image to describe her innocence. At 1.388 she uses it to describe her innocence and lack of understanding. When Violante tells Pompilia to hold her tongue "Such being correct way with girl-brides" (1.383), Pompilia does not understand, but

because she trusts Violante and obeys her parents she follows Violante's instructions. Looking back she makes the comparison to a lamb being shorn:

- Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
Then a lamb does in people clipping wool;
Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
(11.386-88)

Denying understanding of what is happening, Pompilia once again casts herself in the role of victim, the sacrificial lamb. This analogy is made explicit by Pietro later in the monologue:

 withdraw, my child!
She is not helpful to the sacrifice
At this stage, - do you want the victim by
Why you discuss the value of her blood?
(11.522-25)

Previous to this, at 1.263 ff, Pompilia recounts Pietro's description of San Giovanni. Pietro is compared to a shepherd with Violante and Pompilia as his flock. Ironically, whereas the shepherd starts up and hears the angel, Violante and Pietro start up to open the door to anything but an angel - Guido.

The use of the lamb metaphor at 1.386 ff is relatively straightforward. However, the marriage as a coin metaphor at 11.400-10 is rather more sophisticated and shows the understanding of which Pompilia is capable:

...when one gives you, say, a coin to spend-
Its newness or its oldness; if the piece
Weigh properly and buy what you wish
No matter whether you get grime or glare!
Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
Would purchase me the praise of those I loved:
About what else should I concern myself?
(11.402-09)

Pompilia is aware that appearances are deceptive and that the end is more important than the means. Pompilia's concern was to please Violante and Pietro and so she married Guido even though she did not know what that act meant. Her rhetorical question at 1.409 wins her sympathy from the audience by means of dramatic irony. The audience

knows that she should have been concerned with more than pleasing her parents, considering the outcome of her marriage to Guido. Although she set out to please her parents, her marriage has ultimately meant their destruction.

Pompilia hardly knows "what a husband meant" (l. 410), but nevertheless tries to overcome her distaste for Guido's "Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard" (l.396) by her analogy to her experience of Master Malpichi. Her experience with Master Malpichi gives her a knowledge which, by means of comparison, she applies to Guido - both Malpichi and Guido are very ugly. While Malpichi's 'physic' 'beautified' him, the same does not come true of Guido whose deeds are just as ugly as his outward appearance - arguments based on comparison are in this instance shown to be faulty, yet Pompilia uses comparisons (to lamb, Virgin Mary etc) throughout her monologue to convince the audience of her innocence. She never suggests, however, that these may be faulty. Her experience with Master Malpichi has shown Pompilia that appearances can deceive. Her experience with Guido has shown her that appearances do not always deceive. Either way, Pompilia has gained knowledge she never had before these experiences. Pompilia gains knowledge as her life goes on. She acknowledges an increasing intelligence based on experience and intuition at l.516 ff:

Then I began to half surmise the truth;
 Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
 False, and my mother was to blame, and I
 To pity, who all spoke of, none addressed:
 I was the chattel that had caused a crime.

(ll.516-20)

She counteracts any ability to escape the situation which her knowledge of it implies by reasserting her position as pitiable and passive - a chattel. As with the lamb image she is a victim, things happen to her, she is not to blame. Later in this section we shall see that Pompilia learns passivity itself can be a valuable weapon, and this knowledge gives her a cunning far more sophisticated than the innocent child-like stance she works to perpetuate.

Many of the metaphors which Pompilia uses to explain her life are based on Christian mythology. She repeatedly compares herself to the

Virgin Mary with Gaetano as the Christ-child. Caponsacchi then is soldier-saint, with Guido as Satan or evil in general. By this means she achieves a number of things. Her own innocence, purity and goodness are established through comparison to the Virgin Mary. Gaetano becomes the child of a Virgin birth, denying the sex act in conception and therefore Guido's paternity. Caponsacchi's role as priest becomes the main means of defining him and the St. George/St. Michael comparison ties him to specific myths. He becomes the 'soldier-saint' who saves Pompilia but increasingly towards the end of the monologue she sees him simply as saint. Their relationship as lovers is therefore implicitly denied.

As we have seen in section one, Pompilia's establishment of a comparison between the Virgin Mary and herself comes early in her monologue. Her denial of Guido's paternity at 1.92 has already been discussed. She restates this position at 11.1762-5 where she states that the child is "Only his mother's", once again suggesting a link with the Virgin.

Pompilia compares her recognition of her pregnancy to an annunciation from God, as something descended directly from heaven. Her description recalls the annunciation to the Virgin Mary:

...thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,
Which I perceived was promise of my child,
(11.621-23)

When, what, first thing at day break, pierced
the sleep
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change! A broad yellow sun-beam was let fall
From heaven to earth... (11.1222-26)

The learned diction in the earlier extract, which is quite sophisticated for Pompilia, gives her account of the realization of her pregnancy an air of formality and weight which enhances its significance.

Pompilia identifies with the Virgin Mary and uses the figure of the Virgin as a moral guide and later, as a metaphor by which she comes to understand something about her own life. After she is

married, however, she finds that this image, which the church extols as a model for virtuous behaviour, is no longer relevant, as the Archbishop points out: "That which has glory in the Mother of God/ Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve/ Created to be Mother of mankind" (ll.758-60).

Pompilia's plea for a convent life and virginal existence is a restatement of what the Daphne image entails. Pompilia put both classical and Christian myth to the same purpose. Virginity, previously upheld as a virtue by the church, now becomes either virtue or vice depending on the situation. In essence, the meaning of virginity changes depending on the context, further evidence of things not being what they seem. The image Pompilia has identified with for so long is undermined and the Archbishop holds up Eve in its place. Paradoxically, Pompilia seems to be presented with a situation in which to fall into temptation is the right thing to do. The Archbishop's fallibility is shown by his language which reveals him as a false representative of God, which Pompilia later recognises. The Archbishop's trite comments are totally inappropriate to the seriousness of the Fall and of Pompilia's predicament:

Had Eve...
 Pouted "But I choose rather to remain
 Single "- why, she had spared herself forthwith
 Further probation by the apple and snake,
 Been pushed straight out of Paradise!
 (ll.761-66)

The Archbishop's argument is not at all logical and he twists Pompilia's actions into "I catch you making God command Eve sin!" (l.768). In the end he can only command her to honour her covenant.

Pompilia's account of the Virgin who hid herself from the Paynims becomes an important precedent for Pompilia's actions at Castelnuovo. Although it is not Mary which Pompilia refers to here, she emphasizes that the Virgin's actions are 'for the faith of God' (l.1390). This Virgin takes up the sword provided, in answer to a prayer from God, kills her enemies in God's name and walks "forth to the solitudes and Christ" (l.1402). Pompilia states at this point: "So should I grasp the lightening and be saved!" (l.1403). When she does take up the sword against Guido, the audience remembers this story and Pompilia's

act is seen as active Christianity rather than simply as retaliation against Guido.

The story also works to reinforce Caponsacchi's role as a messenger from God. The Virgin in the story prays and gets a sword. Pompilia similarly prays and Caponsacchi comes to save her. Caponsacchi has already been linked to the weapon of the sword through the St. Michael and St. George myths which he is identified with, so the association is not inappropriate. To what degree Caponsacchi carries out the role assigned is a different matter, as we shall see later in this chapter.

The most direct comparison with the Virgin Mary comes at 1692-93: "This time I felt like Mary, had my babe/ Lying a little on my breast like hers." By this time the reader is almost conditioned to the association between Pompilia and the Virgin Mary and Pompilia's remark, despite its directness, seems in no way unnatural or contrived. References to the relationship between Mary and her baby are another aspect of the mother-child relationship which Pompilia has stressed in her monologue. Thus she can find some happiness in her short life, since "All women are not mothers of a boy" (1.1683), and even Guido can be forgiven on the grounds that his mother loved him and he "nowise made himself" (1.1731). Such forgiveness, despite the atrocities Guido has inflicted upon her, reinforces Pompilia's saintliness, bringing her nearer the Virgin Mary.

B: Pompilia and her Audience

Pompilia's monologue is addressed to Fra Celestino and the Convertite nuns who nurse her in final hours. While the majority of critics have maintained that Pompilia has little or no awareness of her audience and that her monologue is not affected by any attempt to influence her audience, William Walker states that Pompilia is not only aware of her audience but employs various rhetorical strategies to win them over. I have to agree with Walker on this issue, Pompilia's awareness of her audience allows her to manipulate them in order to persuade them of her innocence. The devices she uses to do this are varied. She often appeals to the audience for sympathy.

Sometimes she sophisticatedly manipulates them by anticipating and stating their reaction to any given situation, and then countering it, virtually telling the audience what they should be thinking. A phrase as simple as "four years/ Vanish, - one quarter of my life, you know" (11.601-02), gains sympathy by stressing Pompilia's extreme youth. The "you know" addresses the remark directly to the audience, making them take particular notice of this point. These lines work in a similar way:

Remember I was barely twelve years old-
 A child at marriage: I was let alone
 For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
 Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
 First... but I need not think of that again -
 Over and ended! Try and take the sense
 Of what I signify, if it must be so. (11.734-40)

"Twelve years old / A child at marriage" stresses her extreme youth. Pompilia holds the audience's attention by directing some of her remarks to them: "Remember", "I told you", "Try and take the sense". The anacoluthon at 1.738 leaves the horrors of 'waking' up to the audience's imagination, a technique which ensures their involvement. Pompilia encourages a sympathetic response from them by stating that she does not have to think of that horror again. It has already been established in the monologue that Pompilia's unwillingness to remember is linked with the awfulness of what has happened to her and so the audience almost automatically responds in the required way. Pompilia does not have much faith that what she says is particularly clear and puts the onus on the audience to "Try and take the sense". Pompilia, at this point, seems to sense a certain insufficiency in language which she makes more explicit at other points in her monologue, for instance: "Think it out, you who have the time! for me-/ I cannot say less; more I will not say" (11.709-10). Again, there is a certain responsibility on the audience to interpret for themselves. At the same time, Pompilia's motives for not continuing at this point are questionable. Is Pompilia refusing to say more because she cannot find the right words or because she cannot find the right words to express her situation in a favourable light?

