

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
DYNAMIC AND ACCRETIVE IMAGERY  
IN ROBERT BROWNING'S THE RING AND THE BOOK

by

LINDA RUTH DuBICK PHILLIPS

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## ABSTRACT

The Ring and The Book demonstrates the manner in which human speech fails to capture the divine truth of earthly experience, and Browning makes clear that the only way man can apprehend this higher truth is through Art. In other words, human speech is representative of man's earthly condition, his proneness to illusion and error; Art reveals man's capacity for divine perception. The artist's imagination is an inspired vision which places the perception of spiritual truth into the language of men--blending "fact" and "fancy" and the gold and artistry of the poem's ring metaphor. Thus, the higher perception that Art provides is necessary for men to make meaningful judgments. It is in the affairs of the earth that the artist sees divine truth; he then presents this truth so that men who cannot perceive it in life do apprehend it in Art.

The Ring and The Book is a study of perception presented through imagery which reveals the truth of the divine purpose of earthly life seen in constant conflict between good and evil, saintliness and diabolism, purity and corruption, the soul and the flesh. Few of the characters of the poem can see this truth, yet each unconsciously perceives it in his soul. Images are the language of the soul, the expressions of the truth that has been subconsciously glimpsed. They are significant in presenting the truth perceived by each character, and in presenting a divine truth the character may not see. Thus, the imagery of the poem provides the reader with the range of truth against which to evaluate the differing levels of perception.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the dynamic and

accretive qualities of the imagery in The Ring and The Book as that imagery relates to Guido, Pompilia and Caponsacchi and the theme of the quest for the meaning of truth. The images are dynamic in that they pass through a long sequence of forms, and accretive in that with every appearance a new meaning is added to the original metaphor. The process builds on previous uses, applications and contexts of the images, and in this way reflects the bias, distortion and self-interest of each individual. The same process of dynamism and accretion occurs in the treatment of the theme of the quest for the nature of truth.

The first chapter of the thesis defines the terms necessary to establish the context of the analysis, and establishes both the classifications of image patterns and the positions from which they are viewed in the series of dramatic monologues which constitute the poem. Browning's own discussion of the events and their implications as set forth in Book I are included in this introductory chapter. The three subsequent chapters deal with the development of the imagery within the triadic unities of Books II, III, and IV; V, VI, and VII; and VIII, IX, and X. The fifth chapter deals with Book XI, which affirms the Pope's final vision of the truth, and Book XII, in which Browning states his own conclusion about the nature of truth.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction.....1  
Book I - "The Ring and The Book".....16

CHAPTER TWO

Book II - "Half-Rome".....33  
Book III - "Other Half-Rome".....43  
Book IV - "Tertium Quid".....60

CHAPTER THREE

Book V - "Count Guido Franceschini"..... 79  
Book VI - "Giuseppe Caponsacchi".....100  
Book VII - "Pompilia".....117

CHAPTER FOUR

Book VIII - "Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis".....136  
Book IX - "Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius".....152  
Book X - "The Pope".....165

CHAPTER FIVE

Book XI - "Guido".....186  
Book XII - "The Book and The Ring".....204

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....212

## CHAPTER ONE

- I -

In 1860, on a blistering June day in Florence, Robert Browning ventured into the Piazza San Lorenzo and walked among the stalls, which to this day, peddle a vast collection of second-hand, dillapidated, sun-browned oddments. Close to the Ricardi Palace, he chanced upon a vellum-bound collection of legal briefs, pamphlets and letters pertaining to a forgotten cause célèbre involving a child-bride, a disguised and supposedly adulterous priest, vengeance and duplicity, triple murder, four hangings, and the beheading of a destitute and crazed nobleman.

"Stall!" Browning shouted, "a lira made it mine."<sup>1</sup> Opening the covers, he read the hand lettering: Pozione Di Tutta La Causa Criminale Contra Guido Franceschini... "A Setting-forth of the entire Criminal Cause against Guido Franceschini, Nobleman of Arezzo, and his Bravoes, who were put to death in Rome, February 22, 1698. The first by beheading, the other four by the Gallows. Roman murder-case. In which it is disputed whether and when a Husband may kill his Adulterous Wife without incurring the ordinary penalty."<sup>2</sup> This "square old yellow book" (I.32) discovered in the Florentine market told the story of a murder case so complicated in its mixture of "pure crude fact" (I.34) and ultimate mystery, that it proved to be the perfect stimulus for Browning's imagination and intellect.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning, The Ring and The Book (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 3, l. 82. All other quotations from the text of the poem are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Charles W. Hodell, (trans.) The Old Yellow Book (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1927), p. xix.

In the collection of pleadings from the Old Yellow Book was a vintage crime, complex and controversial, left untouched since 1698. Although it was plain enough who had killed Pompilia and her parents, the Comparini, the important matters of the case--the secret motives, the unexpressed hopes and fears and passions of the characters--were left in doubt. Browning engaged himself to discover these things, externalizing in his poem his belief that the relish for a quest was directly proportional to the impossibility of full success: "Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,/ What mortal ever in entirety saw?" (I.820-21).

The Old Yellow Book's chronicle of human misery filters through a long-winded, case-citing, slow-motion duel between teams of professional advocates. The trial documents demonstrate realities which pass partly through limited, subjective viewpoints in the dispositions of witnesses and the pleas of lawyers, conflicting and developing the drama, irony and distortion of the truth of the case. The materials of the Old Yellow Book suggested to Browning not only an enormous literary experiment, but also how such an experiment might be organized. Here was an action large, violent, and paradoxical enough to lend intense interest to the mental operations of the nine personae of The Ring and The Book.