It seems that she fears the audience will not believe her sexual innocence or what she terms her 'dullness', and blame her for not

carrying out her wifely duties, just as Guido blames her:

Only, my dullness should not prove too much!
 - Not prove that in a certain other point
 Where in my husband blamed me, - and you blame,
 If I interpret smile and shakes of head, -
 I was dull too. (11.712-16)

With the phrase "and you blame" Pompilia identifies the audience's position on this matter, a position which she will later discredit when she explains her side of the story. That she cannot find the words to do this "-Women as you are, how can I find the words?" (1.720), accentuates her youth and bewilderment, along with a certain degree of embarrassment at discussing such a delicate matter. The audience will sympathize with this and Pompilia's use of "women as you are" observes the affinity based on their common gender.

Pompilia's apparent sympathy for her audience develops into irony against them in the last three words "I am sure":

And now you are not tired? How patient then
 All of you, - Oh yes, patient this long while
 Listening, and understanding, I am sure!
 (11.905-07)

The suggestion is that Pompilia's audience are listening for reasons other than to understand her, more likely for the drama of her story. The moral character of the audience is further diminished as Pompilia goes on to mimic their opinions in a fashion which reveals them as petty and trite: "There, there! - your lover do we dream he was?/ A priest too - never were such naughtiness!" (11.912-13).

Pompilia's claim that nobody would take the time to listen or understand when she was "sound and well/ And like to live" (11.908-09), condemns the audience further by implying that it takes impending death before they would listen to her. Even while she is admonishing her audience, Pompilia makes a comparison between the Virgin Mary and herself, having the audience refer to her as a "Shy pale lady" (1.915). The phrase "And so on" (1.917) makes it seem as if there was almost endless gossip, and this unremitting quality further serves to dismiss it as trivial. After so obviously and sternly admonishing them, Pompilia's forgiveness of the audience on the grounds that

people perceive things differently emphasizes her charitable nature. Pompilia places herself above the audience by acknowledging differences in perception yet assuming her position to be the right one; it is her audience who "misinterpret and misprize-" (l.920).

Later, Pompilia again addresses her audience with the purpose of steering them in the 'right' direction and having them understand her point of view. She almost commands them to listen: "Now, understand here, by no means mistake!" (l. 1260). What follows is an explanation of how she had previously tried to leave Arezzo. This is important in that it shows that leaving Arezzo with Caponsacchi is the fulfillment of some problem which has faced Pompilia for some time rather than an excuse to elope with Caponsacchi.

Finally, in one of her last addresses to her audience, Pompilia terms her listeners 'friends' in a last attempt to ensure their support by incorporating them within her gratitude: "Ah, Friends, I thank and bless you every one!" (l.1768). From the above examples we can see that Pompilia is clearly aware of her audience. She addresses them directly at various points throughout the monologue and manipulates their response to obtain sympathy for herself and for her viewpoint. This is an independent view that allows her to be admonishing, detached and ironic.

C: Pompilia and Irony

Pompilia's use of irony along with other language devices show Pompilia to be capable of more calculated and ordered rhetoric than conventional criticism admits. Irony establishes Pompilia as more sophisticated than is generally allowed.

One form of irony Pompilia plays on is a form of dramatic irony. Her audience already know the facts of the events and Pompilia's retrospective account allows her to present her account to her own advantage. Having Pietro say "Our cause is gained;/ The Law is stronger than a wicked man" (l.230-31) is an example of dramatic irony. Pietro's cause, to have Pompilia safe and back with them, is gained only for a short time. While the law may ultimately be

stronger than a real man (insofar as Guido is killed for his crime), the law is in effect not stronger. It cannot save Violante's life, nor Pietro's, nor Pompilia's. Pietro's plans for a quiet life and better existence in the country contrast dramatically with the horror that ensues the next day and thus a remark such as "Oh what a happy, friendly eve was that" (l.249) serves to highlight the horror and produce sympathy for Pompilia and the Comparini.

Pompilia's account of her marriage has, at times, an ironic feeling about it. Pompilia's lack of understanding about the marriage ceremony and its consequences for her, are conveyed by a flippant use of language which belies the seriousness of the situation. She does not know what the words she uses signify, and so the words which cement her relationship to Guido are described in an almost flippant manner: "The priest had opened book,/ Read here and there, made me say that and this,/ And after, told me I was now a wife" (ll.445-47).

Pompilia's inability to recognise the gravity of the situation is further conveyed by her repetition of the priests citation of John ii:1-10, the miracle at the wedding at Cana, in terms which recall an argument learned from memory but little understood: "Since Christ thus...And therefore ...to show..." (ll.448-50). "Honoured indeed" (l.448) becomes ironic in so far as the tone of these lines indicates Pompilia's lack of feeling about the entire situation. She is not honoured, she does not feel anything, indeed marriage to Guido eventuates into dishonour. The analogy between Guido and Christ (l.450) is also heavily ironic since two more opposite people could not be found. Guido is compared to Satan by a number of other monologuists. Even if the audience were unaware of the outcome of events there would still be a sense of disjunction in Pompilia's nonchalant attitude during the service because of her journey to the church which is obviously foreboding:

...I was hurried through a storm,
Next dark eve of December's dearest day-
... cloaked round, covered close,
I was like something strange or contraband,-
Into blank San Lorenzo...
I fancied we were come to see a corpse...
(ll.425-32)

Dramatic irony continues at 1.466 where Pompilia recounts Pietro's remark, seemingly light-hearted: "What do these priests mean, praying folk to death." Pietro's jest lies in the fact that people could catch their death going to church in such awful weather, but his comment is also true on a literal level (as the audience must recognise), since Pompilia's marriage to Guido sets off a chain of events which means not only her own death, but also the death of the Comparini. Pietro's comments "with Christmas close/to wash our sins off nor require the rain?" (11.467-68), loses its humour as the audience realize that ironically, sins have been committed rather than washed away, despite having gone to church, despite it being so close to Christmas.

Throughout this section apparently straight forward events are undercut by ominous descriptions and dramatic irony. Pompilia is playing on the audience's already knowing the outline of events in order to win their sympathy. At 11.472-73 this kind of dramatic irony continues: "When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,/ Of Guido - 'Nor the church sees Christ' thought I." The inappropriateness of the Guido/Christ analogy has already been pointed out and Pompilia's reaction, thinking that Guido will not return, produces a sympathetic response from the audience who know he will.

Violante's description of what marriage will mean for Pompilia is ironic, and in the light of her own experiences it is difficult to believe that Pompilia is not at least aware of this irony, even if she is not using it consciously to win the audience's sympathy. According to Violante marriage will bring Pompilia "no end of pleasant things" (1.554), "a great palace where you [Pompilia] will be queen,/ Know the Archbishop and the Governor" (11.568-69). In 'reality' life turns out to be no end of unpleasant things and the palace is by all accounts no better than the home of the Comparini. Knowing the Governor and Archbishop is of no use to Pompilia, who is told to return to her husband when all she really requires is help in escaping from him. Violante's disparagement of "handsome youth" (1.556) similarly turns out to be inappropriate since it is a handsome youth in the form of Caponsacchi that helps Pompilia to escape from Arezzo, even if his attempt to save her is ultimately a failure.

While dramatic irony undercuts the validity of Violante's statement, her begging Pompilia's forgiveness also suggests that the situation is not as attractive as she would have us believe. Pompilia's innocence is stressed as she does not understand Violante's plea and says "All is right if you only will not cry!" (1.573). Paul's remark "Until death part you" (1.583), ironically anticipates the role that early death will have in Pompilia's life.

Pompilia does have some understanding that words do not necessarily constitute a fixed, unquestionable meaning. Violante says that Pompilia is to marry a cavalier (1.377), which Pompilia associates with Tisbe's explanation of a cavalier in the tapestry of Perseus and Andromeda:

(Tisbe had told me that the slim young man
With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
Would eat a girl else, - was a cavalier.)
(11.390-93)

This is a cruel irony against Pompilia for Guido turns out to be the opposite of the image Tisbe has provided: "old/ And nothing so tall as I myself, hook-nosed and yellow" (ll.395-96).

The type of irony which has been discussed to this point comes directly from Pompilia. It stresses a discrepancy between various remarks or expectations and what actually happened. Insofar as Pompilia recounts her life and chooses what to report of her conversations (including omissions and additions), she is responsible for this general dramatic irony. She is aware of the ironic sense which surrounds her life. Things are not what they seem:

Thus, all my life,-
As well what was, as what, like this, was not,-
Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.

(11.198-201)

Granted that Pompilia can recognise this irony in her life, it is not unreasonable to expect Pompilia to consciously disrupt expectations by means of an ironic tone, in the hope that it may aid her cause. One

instance of this comes in her account of her visit to seek help from the Archbishop. The repetition of the phrase "He stands for God" (1.726, 1.748), in combination with the bitterness of "He gave me wrong advice/ Though he were twice Archbishop, - that, I know" (11.731-32), shows Pompilia's ability to deride her opponents. Her comment, "He stands for God", is ironic. What Pompilia means is that he professes to stand for God but he is no true representative of God.

The Archbishop is further condemned by the language Pompilia has him use. He says at one point "God's Bread!" (1.798) which is an oath and highly inappropriate to his office. Christ often used parable as a means of teaching. The Archbishop's inability to use parable shows his distance from Christ. The Archbishop's fig parable extols the willing sacrifice of the flesh and pursuit of the sensuous in the present under the guise of a pseudo-moral - "fools elude their proper lot" (1.842). This is in contradiction to Christ's own fig parable (Luke 13:6-9) where patience is emphasized and the fig tree is given another year to produce fruit.

Pompilia recognises then that the Archbishop "was just a man, And hardly that, and certainly no more" (11.848-49). This is a bold statement to make about somebody who 'represents' God. The scathing tone of "And hardly was" shows the bitterness and bluntness of which Pompilia is capable. The knowledge Pompilia has gained about the church on earth increases her sense of disillusionment and she resolves "henceforth" to ask "God counsel, not mankind" (1.859).

Despite Pompilia's ability to use language as a weapon she still sees it as beyond her at certain points. Perhaps she genuinely feels she is inadequate or perhaps she just feels that her attempt to persuade the audience has been inadequate. By acknowledging her inadequacy but repeating her faith in God ("Why should I doubt He will explain in time/ What I feel now, but fail to find the words"; 11.1760-61), and by acknowledging the inexplicable quality about her life as a whole ("it seems absurd, impossible today;/So seems so much else not explained but known", 1.1767), a further attempt to gain sympathy from the audience is made based on the gap between language and event.

D: Pompilia and Guido

Conventionally, Pompilia's relationship with Guido is seen in terms of Pompilia as passive victim and Guido as violent aggressor. While I would not wish to deny or excuse the atrocity of Guido's actions, I would suggest that the situation is somewhat more complicated than this. Pompilia is not necessarily as forgiving and passive as she first appears, although she works hard to emphasize how forgiving of Guido she is. Pompilia's account of Guido's atrocities works to her advantage since her saintliness is given depth by her ability to forgive someone so awful. Pompilia pardons him but she goes even further to thank him for what he has done to her since he at least ended their 'counterfeit' marriage:

Let him make God amends, - none, none to me
 Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
 Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
 Himself this way at least pronounced divorce.
 (11.1712-15)

She hopes God's shadow will touch Guido and that he will repent of what he has done. Her own part in Guido's life is described as:

importunate, -
 My earthly good, temptation and a snare, -
 Nothing about me but drew somehow down
 His hate upon me, - somewhat so excused
 Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him.
 (11.1723-27)

She touches here upon an aspect of her personality which infuriates Guido: her very passivity provokes Guido as much, if not more, than any active retaliation.

Pompilia does not disguise the fact that she finds Guido very ugly. While he is referred to as "Hooked-nosed" (1.396), this also becomes "Hawk-nose" (1.443) which emphasizes Guido's predatory nature. Guido is the hunter and Pompilia the prey. His comparison to Malpichi also does not flatter him, Malpichi being described as "lean, so sour-faced and austere!" (1.417). Pompilia's referral to Guido as like a butcher (1.578) again emphasizes his brutal, savage nature. Pompilia acknowledges that Guido takes out his frustration at being tricked by

the Comparini on her, and these acts of revenge designed to make Pompilia's day to day life miserable illustrate the extent of Guido's brutality. Guido is also associated with 'coldness behind', another derogatory description which accentuates his cunning: "breathed cold through me from behind" (l.954), "Cold cruel snicker close behind" (l.1231). Although Pompilia maintains that she has forgiven Guido, continual unflattering and derogatory descriptions of him contradict the positive attitude of forgiveness she professes to have.

Pompilia claims that she reluctantly brings back to mind her husband's cruelty (l.633), and maintains not merely that she will forgive him, but that she finds "little to forgive at last" (l.637). Her supposed reluctance to tell tales implies that she is unwilling to incriminate Guido. Such loyalty seems to extend to providing him with excuses for his behaviour:

is it not true
He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
To get enriched by marriage? (ll.638-40)

Pompilia's loyalty and understanding, her willingness to try and understand Guido's side of the story, is seen in a favourable light. Trying to make excuses for Guido would seem to be working towards justifying Guidos deeds, but the excuses Pompilia makes for Guido are obviously inadequate and therefore only incriminate him further. The example given above then accentuates Guido's mercenary motives for marriage which, in turn, lowers the audience's opinion of him.

Pompilia tells of her wish to remedy the split between Guido and the Comparini, casting herself as potential peacemaker. She proves powerless in this situation and succeeds only in antagonizing Guido: "...anger him just twice/ By trial at repairing the first fault" (ll.675-76), and "So, unaware, I only made things worse" (l.683). Pompilia maintains that she was unaware of the infuriating nature of her goodwill and unaware that Guido may be trying to trick her into some action which would incriminate her (see ll.681-82). This may be so at this stage of her life, but her experiences with Guido quickly teach her a means of retaliation based on passivity.

Pompilia's hatred towards Guido intensifies as the monologue progresses, perhaps an indication that her forgiveness of him is only superficial. Her remark that Guido insists upon the consummation of the marriage at a time when simple cruelty "seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear," (1.743) reveals her bitterness towards him. She no longer seems engaged in an attempt to defend or make excuses for him, but on the contrary now works to incriminate him in a more direct fashion. Pompilia uses a parody of the convention 'let us become one flesh, being one soul' in reference to Guido:

since our souls
Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
Give me the fleshy vesture I can reach
And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!
(11.781-84)

The rhyming of 'each' and 'reach' along with an increase in alliteration in those lines quickens the tempo and stresses Guido's lust for the pleasures of the flesh. Pompilia, in contrast, is concerned for the soul, not just her own but "for Guido's soul's own sake" (1.785). Her concern for him at this point counteracts, to an extent, her bitterness in the previous lines.

Pompilia apparently praises Guido at 1.772, but this is also a form of criticism, showing how blatant Guido is in his desire for the physical pleasure which Pompilia can provide: "No! There my husband never used deceit/ He never did by speech nor act imply/ 'Because of our souls' yearning that we meet" (11.772-75). Pompilia views giving in to Guido sexually as a form of prostitution as she makes the link with her natural mother. What Pompilia sees as her own prostitution, despite her good intent, makes her more forgiving of her mother. Pompilia is again faced with the realization that things are not always as they seem, another instance of the discrepancy between what is asserted and what is actually the case which pervades her life. She says that she understands her mother now, "From my experience of what hate calls love -/ Much love might be in what their love called hate" (11.876-77), acknowledging that things are not necessarily as they seem, that meaning depends largely on context. Her mother may have given her up but she may have believed that this was the best action she could take for Pompilia. As with 11.876-77, Pompilia

points to the gap between language and event: "If she sold...what they call, sold..." (1.878).

Pompilia recognises that she can infuriate Guido by being passive. Her passivity itself becomes a weapon, her own form of retaliation. In reference to Don Celestino's psalm, Pompilia distinguishes between actively escaping "Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!" (1.992), and the less deliberate position "How good it were to fly and rest" (1.995) which is more just an observation. She associates herself with the passive position and makes an analogy between the psalm which Don Celestino recites and her relationship with Caponsacchi. Caponsacchi becomes her dove's wings, her means of escape, but her association with the passive means she denies any part in actively seeking escape. As the wings fall from heaven, Caponsacchi is once again seen as God's messenger and the flight from Arezzo as sanctified by God.

Pompilia becomes more aware of her passive role and acknowledges her conscious recognition of this role: "Life means with me successful feigning death,/ Lying stone-like, eluding notice so" (1004-05). This degree of self-consciousness and admission of role-playing suggests that Pompilia is capable of playing other roles. When Guido attempts to provoke her by thrusting at her with a sword, her answer is to bear it, repeat the "mere truth" (1.1035) and hold her tongue. The use of 'mere' highlights the degree of self-consciousness in Pompilia at this point. The truth is not 'mere' at all, since it infuriates Guido so dramatically. He responds with an accusation which points to Pompilia's ability to role play: "... 'Since you play the ignorant,/ I shall instruct you..." (11.1036-37).

Guido believes that Pompilia is not ignorant, but very cunning, while Pompilia would want to maintain that her ignorance is genuine. Pompilia's description of Guido's brutality brings audience sympathy to Pompilia's side, but on the other hand Pompilia's own admission of feigning suggests that Guido's accusation is, at least to some degree, well founded. Pompilia knows Guido would not attack her with the sword unless he had reason enough to legally justify his actions, and so Pompilia continues to taunt him with her assumed innocence. Her

phrase "All/I said" (11.1045-6) teases and provokes Guido. She knows very well that "Let God save the innocent!" (1.1046) is more than enough to provoke Guido and thus "All/I said" is ironic. "All" is more than enough! Despite descriptions of Guido's brutality and devious plots, Pompilia maintains that she does not speak to incriminate Guido, "Whereupon... no, I leave my husband out!/ It is not to do him more hurt, I speak" (11.1134-5). It is tempting to suggest that Pompilia wants to ensure the sympathy of her audience and so both slanders Guido and forgives him. Slander highlights Guido's awful nature and so wins sympathy by means of pity; forgiveness wins sympathy by emphasizing her own generous nature.

As Caponsacchi's role in her life is discussed, Guido is featured less in Pompilia's monologue. Her concern to be fair to Guido is dropped in favour of a defense of her relationship with Caponsacchi. As she comes nearer to her death it is Caponsacchi who becomes her greatest concern.