Relative to the quest for truth is Browning's belief that the development of the individual soul is ideally a growth toward perfection prior to the soul's eventual return to the divine source of its being. During its earthly tenure, the soul is influenced by human faculties, defined as imperfect because human. Man must

understand the effect upon the soul of the series of choices he makes between good and evil that prepare for subsequent decisions and for the inevitable spiritual results. These judgments are based upon mere human knowledge, however, and are therefore partially incapacitated because human knowledge is relative and finite.

On a higher plane is the potent truth of the divine revealed through love. Unlike human knowledge and truth, God's final truth is infinite, unlimited and absolute. The capacity of finite human beings to recognize this pure truth and to live according to God's laws is doubtful, because of the limitations of human apprehension and the continuous struggle between good and evil. But Browning saw Art as the artist's "fancy" or imagination, as much a God-given gift as that of the prophet or seer, mankind would be assisted to see the truth which proceeds from God.

The quest for truth is the major theme of The Ring and The Book, which attempts to find where in the "strange disguisings whence even truth seems false" (II. 402) does truth really lie. It has been noted that "For every character or significant action in the poem, appropriate images have been conceived that may be said to accompany that character or denote that action throughout the poem."<sup>3</sup> It is within the complicated patterns of imagery that the search for truth and the final answer is attained.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Willard Smith, Browning's Star Imagery: The Study of a Detail in Poetic Design (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 194.

In The Ring and The Book, imagery is Truth. Browning uses it to express what the characters have seen in their souls. He thus escapes the necessity of descending upon the poem in his own person to explain the unconscious vision in every speaker. Each person, in his soul, perceives the truth and the significance of the Franceschini case in varying degrees and levels of conscious perception which explains the consistency of the images throughout the poem. Imagery becomes Art, a higher sort of communication that avoids the distortions of human speech by calling up thoughts and pictures. In the poem is the language of the soul, the expression of truth that has been subconsciously glimpsed, but buried under wordly distortions. In other words, for Browning there is a truth at the heart of an image, and we can judge a man's character by how closely he comes to the truth of the image he employs.

An image may be defined as a reproduction in the mind of a sensation produced by a physical perception so that the sensation becomes a replica of the sensory data itself.<sup>4</sup> In literature, images produced in the mind by language refer to experiences which could produce physical perceptions were the reader actually to have those experiences or the sense impression themselves. Any analysis of imagery in a literary work relates the statement on the page and the sensation it produces in the mind. Analysis of the relation between

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Preminger, (ed.) Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 363-70.

a subject and its analagous image leads to concentration upon the function of images as embodiments of symbolic vision or nondiscursive truth by virtue of psychological association.

In The Ring and The Book, images generally serve to reveal the sensory capacities of Browning's mind--his interests, tastes, temperament, values and vision. They serve as tone-setters, structural devices and symbols. The images of the poem also serve as the speaker's subject, be it people, places, objects, actions, or events. Imagery thereby becomes a symbol of something else as a result of the speaker's reflective and meditative activity. Brought in from the outside world of the speaker, apart from his literal subject, images function as analogies in a figurative fashion. They function to explain, to clarify, and to make vivid the speaker's mental activity; they serve to dispose the reader favourably or unfavourably towards various elements in the poetic situation.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning sensed the function of imagery in her husband's poetry: "there is an extra distinctness in your images and thought ... crossing one another infinitely".<sup>5</sup> Because imagery acts as a revelation of the unconscious at a given moment of heightened feeling, it functions in the organic structure of the poem to distinguish speaker from speaker and to enunciate, to reinforce, and to organize the central themes and statements into a unified

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<sup>5</sup> Robert W. B. Browning (ed.) The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1845-1846 (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1966), I, p. 454.

design. The structure of imagery is also affected by the nature of the poem itself--the distinctive blend of intellectual, philosophical, imaginative and emotional elements that form the context in which the images occur.

The imagistic technique demonstrated in The Ring and The Book fashions a network of images that fall into six very broad groups--color, religion, animals, disease, nature, and mythology. While these categories contain countless diverse images, there are key images in each group that appear again and again to establish themselves in imagistic patterns. For example, in the animal group there is everything from an elephant to a butterfly, but the key images are those of wolves, snakes, dogs, sheep, and birds. These animals are consistently used to fortify concepts of man's rapacity and innocence so crucial to the theme of the poem. The dominant color images are those of white and black, used with their traditional association with good and evil. Throughout the poem, the imagery of "white light" is used by Browning as a symbol of the eternal verities which are absolute and ideal--the Nature of God, Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Heaven and the Soul<sup>6</sup>--and the images of black with evil, corruption, ugliness and the flesh. In the religious group, references to angels, to the devil, to Christ, and to the Virgin, and reversals of scriptural meanings are the most frequent. References to Perseus and Andromeda dominate the group of mythological

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<sup>6</sup> William O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 194.

figures. The images drawn from nature are usually taken from the heavens or from flowers. It is not difficult to see how Browning could build a structure of truth out of these images, showing the divine purpose of earthly life--the constant conflict between good and evil, saintliness and diabolism, purity and corruption, the soul and the flesh--all of which create the basic conflicts in man.<sup>7</sup>

Constant occurrence of the same and associated imagery constitutes a pattern in the poem. Each image thus attains a comprehensive relationship to all or some of the images that have gone before in the repeated sequence. The precise nature of that relationship depends upon the particular image, the pattern of which it is a part, and the dramatic context in which it appears. Each image is made to yield whatever meanings are latent within it, and once the pattern is concluded, the whole is seen as a unit, and the meaning and relation of the images to those that follow is further enriched.

It is in this manner that the images of The Ring and The Book are both dynamic and accretive: dynamic in that they pass through a long series of forms, never twice exactly the same; and accretive in that with every new appearance, new meaning is added to the original metaphor, each fresh occurrence involving the reminiscence of previous forms, applications and contexts. The same process occurs with the characters who in the course of the poem assume so many scores of different guises. Every new metaphor involving previously introduced

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon W. Thompson, "Authorial Detachment and Imagery in The Ring and The Book," Studies in English Literature, 10 (1970), pp. 681-82.



elements is in fact a separate creative event in which each constituent is somehow modified, its earlier meaning being either altered or strengthened, before it proceeds on its way to the next conjunction. Each element in a given metaphor contains within itself the history of all its previous uses.<sup>8</sup>

By this method, all the characters in The Ring and The Book are personified by a changing series of images which serve to assign them traditional "positive", "negative," favourable or unfavourable attributes in constant variation. For instance, in Book I Guido is figured as Satan, Job, Lucifer, an elephant, a werewolf, a tiger cat, a star and a pestilential cloud. In the following Books he is imaged as a gardener, a vineyard keeper, the keeper of a hen roost, the owner of a pet lamb, a herdsman, a goat trainer, a huntsman, a fowler, a spearman, a bishop, a priest, a singer, a verger, a butcher, a gambler, a foolish virgin, an artist, and a warrior; Adam, Jacob, Moses, a Philistine, David, Solomon, Potiphar, Ahasuerus, Hologernes, Herod, Lazarus, St. Peter, Barabbas, Nabal, Aristaeus, Bellerophon, a male Griselda, Menelaus, Vulcan; a wolf, a caged animal, a wildcat, a cat, a mouse, a lynx, a lion, a badger, a ferret, a bull, a dabchick, a bird of prey, a rooster, a bat, a spider, a crab, and a stockfish; witches' brew, an ice block, a solar system, a wave, grass, a flame, a plume, and an ornament.

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks, II for the central organizing idea of dynamic and accretive imagery in The Ring and The Book set forth in Chapter 8 of their study of the poem, Browning's Roman Murder Story: A Reading of The Ring and The Book (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp.226-80.

Pompilia is figured in Book I as a saint, a martyr, Cleodolinda, and a sheep. In the following Books she is imaged as a slave, a babe at baptism, a deacon and a Fury; Eve, the Madonna, Rachel, Potiphar's wife, Abigail, Esther, Delilah, Judith, Magdalene, Malchus, Amaryllis, Corrinna, Dido, Hebe, Helen of Troy, Hesione, Medusa, Philomela, Phryne, Venus, and Eurydice; a heifer, a goat, a fawn, a bird in a trap, a migratory bird, a fowl in a coop, a chick, a pullet, a hawk, a magpie, a lark, a cuckoo, a pheasant, a pigeon, a swan, a raven, a crow, a dove, a finch, a sparrow hawk, a chimera's head, a minnow, an eel, a flower, a weed, a lily, a plant graft, a mistletoe, a sprig, an apple, a garden, a ruined building, Troy, a stream, the moon, a pearl, a paten, myrrh, a flame, a painting, a leper rag, a plague, bait, snare, angler's lure, food, bread, icicle, and an egg.

Caponsacchi is represented in Book I as St. George, an actor, and a puppet, and appears later as an angel, an athlete, a student, Joseph, doubting Thomas, Apollo, Mars, Myrtilus, Orpheus, Ovid, Paris, game, a crane, a parrot, a popinjay, a firefly, a butterfly, a grub, a hornet, a rock, a wind, an orb, and liquor.

But interestingly enough, Browning's imagistic scheme in the poem allows Guido to share the following images with both Pompilia and Caponsacchi: God, Christ, Samson, St. Michael, an ox, a dog, a swine, a sheep, a lamb, a fox, a tiger cat, a bird, a decoy, bird, a fly, a snake, a dragon, a serpent, a fish, leviathan, a sea monster, a wolf, and a tree. He shares with Pompilia images of Satan, a horse, an owl, a hawk, a swan, a bee, a cockatrice, a scorpion, a worm, a maggot, a stone, a butcher's block, and a morsel on a dish. Guido

shares with Caponsacchi images of a shepherd, a physician, David, Lucifer, Holofernes, Hercules, Perseus, Ulysses, a wolf, a lion, a bear, a star, and a ship. This complicated systematic pattern of shared imaging applies to all the characters of the poem. The remarkable manner in which Browning integrates these images with the poem as a whole directs the action by the appropriate choice and modulation of figures.

It is by recognition of the methods of dynamism and accretion that the reader becomes aware that Browning realized that meaning is weakened and distorted when transmitted through language and the medium of the human mind, obliterating moral distinctions and degrees: it "goes as easy as a glove/O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one" (I.1172-73). But he also recognized that language is the primary way of learning what lies beyond immediate perception. "For how else know we save by worth of word?" (I.829) Browning therefore chose the method of indirection to serve the truth more faithfully than outright statement. "Art may tell a truth/Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,/Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word"(XII.855-57). To achieve this end, he adopted the methods of paradox, opposed truth with relativism and consensus with disagreement in his imagery. In order to exalt the power of good, he demonstrated the triumphs of evil.