E: Pompilia and Caponsacchi

Pompilia wishes to place her relationship with Caponsacchi within the bounds of Christian morality. However, the language which she employs when speaking of Caponsacchi undermines this position. The monologue presents contradictory views of the relationship to a degree which Pompilia is unaware of.

The relationship with Caponsacchi is a crucial factor in determining Pompilia's innocence. If it is established in the audience's minds that letters were sent between Caponsacchi and Pompilia and that they were lovers, the audience's sympathy for Pompilia would be lessened, even though they are still likely to agree that Guido was wrong to murder her and her parents. Guido's punishment would likely be less severe and Pompilia's representation of herself as martyr or saint would be undermined.

Caponsacchi is initially referred to in a way that suggests a certain formality or distance between them. He is referred to as "friend" at 1.361 and again at 1.619 where he is mentioned as an

answer to Pompilia's prayers, God's envoy:

My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,
Some hand would interpose and save me - hand
Which proved to be my friend's hand...

(11.618-20)

Caponsacchi is frequently referred to as 'the priest', for example in the opening lines, as we have seen in section one (l.163 ff), and at l.689. Referring to Caponsacchi by other than his name is a means of suggesting that there is no intimacy between them. At 11.706-08:

In the whole sad strange plot, this same intrigue
To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
Be other man and woman than we were!

Caponsacchi is again referred to as 'friend'. More than this, the pressure to "unself" themselves, which Pompilia rejects, is of interest in the context of Romantic irony. Pompilia clearly retains the sense of a fixed self at this point and yet Guido is seen as trying to make her something other than she is. Romantic irony would say that there was no underlying self to be made other than self. Guido would be merely positing another self for Pompilia much like the ones she herself has posited throughout the monologue - child, wife, mother, Virgin, lamb. Pompilia wishes to deny the validity of Guido's version while maintaining the validity of her own. She also wants to maintain the notion of a true, fixed self, while simultaneously offering a number of different images for this self.

Pompilia refers to Caponsacchi by name consistently after 11.938-41 where she provides a rather grand introduction:

If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
The weak a saviour and the vile a foe,-
Let him be present, by the name invoked,
Guiseppe - Maria Caponsacchi!

The words carry great dramatic effect building Caponsacchi to heroic levels. This affect is achieved by parallel construction which builds to a crescendo, coming to rest at "Guiseppe - Maria Caponsacchi!" where both the parallelism and rhythm are broken. Caponsacchi's name receives great emphasis and this is evidence of a certain rhetorical sophistication on Pompilia's part.

Whereas Pompilia maintains that she remembers her past in response to Don Celestino's instruction to remember in order to forgive, she maintains at 1.944 that she remembers in order to clear Caponsacchi's name: "I will remember for his sake/ The sorrow: for he lives and is belied" (11.944-45). Pompilia denies taking any initiative in Caponsacchi's arrival to save her and also denies responsibility for the St. Michael/St. George comparison which establishes Caponsacchi as a soldier-saint. It is Margherita who compares Caponsacchi to Michael:

'And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first
At Rome to introduce the company,
Will bear him from our picture where he fights
Satan, - expect to have that dragon loose
And never a defender!' (11.1215-19)

It is Conti who states: "Our Caponsacchi, he's your true Saint George/ To slay the monster, set the Princess free" (11.1323-24). When Pompilia does take up these images it therefore seems that they were not her idea, but the view of others and not herself extolling Caponsacchi out of all proportion.

Pompilia emphasizes that she is at first unwilling to accept Caponsacchi as a possible saviour because she fears a plot between Margherita and Guido and because (she maintains) Margherita's constant mentioning of Caponsacchi's name in these circumstances has changed Pompilia's perception of him:

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense,
Like any bye-word, broken bit of song
Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and mouth
That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
And perhaps shame. (11.1329-35)

Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
Into a mockery and disgrace... (11.1339-40)

Pompilia acknowledges the ability of language to change perception - if a thing is repeated often enough in a certain way with "sneer or smile" its meaning can change. If Pompilia recognises this aspect of language then it is not unreasonable to suspect that she uses it

herself. If the repetition of Caponsacchi's name in a certain light means the name of him becomes a disgrace, then Pompilia might repeat certain aspects of his character in a more favourable light in order to make his name championed.

Pompilia promotes Caponsacchi as a saviour figure but his behaviour contradicts the image. She refers to Caponsacchi as 'the deliverer' (l.1409), but he is a deliverer who needs some prompting into action. Pompilia virtually instructs Caponsacchi to save her and presents him with the mission:

...He wills you serve
By saving me, - what else can He direct?
Here is the service. (ll.1432-4)

Caponsacchi does not respond immediately but comes the second night, a fact which Pompilia plays down in order not to taint Caponsacchi's heroism - Pompilia describes Caponsacchi in terms of God's envoy (see l.1456) and makes a point of emphasizing his priestly office: "You serve God specially, as priests are bound,/ And care about me, stranger as I am" (ll.1429-30).

In contradiction to this image, there are elements which seem more appropriate to romance rhetoric than to the relationship between a priest and a stranger. Pompilia remembers Caponsacchi's first word to her and makes much of it:

The first word I heard ever from his lips,
All himself in it, -an eternity
Of speech, to match the immeasurable depths
O' the soul that then broke silence - 'I am yours'.
(ll.1444-47)

The half line "- 'mine,' thank God!" (l.1457), in response to Caponsacchi as God's way at l.1456 is natural enough, but the next line seems rather over-wrought, suggesting something more intimate than the role of public saviour - "He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine" (l.1458). Such possessiveness seems inconsistent with the distance between them which she has been stressing through the use of words such as 'priest', 'friend' and 'stranger'. She refers to Caponsacchi as "Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand/ Holding my hand across the world..." (ll.1496-97) and bemoans the fact that there

is no time "To tell [him] how that heart burst out in shine" (l.1529). She talks of him bringing her heart "all the spring" (l.1527). These are all images associated with a romantic relationship, especially spring, heralding new beginnings and by convention the time when romance blossoms. Such comments are couched in explanations of Caponsacchi as a Christian Saint, suggesting that Pompilia does not see the discrepancy or alternatively wishes to camouflage her feelings. Pompilia passes some of the responsibility for calling Caponsacchi a saint to Don Celestino (ll.1511), but she bears much of the responsibility herself:

If I call 'saint' what saints call something else-
The saints must bear him with me, impute the fault
To a soul i' the bud... (ll.1514-16)

Subjective interpretations such as this must stress that Caponsacchi is a saint in her eyes and by her meaning.

There are moments when unspoken feelings pass between Pompilia and Caponsacchi and these intimate moments give the impression of a relationship closer than friendship. Caponsacchi anticipates Pompilia's emotions, for instance: he "divined what surge of bitterness" (l.1535), and he responded "As if in answer to some unspoken fear" (l.1540). Pompilia also has a conventional 'lady-swooning, knight-catching' scene in her monologue, but denies responsibility for it by saying that this has been told to her at a later date. Nevertheless, despite this scene not being part of her own memories (she says), she wishes to include it in her narrative. It is important to her:

From that sick minute when the head swam round,
And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
As in his arms he caught me and, you say,
Carried me in... (ll.1577-80)

The description of this scene belongs to the romance mode rather than the priest-parishioner relationship she seeks to portray.

If Pompilia's language in speaking of Caponsacchi gives her away, so does Caponsacchi's inaction at Castelnuovo which contradicts the role of soldier-saint. It is Pompilia herself who lifts the sword

against Guido, while her "angel" was "helplessly held back/ By guards that helped the malice" (ll.1587-88). Pompilia maintains that the impulse to rise was initially to serve God (l.1600), and once she has risen she says she wields the sword for the sake of her unborn child (l.1616), although that contradicts what she has said a moment earlier: "Not save myself, - no - nor my child unborn!" (l.1601). It is the impulse to help Caponsacchi, "And take the angel's hand was sent to help" (l.1616), which dominates her actions. She desires at least to defend Caponsacchi, which is an ironic reversal of the courtly love code:

"Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
The very angel's self made foul i' the face
By the fiend who struck there, that I would not bear."
(ll.1619-21)

Pompilia states a little later: "You see, I will not have the service fail!/ I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!" (ll.1642-43). She seems to be indicating that she still thinks Caponsacchi has saved her, even though she admits that it was she who lifted the sword:

I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
The neutralizer of all good and truth. (ll.1594-96)

Her taking up of the sword contradicts her passive role, as does her open admission at l.1260 that she had actively sought to escape Guido's clutches on previous occasions. She acknowledges in a very down to earth fashion that the likes of Guido respond to nothing but violence: "Prayers move God; threats, and nothing else, move men!" (l.1624). She nevertheless maintains that it was "not the vain sword nor weak speech!" (l.1641) which saved her, but truth, active Christianity along, of course, with Caponsacchi.

Pompilia states at l.1769 that she will speak no more but withdraw to compose herself for God. However, she seems unable to help herself and spends her last words praising Caponsacchi, further evidence of her gratitude to him. She continues to speak of him in romantic terms:

I feel for what I verily find - again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,

The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own. (11.1776-80)

Caponsacchi may have helped Pompilia escape from Arezzo but he is inactive at Castelnuovo and Pompilia, ultimately, is not saved. This St. George does not save the Princess, although the dragon is finally killed, albeit not by St. George's spear.