The manner in which the speakers distort language reflects an image of a soul warped from the ideal development towards its highest good. Browning prepares for this evaluation of the characters in Book I. Half-Rome "supposes and states" with an "Honest enough" "feel after the vanished truth," but also with a "prepossession" or

or "Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong/Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right" (I.852-53). The narrator does not explain further: "'T' is there--/The instinctive theorizing whence a fact/Looks for the eye as the eye likes the look" (I.854-56). Other Half-Rome exhibits "the oppositè feel" for truth, the "prepossession" in this case being a "fancy-fit" that brought a "siding rather with the wife" than with Guido: "So listen how, to the other half of Rome,/Pompilia seemed a saint and a martyr both" (I.900-1). The "personage" who "harangues" next in order is Tertium Quid, representing the "superior social section" with its reasoned statement: "The critical mind, in short: no gossip guess" (I.918). The verdict of Tertium Quid will offer "something bred of both" Half-Rome's and the Other Half-Rome's conclusions, but in "silvery and selectest phrase" (I.925), "Courting the approbation of no mob,/But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That" (I.928-29). Archangelis "Conceives and inchoates the argument" (I.1147), "Makes logic levigate the big crime small" (I.1145); his opponent Bottinus speaks with the "Language that goes easy as a glove,/O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one" (I.1172-83). Guido "does his best man's-service for himself" (I.919), "And never once does he detach his eye/From those ranged there to slay him or to save" (I.967-68). From the outset then, Browning indicates that the judgments offered by these characters and the others are to be regarded as suspect.

The language of metaphor in The Ring and The Book in itself exemplifies the treachery of man's discourse. It enables the speakers to express what they see or wish others to see in the events and characters of the story, including themselves. They seek to replace the

commonly observed actuality with something that is different or more intense--to substitute for the external reality of a person a version that more nearly accords with their private interpretation which they wish their listeners to adopt. Thanks to the power that figurative language has to compel assent when used shrewdly, shadow acquires the plausibility of substance. Metaphor tends to discredit the "real" and urge the acceptance of appearance as "truth." Tension and uncertainty mount as the intricate pattern is developed, the overlaid conflict of opposing or variant figures of speech intensifying basic conflicts between characters and viewpoints.<sup>9</sup>

Browning imposes a fictitious universe of images used by the speakers to describe others as opposed to specific historical scene and action, place and character. By this means, each character is deprived of his identity by others to become a construct of language in a realm which replaces, distorts or modifies his true qualities. Because the subjects of the images are drawn from the whole range of human experience, in their totality they contribute to that intimate mingling of the comic and the tragic, the celestial and the earthly, the pathetic and the repulsive, which is among the poem's most distinctive qualities. Each character in the poem interprets the story according to his own approach to life, while the poet applies his moral and artistic insight to both the story he tells and the characters he creates, thereby making The Ring and The Book Browning's reading of life.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

After reading the trial documents, Browning stated, "My plan was at once settled. I went for a walk, gathered twelve pebbles from the road, and put them at equal distances on the parapet that bordered it. Those represented the twelve books into which the poem is divided; and I adhered to that arrangement to the last."<sup>10</sup>

Certainly no poetic structure Browning had devised so far seemed adequate to the story's intricacies until that moment. He saw in the documents of the murder case the extraordinary complexity of antecedent events. The composition of the poem called for techniques in handling multiple viewpoints with an illusion of simultaneity. Robert Browning, the man whose name became synonymous with the genius of the dramatic monologue, embarked upon the crowning achievement of his career as he began The Ring and The Book.

The dramatic monologue was the literary method best suited to Browning's purposes in the poem because its process is the very method of indirectness. By exploring the complicated and subtle relation between the members of two sets of speakers and audiences, the poet sought to convey his ideas and attitudes obliquely to the reader through an intervening communication between the monologist and his listeners. What the reader learns is the product of a dramatic situation contrived by the poet. His response is governed by his estimate of the two speakers--the poet and the monologist.

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<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Lehmann, An Artist's Reminiscences (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1894), p. 224.

The series of monologues in The Ring and The Book may be divided into three groups of three. Each group has a speaker pro, a speaker con, and a "tertium quid." Books II, III, and IV represent the "world's outcry": Half-Rome against Pompilia, Other Half-Rome against Guido, and Tertium Quid refusing to become involved or make a choice. Books V, VI, and VII introduce the main characters involved in the action: Guido against Pompilia, Caponsacchi for Pompilia and against Guido, and Pompilia herself, detached from the situation by her purity of spirit and devotion to the truth. Books VIII, IX, and X present Pompilia's case by her lawyer, Guido's by his, and the final judgment of the Pope, who feels the urgency of the situation and yet has difficulty in making a decision. Book XI contains Guido's second monologue which takes place after he has been found guilty, and reinforces the Pope's decision. In Book XII, Browning directs us to determine the extent of distortion and to extract the residue of fact.

In the dramatic monologues that comprise The Ring and The Book, truth is under the exclusive control of one speaker after another. In this series of stories within stories, revealing or implying motives within motives, truth is wrapped in layers of possible misrepresentation. Each speaker monopolizes the reader's attention during his monologue. If viewpoints other than the speaker's are presented, they are introduced through quotations, or quotations within quotations by him. The result is a double ventriloquism, a creation within a creation. The speaker in the monologue says what the poet wants him to say as a dramatically conceived character; and when he quotes someone else, he is still under the poet's control, imposing his will on that person, who

is his dramatically conceived character. Framing arguments and language in the ways that serve his purposes best, the character chooses particular dialectics and analogies that may be misrepresentative, thereby further characterizing himself.

It is not easy to conceive of a method of narration that is more capable of leading one away from the truth. One must discern when Browning is speaking directly through his characters and when they speak at cross purposes to him; when Browning sympathizes with a character or rejects him; when a character may be assumed to be telling the truth; and by what argumentative means a speaker seeks to persuade his listeners. Because the reader is as much a target of the speaker's rhetorical strategy as the dramatic listener, he is the object of the poet's strategy as it is worked out through the speaker of each monologue.

The series of monologues are symmetrically arranged to achieve the fullest artistic validity for the concept of the nature and discovery of truth. The truth with which the theme is concerned is two-fold: the truth of the events and persons that make up the Roman murder story, and the truth of God. Thus, the poem exists on two levels of significance, the literal and the symbolic. The concrete persons and events of the poem serve as allegorical devices leading to a transcendence of the literal and to the exposition of Browning's central theme, and the ethical-religious concepts that are contained within the general organizing idea.



The monologic structure of The Ring and The Book emphasizes the character of the speakers, and the arrangement of the speakers is one of the principle means by which the argument of the poem is sustained. Since the emphasis is upon character, the speakers in the poem are representative types of men and women whose relationship to the truth is determined by the personal qualities they possess. In each case, human judgment is conditioned by whatever state in its development the soul has attained. The speakers are marked by their capacity to know the options presented and the consequences of judgment or choice between those options.

## -II-

## Book I - "The Ring and The Book"

In Book I, Browning speaks directly to the reader, describing the genesis of The Ring and The Book. He comes to grips with the question of how and to what degree he used his source materials and explains the method and organization of the poem. He relates the circumstances of his accidental discovery of the Old Yellow Book, and states his intention to present the narrative through the eyes of the protagonists of the story and other interested persons. His method will be the dramatic monologue, and the reader who wishes a final pronouncement upon the actors of the drama will find it necessary to rely solely on his own judgment.

It would seem well worth while to observe carefully the imagistic content of Book I, for here Browning speaks directly, not in the guise of someone else, as he will be in the ten following books.

Hence, a comparison of the imagistic practices employed in Book I give some indication of the techniques that are a part of Browning's stock-in-trade, and which have been devised to reveal the mind and personality of the characters. In Book I are revealed many of the methods, distinctive qualities, and much of the characteristic image content employed throughout the poem.

A series of closely related images occur in Book I, all of which concern the artistic process involved in the creation of the poem. The very singularity of the raw material for The Ring and The Book called for uncommon treatment if it was to be transmitted into art to serve Browning's aim. "Art remains the one way possible, / Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least" (XII.839-40). This process of transmutation is first described in the gold-and-alloy image, combining the symbolic significance of circularity with the creative process. Like an Etrurian artificer shaping a golden ring, Browning fashions his poem from the facts of the Old Yellow Book.<sup>11</sup>

Browning began to work with his raw material, the "pure crude fact" (I.34) of the murder case secreted from the being of the men and women whose existence it had formed. The circle of evidence was formed around a centre of pure truth, constructed in the same way a worker in gold prepares an ornamental ring. The worker finds that the pure gold is too soft to be shaped, and must be mixed with an

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<sup>11</sup> Many critics have noted the link between the ring-maker's craft and Browning's gold-and-alloy image in Book I, most notably Mrs. Sutherland Orr in A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1910), Paul A. Cundiff in Browning's Ring Metaphor and Truth (New York: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972), and Donald S. Hair in Browning's Experiments with Genre (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

alloy to gain the necessary power of resistance. Browning found that his raw material was inadequate to his purposes as well, because it was too hard, too "crude".<sup>12</sup> In its existing state, it would have broken up under the artistic attempt to round it, and so he added

something else surpassing that,  
 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;  
 To wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,  
 Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,  
 As right through the ring and ring runs the djereed  
 And binds the loose, one bar without a break.  
 I fused my live soul and that inert stuff ...

(I.455-63)

Browning's alloy of "fancy"--his imagination and his experience--breathed the breath of life into the dead record.

The worker in gold spurts a fiery acid over the face of the gold ring to remove the alloy metal and restore a pure film of gold to the surface. Browning restored the pure narrative to the surface of the poem, knowing that his poetic imagination had contributed to the interior structure the quality which made the poem malleable and shapely.<sup>13</sup> When his ring of evidence had reformed, he could bid his readers to recognize unadulterated human truth in what he had set before them.<sup>14</sup>

Because truth is, on earth, always relative and subjective, never in pure form, and fused with its matrix of infinite complexity,

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<sup>12</sup> Orr, Handbook, pp. 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> Cundiff, Browning's Ring Metaphor, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Orr, Handbook, p. 77.

the search for truth in The Ring and The Book becomes a closely-reasoned examination of the nature of truth and the limitations of man's mind. The circular organization of the poem (reflected in the preceeding ring-image and the titles of the first and last books, "The Ring and The Book" and "The Book and The Ring," utilizes one of Browning's favourite images for truth. As in "Abt Vogler," the circle represents ultimate truth, and the arc of the circle, finite truth: "On earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round" (I. 72). Browning believed that the artist was gifted with insight into ultimate truth, and so the circle, limited to a single plane, becomes a symbol for the truth as the artist sees it. The sphere, with its infinite number of planes, represents the truth as God sees it.

As the years passed after the events of 1698, new lies crowded the memory of the case, and then the memory itself became like a pillar of a ruined temple which proved to be made of sandstone, not granite, and was worn away by "time's tooth" until only its "entablature,/. . .no bigger than a book remained" (l.660-66). The "entablature"--the sole remaining fragment of the Franceschini affair in all its detail--is transformed into the book it resembles: the "square old yellow book." The transmutation of entablature into book, and book into ring, is a symbolic anticipation of the theme of change which pervades the rest of the poem and is evidenced in the imagery.