Increasingly in these closing lines, Pompilia talks more openly of her love for Caponsacchi as she becomes less concerned to uphold the distance between them. The exact nature of the love between Pompilia and Caponsacchi cannot be proven but Pompilia suggests that the nature of their love is spiritual. The romance elements still exist, and this is illustrated by some of Pompilia's remarks in these late stages of her monologue. She refers to Caponsacchi as "lover of my life" (1.1786) and directs a reassuring remark to him, "Love will be helpful to me. More and more... My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!" (11.1788-90). As in courtly love where there is largely an idealising of physical desire with no consummation, the relationship of Caponsacchi and Pompilia is in her eyes both romantic and spiritual. Despite Caponsacchi's ultimate failure to save Pompilia, without him there would have been no escape from Arezzo.

Pompilia is concerned that Caponsacchi should not be too distraught at her imminent death and seeks to reassure him by stressing the depth of their relationship and by reminding him that he exists in her soul: "Tell him that if I seem without him now, / That's the world's insight!" (11.1791-92). She also wishes him to know that it was his name that she sprang to meet that fateful night and this explicitly contradicts what she said earlier (1.60). This remark is testimony of her love for Caponsacchi because its contradiction with the earlier remark establishes Pompilia's ability to lie. The lines "I know not wherefore the true word / Should fade and fall unuttered at last" (11.1806-07) indicate that she is speaking the truth now. If this is the truth then 1.60 is a lie, and if 1.60 is a lie we may well begin to question what other elements of her monologue are also untruths. The reader is forced to read the monologue with this in mind: is Pompilia as ready to lie for her own purpose as other monologuists in The Ring and the Book? It seems so. Pompilia is

subject, like every other speaker in the poem, to the falseness of human testimony. As Fra Celestino says:

"God is true
And everyman a liar" - that who trusts
To human testimony for a fact
Gets this sole fact - himself is proved a fool;
Man's speech being false... (XII.600-04)

Pompilia has had discussions about truth throughout her monologue, suggesting that truth may lie in the metaphorical rather than the literal, recognising that truth is not always immediately apparent, and apparently accepting that truth exists in various degrees.⁴

Whatever the nature of Pompilia's feeling for Caponsacchi, it is deep enough to merit Pompilia willingly risking her life for him. That she was killed because Violante answered the door which she believed would open to Caponsacchi no longer seems important to Pompilia who asserts that she would answer to knock and spring to Caponsacchi's strong hands despite danger:

I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven.
(11.1811-13)

In the context of what has preceded it, this seems an expression of a very human love. Pompilia, however, links it with Caponsacchi's role as priest. Her monologue ends as it begins, stressing a relationship between Caponsacchi and herself which is consistent with his priestly office. She sets her relationship with Caponsacchi above transitory earthly love and the hypocrisy of relationships such as her marriage to Guido ("Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit" 1.1824), giving it a higher and more permanent status- "In heaven we have the real and true and sure" (1.1826). Pompilia looks forward to marriage in heaven, advising her audience to:

Meantime hold hard by truth and his [Caponsacchi's] great
soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by... (11.1842-45)

III

The Charming Symmetry

The previous two sections of this chapter have pointed to a more complicated and sophisticated Pompilia than has generally been accepted. It is important to realise, however, that Pompilia is naive and simple (particularly before her own marriage), as well as being capable of employing cunning strategies and sophisticated linguistic devices (which she does when presenting her escape from Guido and her relationship with Caponsacchi in the most favourable terms). The co-existence of these apparently contradictory aspects in Pompilia, and the range of characteristics ascribed to Pompilia during the course of her monologue, are evidence of her multiplicity. The balancing of the many aspects of Pompilia's character rather than the domination of any one aspect produces, paradoxically, a sense of a harmonious, though complicated, whole: a symmetry of contradictions. It is, as the title of this thesis suggests, a charming symmetry. Throughout her monologue, Pompilia's attractiveness makes her a most appealing speaker, one who delights even when the reader is alert to her biases and strategies.

The simplicity and innocence of Pompilia's life before her marriage to Guido is largely responsible for the naivety and inexperience of Pompilia at this stage of her life. The impression of naivety, created so strongly early in the monologue, is not easily countered when it is sustained by further examples throughout the monologue. Incidents of sophistication cannot negate the unspoiled quality of Pompilia. Pompilia's ideas on marriage, that marriage would win approval ("...marriage was the coin, a dirty piece/ Would purchase me the praise of those I loved"; ll.407-8), that "this or any man would serve" (l.411), and that marriage would change nothing ("wine is wine/ And water is only water in our house"; ll.474-75), are charming in their innocence. Both speaker and audience realize that the events of Pompilia's life have shown how incorrect these judgements were and there is a clear pathos in the realization of lost innocence.

Pompilia's magnanimity in forgiving and trying to comprehend Violante's role in the betrothal is admirable. It is possible, though unlikely at this stage of her account, that Pompilia is concerned with establishing an image of herself as merciful. In this case, however, it is not so much the forgiveness of Violante which the reader finds charming, but Pompilia's automatic assumption that Violante would feel the same about giving up Pompilia as Pompilia did about giving up Gaetano:

I know she meant all good to me, all pain
To herself, - since how could it be aught but pain,
To give me up, so, from her very breast.

(11.338-40)

Similarly, her attempt to understand her natural mother's position and the reasons for giving her away are equally as generous:

Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?
Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm,
May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
Have meant to do most good -...

(111.884-88)

The development of paradox is a move towards Pompilia's sophistication, but the willingness to understand and forgive is part of the charm of her personality.

Pompilia's concern for Gaetano above herself throughout the monologue further endears Pompilia to her audience. Gaetano may be used as a means of winning Pompilia sympathy, while her pregnancy may give her a morally appropriate reason to leave Guido in the eyes of the church; nevertheless it would be hard to deny the genuineness and depth of Pompilia's maternal solicitude. Despite the atrocities inflicted upon her, she can see some good:

Oh how good God is that my babe was born,
-Better than born, baptized and hid away
Before this happened, safe from being hurt!

(11.41-43)

The recognition that Gaetano is safe lessens the pain (see 1.350), while the strength of her maternal feelings for him again allows her

to unquestioningly attribute maternal love to others, specifically Guido's mother. The generosity of a remark such as "I could not love him, but his mother did" (1.1732), about one responsible for her death is another example of Pompilia's charming qualities. Pompilia's forgiveness of Guido, but more than this her statement that finally there is little to forgive, may well be a deliberate ploy to emphasize her forgiving nature. Nevertheless, her willingness to leave judgement to God and the charitableness of the reasoning behind the argument which amounts to thanking Guido for her murder, is enchanting:

Let him make God amends, - none, none to me
 Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
 Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
 Himself this way at least pronounced divorce.
 (11.1712-15)

Even when Pompilia is being less than totally innocent, she can still be charming. Her taunting of Guido at 11.1045-46, "All/I said was, 'Let God save the innocent!", is deliberately provocative and contradicts her passive stance. It, nevertheless, delights the reader who appreciates the subtlety of Pompilia's resistance as compared with the brutality of Guido.

Pompilia's use of language can be very endearing at times. The recollection of her childhood during the play at the carnival is one example:

My thoughts went through the roof and out, to Rome
 On wings of music, waft of measured words,-
 Set me down there, a happy child again,
 Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day.
 (11.964-67)

The language Pompilia employs to narrate the recognition of her pregnancy may associate her with the Virgin Mary. However, while acknowledging this may be deliberate on Pompilia's part, one cannot remain impervious to the beauty of the description and the tranquil quality of the sounds:

...A broad yellow sun-beam was let fall
 From heaven to earth, - a sudden drawbridge lay,
 Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
 Mocking the fires that crossed them and recrossed

In rival dance, companions new-born too.
 On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed
 Shook diamonds on each dull grey lattice-square.
 (11.1225-31)

I have pointed out elsewhere in this thesis that the language of romance which Pompilia occasionally employs to describe her relationship with Caponsacchi contradicts the more formal relationship she presents elsewhere. Many of the passages about Caponsacchi, romantic or otherwise, reveal a kind of naive simplicity, an unspoiled quality about Pompilia. At 11.1815-20 Pompilia's concern, despite her great pain and ever approaching death, to reassure Caponsacchi of how much she values him, endear her to the reader:

Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
 Say, -I am all in flowers from head to foot!
 Say, -not one flower of all he said and did,
 Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
 But dropped a seed has grown a balsam-tree
 Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place.
 (11.1815-20)

In addition, the beauty and calmness of the metaphor is delightfully soothing and Pompilia's composure at this point can only instil further admiration for her in the audience.

Pompilia's charm exists despite some of the less innocent aspects of her nature. Perhaps it is the presence of such charm which has been responsible for the large amount of pro-Pompilia criticism in the past. Such criticism acknowledges Pompilia's child-like qualities without recognising her moments of sophisticated, adult understanding. It acknowledges Pompilia's youth and innocence but fails to perceive her bids for sympathy and her uses of irony which are largely directed against Guido. While she is perhaps more saintly than most of the other speakers in the poem, her humanness should not go unacknowledged and the recognition of her great capacity to forgive needs to be balanced with an awareness of her capacity for extreme bitterness.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER THREE:

1. The Ring and the Book, V.604-6, p.223.
2. Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Frank Justus Miller (London: Heineman Ltd; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.37.
3. Ovid, pp.37-38.
4. See 1.93, 11.1192-97, 11.1198-1200.

CHAPTER FOUR

"HERE WERE THE END, HAD ANYTHING AND END"

In the concluding section of this thesis I wish to discuss Romantic irony in relation to Pompilia and her monologue in a more general manner than I have done in the previous chapter. Inevitably reference will be made back to the examples given in chapter three, but any repetition is aimed at discussing the limits of a reading of Pompilia's monologue based on Romantic irony. The recognition that such a reading challenges any single monologue as a centre for truth in The Ring and the Book leads to a brief discussion of the themes of morality and truth. Finally, a discussion of Books I and XII suggests that the truth which Browning proposes deals not with guilt and innocence, but with the nature of human experience as constituted by language. In unfolding the events of the story in Book I and dispersing them in Book XII, Browning's poetic method embodies the very truth he seeks to convey. It is the character of this method which makes the poet, rather than Pompilia, a Romantic ironist.