A series of images dealing with regeneration and reluming also serve to describe the poetic process as it concerns the creation of the poem. The first image occurs in the figurative description of the poet's function, which

Repeats God's process in man's due degree,  
 Attaining man's proportionate result,--  
 Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.  
 Inalienable, the arch-prerogative  
 Which turns thought, act--conceives, expresses too!  
 No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,  
 May so protect his surplusage of soul  
 In search of body, so add self to self  
 By owning what lay ownerless before,--  
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms--  
 That, although nothing which had never life  
 Shall get life from him, be, not having been,  
 Yet, something dead may get to live again,...

(I.710-22)

A poet cannot actually create anything, Browning states, for that is God's function. But he can revivify half-dead sparks of life as Browning does with the events treated in the Old Yellow Book.

Browning conceives of this regeneration as a "reluming," a figurative conception introduced as

Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,--  
 Half-burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp  
 Stationed for temple service on this earth,

(I.728-30)

Eleven lines later, the poet continues with the figure; the regeneration now takes place upon a dead body in a tomb, but the notion of light and of reluming is still present:

I can detach from me, commission forth  
 Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage  
 O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,  
 May chance upon some fragment of the whole,  
 Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,  
 Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein  
 I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,  
 Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last  
 (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)  
 What shall be mistily seen, mumuringly heard,  
 Mistakenly felt:...

(I.742-52)

Finally, the process of regeneration and resuscitation is imaged in the revival of a corpse. The idea of bringing a dead body back to life is retained, but not the notion of fire or light:

Was not Elisha once?--  
 Who had bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.  
 There was no voice, no hearing: he went in  
 Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,  
 And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up  
 And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,  
 And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes  
 Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,  
 And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:  
 And he returned, walked to and fro the house,  
 And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,  
 And the eyes opened.

(I.753-64)

The pertinent point in this long passage is the imagery of resuscitation, regeneration and reluming "half-burned out wicks" or "something that fed fire once"--of the process by which the Old Yellow Book became The Ring and The Book.

All the monologuists of the following Books of the poem are introduced and basically sketched in terms of the imagery assigned to them to delineate their attitudes, viewpoints and personalities in Book I. Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome and Tertium Quid, the representatives of general sections of the populace are the "world's bystanders" (I.636) who "prattled" and "discoursed the right and wrong"

of the case, turning "wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep  
wolves,/So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece" (I.639-41),  
and who are imaged in circular motifs.

Half-Rome, the "world's outcry" (I.831) is a Guido-partisan,  
arranged

Around the rush and ripple of any fact  
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things;  
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,  
At what were figure and substance, by their splash:  
Then, by vibrations in the general mind,  
At depth of deed already out of reach.  
This threefold murder of the day before,--  
Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth;  
Honest enough, as the way is:all the same,  
Harbouring in the centre of its sense  
A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,  
To neutralize that honesty and leave  
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too.  
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,  
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,  
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold;  
So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide  
O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix  
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck.  
(I.833-50)

Half-Rome extends feelers into a pool to try to grasp the pebble of  
pure truth at the bottom, but is hampered by "the rush and ripple"  
of the coencentric circles of "fact" on the surface. This is Half-  
Rome's "source of swerving" (I.851) that causes his "Over-belief"  
(I.852) in Guido's cause. He is a victim of the "plague of squint"  
(I.871) which "for truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else" (I.873),  
"a fact/Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look" (I.855-56).

Other Half-Rome represents the "opposite feel/For truth  
with a like swerve, like unsuccess" (I.875-76). But Other Half-Rome  
sides with Pompilia "by no skill but more luck" "Because a fancy-fit

inclined that way,/Than with the husband" (I.877-80). He too gropes in the pool for the pebble of truth, which is obscured by his "lucky" opinion that Pompilia "seemed a saint and martyr both" (I.901). Other Half-Rome chooses her side instead of Guido's as he would two equally matched runners in a race (I.880-83).

The circular motif also appears in reference to Tertium Quid who represents "The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat as it were,/And finer sense o' the city" (910-11). He prefers to "sift a business from the bran/Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort" (I.915-16). The "reasoned statement" (I.912) of Tertium Quid's "critical mind" is framed "in silvery and selectest phrase" (I.925) to his peers

Who take snuff softly, ranged in well-bred ring,  
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,  
Around the argument, the rational word--  
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample speech.  
(I.931-34)

Color, light, and fire imagery are closely related in The Ring and The Book. This is first evidenced in Book I in the sections dealing with Count Guido Franceschini. The sun, or sunset, at Castelnuovo, where Pompilia and Caponsacchi stay for the night and where Guido overtakes them, is a "sudden bloody splendour poured/Curse-wise in his departure by the day" (I.505-6). Browning uses white light and colored light in opposition to each other, the contrast having the same literal frame of reference as the traditional connotations between white and black, and white light and the obscuration of light. Hence, Guido becomes imaged as a star obscured by fog:



I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,  
 And did touch and depose their treasure on,  
 As Guido Franceschini took away  
 Pompilia to be his forevermore,  
 While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,  
 Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"  
 I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,  
 Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell.  
 (I.532-39)

The Comparini see Guido as a "star" of nobility to wed their daughter,  
 but the star becomes a diabolic figure transmitted into fire, which  
 in "baffled hate" of Pompilia prepares

to wring the uttermost revenge  
 From body and soul thus left them: all was sure,  
 Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,  
 The victim stripped and prostrate: ...  
 (I.572-76)

This perverse ring-image of evil and beastly spirits combined with fire  
 imagery, gives way to the picture of Guido and his hired murderers who  
 "Glimmeringly" "pad/The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,"

And all five found and footed it, the track,  
 To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light  
 Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,  
 While and inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,  
 And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth.  
 (I.605-11)

Color, light and fire are subtly fused in this scene where the light  
 inside the Comparini villa reflects safety and assurance, and is  
 opposed by the darkness outside where the murderers lurk.

Guido's hellish qualities are imaged after his apprehension  
 by the law in his "close" and "fetid" cell where he lies "despite the  
 smoke/o' the burning." The "tarriers" who stand at the "pit's  
 mouth" arguing pro and con about the case (I.645-49) anticipate the  
 "smoke and rumour" (I.935) of the two halves of Rome. But the

wrangling of the populace cannot compare to the testimony of the major characters:

So much for Rome and rumour, smoke comes first:  
 Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry  
 Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit  
 To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge  
 According to its food, or pure or foul.  
 (I.935-39)

Continuing the fire imagery, Guido "calls black white," his words like "Eruption momentary at the most, / Modified for truth by a fall o' the fire" (I.960-62). Guido is "wrapped in folds of red" (I.1292) suggesting the proximity of the fires of hell, reiterated in the passage

Where the hot vapor of an agony,  
 Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down--  
 Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears--  
 (I.1279-81)

The fusion of color, light and fire imagery to suggest evil, wickedness, and violence, as well as Guido's hellish qualities, is also reflected in the religious imagery assigned to him. Often, scriptural references are reversed in meaning. The enormity of Guido's crime is emphasized

When, at a known name, whispered through the door  
 Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,  
 It opened that the joyous hearts inside  
 Might welcome as it were an angel guest  
 Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup  
 And satisfy the loving ones he saved;  
 And did so welcome devils and their death?  
 (I.388-94)

The passage is a reversal of Heb. 13:2 ("Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares") and Rev. 3:20 ("Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man

hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me").

Guido is also figured as Satan, "the Prince o' the Power of the Air" (I.560) from Eph. 2:2, and as Lucifer (I.617), "the son of light." In opposition to the roles of negative religious roles, he is also Job (I.955, 1265), the suffering man tempted and tortured by Satan.

Guido is most vividly imaged in animal terms, appearing first as a "brute beast" elephant who punishes his "naughty spouse" (I.231-33). He is also "the main monster" (I.545) of a "satyr-family," (I.564), a werewolf (I.605-11), a wolf (I.620-23, 640-41),/and a sheep (I.640-41). The pertinent point in this animal imagery is the confusion incurred when the distinctions between positive and negative connotations are difficult to discern, so that

A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,  
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf,-  
Vex truth a little longer:...

(I.650-52)

In terms of his diabolic qualities, Guido has a "monster" in his heart, "Which crime coiled with connivancy at crime--/His victim's breast he tells you, hatched and reared;/Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell" (I.807-10), Guido thus becomes imaged as a snake, and also as "part man part monster" (I.1286), and finally a "tiger cat" who

screams now, that whined before,  
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,  
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined;  
Then you know how the bristling fury foams.

(I.1288-91)

Guido, the trapped creature, rages in his cell because he has been "the star-like pest" figured as a "bloated bubble" of disease which descended upon Pompilia. Guido was "stationed ... to suck up and absorb"

The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again  
 That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,  
 Back to Arezzo and a palace there--  
 Or say, a fissure in the honest earth  
 Whence long ago had curled the vapor first,  
 Blown big by nether fires to appal day:  
 It touched home, broke and blasted far and wide.  
 (I.549-56)

Giusseppe Caponsacchi, "the young frank personable priest" (I.1014), is first imaged in Book I as an "actor in the piece" (I.377) who plays his part in the tragedy, "A spectacle for men and angels" (I.498). This image recalls I. Cor. 4:9 "For I think God hath set forth us ... as it were appointed to the death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and unto angels, and unto men." This theatre-image is reiterated as the "Man and priest" (I.1009) is described as a "puppet" "plucked at and perplexed" (I.1013), bewildered at his position which stems from his dual nature:

Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,  
 And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,  
 A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames  
 By law of love and mandate of the mode.  
 (I.1015-18)

"The Church's own" servant, he has played St. George to Pompilia's Cleodolinda, "bearing away the lady in his arms" (I.581) to save her from Guido's tyranny. This dichotomy in his character is a cause for confusion so that he cannot be distinguished as sheep or wolf (I.650-52).

Pompilia, the "blood-smutch" on the robe of the Pope who must judge her innocence or guilt, is figured as "a saint, /Martyr and miracle" (I.204-5) by Other Half-Rome, and as "A miracle, ay--of lust and impudence" (I.207) by Half-Rome. This confusion is extended in the imagery assigned to her in Book I. The "treasure" (I.533) of her parents, Pompilia is a prisoner trapped in a "cage and torture-place" (I.496) by Guido at Arezzo. She is a "victim stripped and prostrate" (I.576), helpless and at the mercy of Guido and his family. Pompilia is also confused with sheep and wolves by the populace, and is imaged as a worm of hell by Guido (I.1281).

The most powerful imagistic description of Pompilia occurs in the scene depicting her dying. She is surrounded by "inquisitive" "folk" (I.1075) who, in an extension of the circle motif,

Encircle the low pallet where she lies  
 In the good house that helps the poor to die,--

. . . . .

          busy helpful ministrants  
 As varied in their calling as their mind,  
 Temper and age: and yet from all of these,  
 About the white bed under the arched roof,  
 Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one,--  
 Small separate sympathies combined and large,  
 Nothings that were, grown something very much:  
 As if the bystanders gave each his straw,  
 All he had, though a trifle in itself,  
 Which, plaited all together, made a Cross  
 Fit to die looking on and praying with,  
 Just as well as if ivory or gold.