I

The protean nature of Romantic irony means that any reading based on its premises works from a definition which simplifies its many complexities. The reading must overcome the vagueness of the theorists at some points and also the inconsistencies between interpretations. As I have previously acknowledged, I rely heavily on Lilian Furst's account of Romantic irony and this is because her account seems the most reasonable and lucid explanation of Schlegel's theory. It is to her I return in embarking on this final chapter.

Furst sees three elements as constituting the essence of Schlegel's thought on irony, namely "the role of consciousness, the assent to mobility, and the notion of paradoxicality."¹ Each of these elements can be discussed in relation to Pompilia's monologue.

Paradox is important because it allows two contradictory positions to be held in mind at the same time. It allows for a floating rather than fixed position and this in turn allows for change and progression. Pompilia is conscious of paradox and contradiction in her own life. For example, she has an awareness of the relative nature of love and hate and of the gap between language and experience. The recognition of the love/hate complex - "From what my experience of what hate calls love, - / Much love might be in what their love called hate" (ll.876-77) - allows Pompilia to move towards a reconsideration of her natural mother and a greater understanding of why she gave Pompilia away: "May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,/Have meant to do most good..." (ll.887-88).

The Archbishop tells Pompilia that "Virginity,-'t is virtue or 't is vice" (l.757). This seems paradoxical to Pompilia who has been brought up to believe that virginity is a virtue and who has been encouraged to imitate the virgin life. The Archbishop's argument that Pompilia's virginity in her case is a vice, despite her insistence that there is no love between Guido and herself, that they are not of one soul, leads Pompilia to an awareness of the Archbishop's fallibility: "the Archbishop was just a man/ And hardly that... " (ll.848-49).

In both examples we can see that the awareness of paradox, of contradictory positions, has meant that Pompilia's perception of aspects of her life has changed and she has achieved greater understanding. However, although Pompilia may be conscious of some paradoxes prevalent in her past, she seems oblivious to some of the contradictions in her own monologue, the presentation of this past. Pompilia can detach herself from the events of her life enough to be able to recount them and offer some interpretation, but her ability to detach herself from her creation is limited. As Lilian Furst points out, the Romantic ironist reflects on his creation and is conscious of his own creative processes; he is "both involved in and detached from his creation" (Furst, p.26). In Pompilia's case this aspect of Romantic irony is not fully developed in terms of Pompilia as ironist.

Pompilia's willingness to describe herself according to whichever image or role seems appropriate to the period of her life to which she

refers, constitutes Pompilia's assent to mobility, the second of the aspects which Furst sees as central to Schlegel's thought on irony. We have seen in chapter three that Pompilia identifies herself in various roles - child, wife, mother - and that she uses metaphor to describe her relationship with others: she is, for instance, a lamb to Guido's wolf, Daphne to Tisbe's Diana. At any given time, these images provide her with a momentary sense of unity, a momentary understanding of her life, but overall (until the closing stages of her monologue), there is multiplicity and change rather than any fixed position. Some roles seem to clash. To be both child (implying innocence and naivety) and mother (suggesting experience, maturity and knowledge) seems contradictory. The interplay between these positions, however, works towards change and progression and constitutes the mobility which Furst speaks of. At the same time, this mobility is counteracted to some degree by the pervasiveness of the Virgin image to which Pompilia returns throughout the monologue. This dominating focus on a single model would indicate movement towards a fixed position and away from total mobility, since mobility would require freedom from any particular image. It seems this aspect of Romantic irony, although apparent in Pompilia, is also limited.

This brings us to the final of Furst's three elements of irony, the role of consciousness. The Romantic ironist is perpetually self-conscious, being aware of the need for creation and subsequent decreation, or the undermining of any single position. It is through this awareness that one can achieve transcendence: "the finite world is contradictory and can therefore be mastered only through the conscious floating of an ironic stance" (Furst, p.27).

Although Pompilia offers numerous positions for herself during her monologue, finally she is unable to detach herself from the Virgin Mary image and her claim to transcendence is thus inappropriate in terms of Romantic irony, however appropriate it may be to the rhetoric which has preceded it.

It is during the concluding section of Pompilia's monologue that the Pompilia who has exhibited many aspects of a Romantic ironist at

earlier stages in her monologue proves to be a Romantic ironist *manqué*. Having acknowledged the contradictions earlier in her monologue, and having achieved some degree of self-consciousness and detachment through the representation of her past, Pompilia makes claims for unity and closure in the form of consummation in heaven, rather than for disjunction and openness which Romantic irony proposes. Rather than acknowledging the many aspects of self as a Romantic ironist would (and as she herself has done in terms of role and metaphor earlier in her monologue), Pompilia sets about denying the physical side of her existence in the closing stages of her monologue, thus establishing an idealist position. She restates her notion of a virgin birth (ll.1761-64), denying Guido's paternity of Gaetano and also the physical act of conception. The latter conveniently blocks out both the physical unpleasantness of the act and the sinfulness she associates with it. This denial in effect negates one of the few sins she admits to committing during the course of the monologue.

In order to account for her feelings towards Caponsacchi and her relationship with him, it is necessary to establish Caponsacchi as an appropriate partner for a spiritual marriage in heaven. She thus reverts back to stressing Caponsacchi's role as priest, whereas before this point she had been increasingly viewing him in terms of the romance hero (see chapter three). This would be consistent with the principles of Romantic irony if it were not for the fact that Pompilia fails to progress beyond this point. Like the model of the Virgin, Caponsacchi's role as priest becomes necessary for the continuity of the position with which she closes her monologue. Pompilia now seems intent on harmony. She seems intent on evolving an appropriate narrative closure to coincide with the expiring of her life. This desire for the restoration of harmony and order would contradict the principles of Romantic irony.

Pompilia's confidence in her assent to heaven and ultimate union with Caponsacchi creates a tone in these lines quite unlike anything else in the monologue. Whereas previously Pompilia's respectful and modest nature was emphasized, the tone at this point becomes matter-of-fact and even presumptuous. She assumes that Caponsacchi would not

marry even if he could (11.1821-23) and comments that this right. She is now putting herself in the role of moral arbiter, thereby raising her position above the audience, indeed above humanity. She places herself on the level of the angels, somewhat prematurely anticipating her ascent to heaven. Her remark "how like Jesus Christ/ To say that!" (11.1829-30) jars in its irreverence. Pompilia now seems to be assuming a position which allows her to judge Christ or at least be on familiar terms with Him. The impression is given that Pompilia is trying a little too hard to convince her audience and perhaps herself, that her transcendence is assured. The solemnity of the last lines counteracts the inappropriateness of 11.1829-30 to some extent, and provides a proper tonal context for Pompilia's claim to transcendence:

Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.
(11. 1842-45)

"And I rise" recalls the assumption of the Virgin, but Pompilia's claim to similarly rise to heaven in the manner of the Virgin reveals her limitations rather than transcendence.

If Pompilia is not finally herself a Romantic ironist, it is possible to question the point of reading her monologue using the premises of Romantic irony. Romantic irony provides a perspective from which to view Pompilia. Its emphasis on change and contradiction allows the many and varied qualities in Pompilia's personality to be seen: her sophistication and capacity to use irony, along with the innocence and simplicity that criticism conventionally observes. The predominance of Pompilia's charm over these multiple characteristics pervades until the monologue's end where Pompilia's need for closure provides an ending which, charming though it is, reveals her limitations.

To be aware that Pompilia is not merely the passive innocent, but rather has elements of cunning and sophistication allows us to see the moral issues of the The Ring and the Book in a more relative and less absolutist way than conventional criticism would suggest. If

Pompilia is not as innocent as she first appears, she nevertheless remains the victim of decisions made by her natural mother and Violante. Her passivity may be a conscious, paradoxically active opposition to her treatment at the hands of Guido, but it does not diminish or negate the moral issues surrounding her murder and that of the Comparini by Guido and his associates.

Morality, however, is a different issue from truth. For those readers who locate truth in Pompilia's monologue and untruth in Guido's, Romantic irony poses a problem, establishing, as it does, that truth does not reside in any one place, including Pompilia's monologue. The truth Browning points to is of a different nature than a definite statement on right and wrong; rather, it pertains to the complexities of human experience and linguistic processes. The kind of truth the average reader seeks is a judgement made around the moral issues of the poem. That aim is represented by the Pope who must form an opinion based on his own limited knowledge of the issues. The Pope acknowledges his limitations - "since man's wit is fallible,/ Mine may fail here? Suppose it is so, - what then?" (X.237-38) - but nevertheless recognises the need to judge in order to maintain a code to live by. Recognising the distortions inherent in language, in "barren words/ Which, more than any deed, characterize/ Man as made subject to a curse" (X.348-50), he looks to motives as a guide by which to judge human action, finding in Guido's case that "Not one permissible impulse moves the man" (X.536). In finally judging against Guido, the Pope moves to restore a degree of order to the chaos of human experience and in particular to the speculation surrounding the outcome of the trial. A reading based on Romantic irony allows for the less innocent aspects of Pompilia but it does not alter the moral issues. The Pope's judgement is therefore appropriate:

On receipt of this command,
Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
They die tomorrow: could it be tonight,
The better, but the work to do, takes time.
(X.2101-04)

II

A reading of 'Pompilia' based on the principles of Romantic irony allows for the discontinuities in Pompilia's character and reveals that Pompilia is a Romantic ironist to a limited degree. Such a reading of Pompilia's monologue might also lead to the question of how far Romantic irony pertains to the other monologues or to the poem as a whole. I would like to suggest some answers to this question, although clearly space allows for no more than the raising of some initial concerns. Since one of the major concerns of Romantic irony is the role of the author in his work, I limit the following discussion to Books I and XII where Browning, more than anywhere else in The Ring and the Book, discusses his poetic method.

It is pertinent to recall what Romantic irony would require of the role of the author in his work, while also remembering the general strands of Romantic irony discussed earlier in this chapter. Again I return to Lilian Furst. Two statements especially seem to characterize Browning's role in the The Ring and the Book:

Schlegel envisages the artist as both involved in and detached from his creation, aware of the contradictions of his endeavour, but able to transcend them. He is simultaneously committed to his work and to himself as creator. The dimension of reflection and self-consciousness is, for Schlegel, intrinsic to creativity. The artist... reflects on his creation; conscious of his own creative processes...(Furst, p.26)

Alert to the plurality of all meaning and the relativity of every position, the romantic ironist probes an open-ended series of contradictions which bound into a chaos of contingencies instead of coming to rest in a state of resolution or comprehension. (Furst, p.228)

If we consider Romantic irony and in particular these statements in conjunction with Books I and XII, we see that Browning as poet is a Romantic ironist, and is so to a greater degree than Pompilia.

In the opening of Book One Browning exhibits a certain self-consciousness about the creative processes of the poem by alerting the audience to the source which provides the raw material from which the poet works. The poet describes the physical appearance of The Old

Yellow Book, its "crumpled vellum covers" (I.35), and describes the June day when he came across it in a stall in Lorenzo Square. The poet points to the creative process further by virtue of the ring metaphor which provides an analogy of the way the poet has fashioned the poem. The poet, like the craftsman, takes the raw material (The Old Yellow Book) and combines it with an alloy (poetic imagination) to shape it into a ring - the poem, the self-sufficient finished product.

The poet further stresses the creative processes involved in producing a finished poem by having the story told not once, but three times during the course of Book One. These three accounts of the events of the story are inconsistent and fraught with internal ironies that signal the poet's detachment. Irony points to discrepancy, an aspect not recognised when committed to a single position. These contradictory accounts provide the relative positions characteristic of Romantic irony and provide an open-endedness or inconclusiveness also typical of Romantic irony. Book One then, provides a paradigm of how the poem as a whole is to work. Each version in Book One, like each monologue in the poem as a whole, can only provide a single perspective.

Each version is also subject to the ironies and distortions inherent in language, since language is presentation and not the event itself. In addition to this, one version disrupts the next and is itself disrupted by it, so that there is finally no conclusive view, but only contingent positions. This can be seen working by a closer examination of the three accounts of events in Book One.

The story is retold for the first time at ll.132-363, where a summary of the trial is given. The speaker at this point claims an objective position and equates this with the presentation of the 'facts', highly valuing The Old Yellow Book as an account of the 'truth' of the events. Clearly this summary does not encompass the intricacies of the case and so Browning points to the insufficiency of this single viewpoint. The Old Yellow Book has not been self-sustaining as truth should be, but has been forgotten until discovered at a market stall by the poet. He says of The Old Yellow Book:

Was this truth of force?
 Able to take its own part as truth should,
 Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so -
 Yonder's a fire, into it goes my book,
 And who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
 You know already... (I.372-77)

Browning's artistic creation can give shape to the facts and make the reader aware of the difficulties involved in exacting truth from the events and of the distortions inherent in a linguistic constitution of these events. It can make the events come alive.

Despite being a factual, and so apparently objective account, the speaker's biases in the trial summary are revealed through his use of language. There are many examples of the speaker's biases in this trial summary.² The parody of Arcangeli (I.181-82), and of legal processes as any serious means of exacting truth, undermines the lawyer's capabilities and reveals the speaker's disapproval of them:

Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
 - Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
 Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
 More noise by word of mouth than you hear now -
 Till the court cut all short with 'Judged, your cause.
 (I.241-45)

Conversely, the speaker's sympathy for the Pope (or his lack of sympathy depending on whether he is read as being ironic at this point) is also clearly revealed: "Innocent by name/ And nature too..." (I.300-01). The trial summary as a whole is undermined through irony. This supposedly objective account of the trial reveals much about the perspective of the narrator. It is just as subject-related as the accounts which follow it.

The value of the trial as an accurate statement of the events of the story is further disrupted by the second recounting of events which takes place at 11.457-678. Here the poet embarks on an imaginative journey in order to recreate the events preceding the trial. While the trial summary could be seen as the pure gold in the ring metaphor, the imaginative recreation corresponds to the alloy added in order to shape the ring, the fancy:

Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
 Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
 Fancy with fact is just one fact the more.
 (11.462-64)

The numerous styles used in this account illustrate the way in which linguistic style shapes meaning. The romantic language which describes Pompilia's parents ("Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best/... To somehow make a shift and scramble through/ The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled", I.529-31) encourages a sympathetic response from the audience, while the ghoulish description used to portray Guido and his brothers clearly encourages an unfavourable response:

...a dark brotherhood, and specially
 Two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this,
 Cat-clawed the other, called his next of kin
 By Guido the main monster ...(I.548-51)

Melodrama exaggerates the heroism of Caponsacchi, countering to some extent the ultimate failure of his mission, the rescue of the lady in distress:

As, in a glory of armour like Saint George,
 Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
 Bearing away the lady in his arms...(I.585-87)

The variety of styles of language within this second retelling, including self-parody at points, disrupts its own continuity and meaning; therefore any claim it may have about conveying truth is also disrupted. The sense of drama it presents highlights the insufficiencies of the trial summary which, by comparison, seems lifeless and inadequate.

The poet intrudes between the second and third account of the events, once again discussing the creative process. During this discussion, the poet detaches himself from his creation enough to be able to reflect on it; yet, insofar as the discussion constitutes part of Book One, the poet is simultaneously involved in and detached from his creation. Browning is at this point embodying one of the principles of Romantic irony.

The discussion moves towards a defense of poetry and a consideration of the relationship between art and experience, beginning again with the ring metaphor. Man imitates God; art imitates God's original creation. Man cannot create from nothing but "resuscitates" what God has already created. Art can recreate the experiences which have been lost in time, for instance the events of The Old Yellow Book. Browning's point is that art is an imitative process. If God is truth, then art may reveal truth in 'man's due degree'.

The third recounting of events, which precedes the list of monologuists, is a narrative summary which, in its impersonal and flat tone is almost the opposite of the second account. This account disperses the meaning of the previous two by providing yet another version of events. With its sense of the issues involved in the case and yet maintaining control and dispassion and movement towards present tense, this version approximates the fact made alive, the finished ring.

In Book One the reader is introduced to the problems which pervade the entire poem. The retelling of events three times (four if we count the cast of characters) shifts traditional narrative emphasis on plot (we already know what happens) to an emphasis on the representation of events and character, and also, insofar as the characters are monologuists, to an emphasis on self-representation. The multiple accounts of events also deny any sense of a conclusive or ultimate position and instead stress relativities and contradictions. The use of irony further dislocates meaning and also suggests something about the poet's role in the poem, that is, the poet is both involved in and detached from his work. This aspect of the poet is also illustrated by his emphasis on the creative processes involved in the construction of the poem which point to the fictionality of the work while simultaneously constituting its content.

If we recall Pompilia's monologue, we may remember that Pompilia exhibits aspects of Romantic irony throughout her monologue until its conclusion, where the need for closure and inability to detach herself from particular images reveals her limitations. A brief discussion of

Book XII shows that Browning eschews closure for the poem as a whole and therefore achieves a form of transcendence explicitly denied to Pompilia.

The poet avoids closure by having a number of versions in the final book, thereby denying a definitive conclusion to the events, by dispersing the events of the story into other texts and by avoiding making a moral judgement on the case, concluding instead with a truth which considers human experience, language processes and art.³

The Venetian visitor's letter along with those of the Lawyers' and Fra Celestino's sermon, in conjunction with the poet's own, often ironic and certainly disruptive interpolations, work to continue the series of contingent positions established from the outset of the poem. In each case we see how the story of Pompilia and Guido has become merely a starting point for another story. In this sense there is no end of contexts or stories which the story of Guido and Pompilia may be a part of, and thus no complete version or end can ever be attained. Rather than providing an ending, Book XII shows how the story of Pompilia and Guido and its many versions becomes dispersed among other stories, suggesting infinite contexts rather than a series of endings.

The Venetian visitor, for instance, takes the opportunity to turn the story into a discussion of the Pope's age, the question of his successor and his part in European politics. He seems disinterested in the moral issues connected with the case and notes in a tone inappropriate to the nature of the events that Guido's face was indeed "no face to please a wife!" (XII.196)

Arcangeli regards the entire trial as a setback to his career with apparently no concern that his lack of success in defending Guido has, in a sense, cost Guido his life. Arcangeli remains unchanged by the case and still highly preoccupied with his own skill at latin and his son's welfare. After 'successfully' defending Pompilia, Bottini takes the exact opposite side in acting for the Convertite nuns in the contention for Pompilia's property. He quotes Fra Celestino's sermon in full in order to undermine Celestino, but ironically, in missing

the sermon's application to his own situation, he succeeds only in undermining his own proposed position of superiority.

For Fra Celestino the story of Pompilia and Guido provides the impetus for another linguistic representation, a sermon based on the text "God is true/ And everyman a liar..." (XII.600-01), yet another deferral of the events of the story. The poet has pointed to this process earlier in Book XII:

The act, over and ended, falls and fades:
What has once seen, grows what is now described,
Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less
In every fresh transmission: ... (XII.13-16)

The way a text from Romans III.4 becomes incorporated into Fra Celestino's sermon, which is incorporated into Bottini's letter, which is part of Book XII, is a further example of how the process of intertextuality and dispersion, which Browning illustrates with regard to the story of Pompilia and Guido, works.

In addition to the series of endings, provided by the Venetian, Fra Celestino and the two Lawyers, the poet himself provides a series of endings. At three points during the final one hundred and fifty lines of Book XII he purports to be finishing his story. He states that the verdict of the court will end his book, and then adds some information about the Pope's death some two years later. He claims after this that it is "an end of all i' the story" (XII.775), but then talks about Gaetano, speculating about his future.

The third statement claiming an end occurs at l.823 - "Such, then, the final state o' the story" - whereupon the poet goes on to talk about notions of art and truth. The poet is unwilling to provide an ending to the story because there is no ending, only the proliferation of stories. He finally escapes closure by considering the processes of the poem and the relationship of art and truth: "Literature as product yields to literature as process" (Furst, p.231).

In the concluding lines, the poet to some degree sympathizes with Fra Celestino's position that human testimony is false. However,

whereas Fra Celestino settles for a dismissal of this world in favour of a better life in heaven, the poet has a more open view. For Celestino, truth is to be found nowhere in this world; for the poet, art may tell a kind of truth to be found in human experience. Truth is not to be found in the isolated example or individual end - "all this trouble comes of telling truth,/ Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false" (XII.849-50), but in the whole and in art "- wherein man nowise speaks to men/ Only to mankind," (XII.854-55). Art speaks to mankind because it transcends the particular instance whereby truth is transmitted through language and thereby altered: it "Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,/ Nor recognisable by whom it left-" (XII.851-52). Artistic discourse acknowledges the ability of language to transform, and embodies the process by which man constitutes his world using language. This is the truth art can show. In telling us that truth is to be found obliquely in the language processes of The Ring and the Book, Browning avoids closure and directs the reader back into the experience of the poem and particularly back to the start of the poem where these processes are again discussed.

The opening line of Book XII, "Here were the end, had anything an end", proves an accurate statement of the role of Book XII in the poem as a whole and reinforces Browning's role as Romantic ironist. Superficially, Book XII is the final book of the poem. More broadly, however, Book XII is a series of beginnings, where the reader sees how the story of Pompilia and Guido has become a part of many other stories and contexts. In pointing us in the direction of the processes of language and art and back to Book One where the ring metaphor describes the artistic process, the ring figure is completed. The Ring and the Book, like the ring figure itself, embodies continuation, process and on-going experience. In this too, The Ring and the Book demonstrates an aspect of Romantic irony:

The literary structures of romantic as of modern irony are nurtured by the perception of art as a self-generating dynamic process. The consciousness of its own mainsprings is incorporated into the composition and determines its intrinsic form. (Furst, p.232)

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR:

1. Lillian Furst, Fictions of Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.27.
2. A full account of the juxtaposition of styles in Book I can be found in Douglas R. Standring, "'The Ring and the Book': Texts and the Texture of Experience" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1984).
3. As for Book I, a full account of the juxtaposition of styles in Book XII can be found in Standring.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altick, Richard and James F. Loucks. Browning's Roman Murder Story: A Reading of "The Ring and the Book." Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Armstrong, Isobel, ed. Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.
- "The Ring and the Book': The Uses of Prolixity." In Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 177-97.
- Robert Browning. Writers and their Background. London: Bell, 1974.
- Auerbach, Nina. "Robert Browning's Last Word." Victorian Poetry, 22 (Summer 1984), 161-173.
- Austen, Kay. "Pompilia: 'Saint and Martyr Both'." Victorian Poetry, 17 (1979), 287-301.
- Boo, Sister Mary Richard. "The Ordeal of Guiseppi Caponsacchi." Victorian Poetry, (1965), 178-188.
- Bloom, Harold and Adrienne Munich, eds. Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980.
- Browning, Robert. The Ring and the Book. Ed. Richard D. Altick. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971.
- Camp, Dennis. "Browning's Pompilia and the Truth." Personalist, 47 (1966), 350-364.
- Cook, A.K. A Commentary Upon Browning's "The Ring and the Book". Rpt. Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966.

- Cundiff, Paul A. Browning's Ring Metaphor and Truth. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1972.
- DeVane, William C. A Browning Handbook. 2nd ed. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955.
- Donaghy, Henry J. "'The Ring and the Book': Its Conception, Current Reputation, and Meaning." Studies in the Literary Imagination, 1 (April, 1968), 47-66.
- Drew, Philip. The Poetry of Browning: A Critical Introduction. London: Methuen, 1970.
- ed. Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays. London: Methuen, 1966.
- Duffin, Henry Charles. Amphibian: A Reconsideration of Browning. London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956.
- Eichner, Hans. Friedrich Schlegel. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970.
- Erickson, Lee. Robert Browning: His Poetry and his Audiences. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Furst, Lilian. Fictions of Romantic Irony. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Gest, John Marshall. The Old Yellow Book: Source of Robert Brownings 'The Ring and the Book' (A New Translation with Explanatory Notes and Critical Chapters Upon the Poem and its Source). Boston: Chipman Law, 1925.
- Gridley, Roy E. Browning. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.
- "Browning's Pompilia." Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 67 (1968), 64-83.

- Hair, Donald S. Browning's Experiments with Genre. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.
- Hamilton, Paul. "Romantic Irony and English Literary History." In The Romantic Heritage: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Karsten Engelberg. Copenhagen: Copenhagen University Press, 1983.
- Haney, Janice L. " 'Shadow Hunting': Romantic Irony, Sartor Resartus and Victorian Romanticism." Studies in Romanticism, 17 (1978), 307-33.
- Hodell, Charles W. The Old Yellow Book: Source of Robert Browning's 'The Ring and the Book'. London: Dent, 1911.
- Honan, Park. Browning's Characters: A Study in Poetic Technique. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1961.
- Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Jack, Ian. Browning's Major Poetry. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Johnson, E.D.H. The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry: Sources of the Poetic Imagination in Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- "Robert Browning's Pluralistic Universe: A Reading of the 'The Ring and the Book'." University of Toronto Quarterly, 31 (1961), 20-41.
- Johnson, Wendell Stacy. Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Jones, Terry H. "The Disposition of Images in Browning's 'The Ring and the Book'." Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, 13 (1960), 55-69.

- Killham, John. "Browning's 'Modernity': 'The Ring and the Book' and Relativism." In Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations. Ed. Isobel Armstrong. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp. 153-175.
- Langbaum, Robert. The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1957.
- "The Ring and the Book': A Relativist Poem." PMLA, 61 (1956), 131-54.
- Levine, Richard A. The Victorian Experience: The Poets. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982.
- Litzinger, Boyd. "The Structural Logic of 'The Ring and the Book'." In Nineteenth-Century Literary Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Lionel Stevenson. Ed. Clyde de L. Ryals. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974, pp. 105-14.
- Litzinger, Boyd and K.L. Knickerbocker, eds. The Browning Critics. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967.
- Litzinger, Boyd and Donald Smalley, eds. Browning: The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Locker, Kitty C.O. "The Definition of Woman: A Major Motif in Browning's 'The Ring and the Book'." Diss. U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977.
- Lonoff, Sue. "Multiple Narratives and Relative Truths: A Study of 'The Ring and the Book', 'The Woman in White', and 'The Moonstone'." Browning Institute Studies, 10 (1982), 143-61.
- Man, Paul de. "The Rhetoric of Temporality." In Interpretation: Theory and Practice. Ed. Charles S. Singleton. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

- Martin, Loy D. Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985.
- Mellor, Anne K. English Romantic Irony. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Miller, J. Hillis. The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Muecke, D.C. The Compass of Irony. London and New York: Methuen, 1980.
- Raymond, William O. The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning. 2nd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.
- Ryals, Clyde de L. Becoming Browning: The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning, 1833-1846. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1983.
- Ryals, Clyde de L. "Browning's Irony." In The Victorian Experience: The Poets. Ed. Richard A. Levine. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982.
- Browning's Later Poetry: 1871-1889. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Schlegel, Friedrich. Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms. Trans., Introduced and Annotated by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968.
- Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments. Ed. and Trans. with an introduction by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971.
- Shaw, J.E. "The 'Donna Angelicata' in 'The Ring and the Book'." PMLA, 41 (1926), 55-81.

- Shaw, W. David. The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Slinn, E. Warwick. Browning and the Fictions of Identity. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982.
- Sperry, Stuart M. "Toward a definition of Romantic Irony in English Literature." In Romantic and Modern: Revaluations of Literary Tradition. Ed. George Bornstein. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977.
- Standring, Douglas R. "'The Ring and the Book': Texts and the Texture of Experience." Unpublished M.A. Thesis: Massey University, 1984.
- Sullivan, Mary Rose. Browning's Voices in 'The Ring and the Book'. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.
- Tucker, Herbert F. Browning's Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.
- "Mnemonic Imagination in Shelley and Browning." Studies in Romanticism, 19 (1980), 285-325.
- Walker, William. "'Pompilia' and Pompilia." Victorian Poetry, 22 (Spring, 1984), 47-64.
- Wheeler, Kathleen M., ed. German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Weissman, Judith. "Women without Meaning: Browning's Feminism." Midwest Quarterly, 23 (Winter 1982), 200-214.