(I.1076-91)

The image suggests Pompilia's Christ-like character, which has a sanctifying effect on the people surrounding her. The passage anticipates "the circle of truth perfect in whiteness" which appears

in her monologue, and the Pope's "circle of experience" in which is contained the truth of God.

The descriptions of the two lawyers, Dominus Hyancinthus de Archangelis, Guido's defence council, and Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinus, the prosecutor, are preceded by an indictment of the "frothy talk" of the courts which teaches "common sense its helplessness" (I.1098-99). The law is imaged as a machine in a circle motif:

the recognized machine,  
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel  
Framed to unchoke, pump and pour apace  
Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world?  
The patent truth-extracting process,--ha?  
Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel,  
Give you a single grind of the law at least!  
(I.1112-19)

Archangelis, Guido's lawyer, is a "jolly learned man of middle age,/Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law" (I.1123-24).

This Epicurian is figured by food imagery. He

Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,  
And, just as the roast lamb would never be,  
Makes logic levigate the big crime small:  
Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,  
Conceives and inchoates the argument,  
Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,  
--Ovidian quip, or Ciceronian crank,  
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,  
As he had fritters deep down frying there.  
How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing  
Shall be--first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc.  
Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,  
Leaving yourselves to fill up the middle bulk  
O' the trial, ...

(I.1143-56)

Just as too rich and filling a meal tires and deadens the senses,  
Archangelis strives "To tranquilize, conciliate, and secure,/And

above all, public anxiety/To quiet" (I.1132-34) in favour of Guido.

Bottinus, the prosecutor, is a "composite" (I.1166) man,  
 "Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth" (I.1168):

Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,  
 And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed  
 With sudden age, bright devastated hair.  
 (I.1189-91)

His presentation of the case against Guido is like

some finished butterfly,  
 Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,  
 That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,  
 Or cabbage-bed it had production from.  
 (I.1160-63)

A "Clavecinist debarred his instrument," Bottinus still "thrums"  
 (I.1201-2) the "cold black score" (I.1208) of the case in favour of  
 Pompilia. Within this motif of musical imagery, he practices his  
 "gift of eloquence" (I.1171) and language that "goes easy as a glove,  
 O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one" (I.1172-73). His "Rash-  
 ness helps caution with him, fires the straw,/In free enthusiastic  
 careless fit" (I.1174-75) to vindicate Pompilia.

The "great good old" Pope Innocent (I.322) is a humble,  
 purely spiritual character whose "own meal costs but five carlines a  
 day,/Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more" (I.320-21).  
 Startled from his "dog-sleep" (I.295) by the murder trial, this  
 "Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute" man (I.1214) recognizes in  
 subsequent Books that the question of Guido's guilt and of Pompilia's  
 and Caponsacchi's innocence cannot be resolved by natural or human  
 law, as the lawyers try to do. He will apply God's law as he under-  
 stands it; and this means reviewing the case with a mind inspired and

guided by the lightest and noblest emotions of which man is capable. In the end, the confusion and conflicting details of the case call for him to distinguish between the white and black elements of the case (I.1222-23).<sup>15</sup>

To climax Book I, Browning leads the reader "from the level of to-day/Up to the summit of so long ago" (I.1323-33). In this introductory Book of the poem, the view of the country of The Ring and The Book and therefore of all human existence seen from the summit inspires Browning to express his faith that there is a divine unity in the variety of life:

Rather learn and love  
Each facet-flash of the revolving year!--  
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,  
The variance now, the eventual unity,  
Which made the miracle. See it for yourselves,  
This man's act, changeable because alive!  
(I.1352-57)

Man is included in this variety to a point where all ages mingle, and the Roman murder trial is allowed to take place again as if in the present. For the lessons taught in the story of The Ring and The Book are timeless:

Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,  
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,  
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:  
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,  
Shifted a hair's breadth shoots you dark for bright,  
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so  
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.  
Once set such orbs,--white styled, black stigmatized,--

---

<sup>15</sup> Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, pp. 68-69.



A-rolling, see them once on the other side  
Your good men and your bad men every one,  
From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,  
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.  
(I.1359-70).

## CHAPTER TWO

Books II, III, and IV contain the monologues of Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome and Tertium Quid, whom Browning uses to express the various judgments of the common populace and the upper class concerning the Franceschini affair. These speakers give opinions and arguments which distort the narrative to fit their biased views. The personalities of all three speakers are important in terms of the imagery they use in telling the story and in pronouncing judgments upon the persons involved in it. The imagery conveys the attitudes of each speaker and the cast of his mind, especially in terms of intellectual and spiritual depth.

-I-

### Book II - "Half-Rome"

In Book II, Half-Rome demonstrates an instinctive sympathy for Guido, who, in his opinion, is a husband made to look ridiculous and a nobleman threatened with an ignominious death. Meeting an acquaintance outside the church of San Lorenzo, where the bodies of the Comparini lie exposed to view, Half-Rome tells his "authoritative" account of the events of the case. He is frank, opinionated, self-confident, and sure of the rightness of his convictions and the accuracy of his knowledge of the case. He sees part of the cause of the trouble in the social environment which allows husbands to be publicly betrayed and held up to scorn while depriving them of the right to take personal vengeance, and forcing them to rely on an inadequate legal system:

If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,  
 Master or men--touch one hair of the five,  
 Then I say in the name of all that's left  
 Of honor in Rome, civility i' the world  
 Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source,--  
 There's an end to all hope of justice more.

(II. 1460-66)

The key to Half-Rome's stance is that he is hardly a detached observer. He reveals that, like Guido, he "keeps" a wife to whose window comes a "certain what's-his-name and jackanapes/Somewhat too civil of eyes with lute and song" (II. 1533-35). In other words, Half-Rome identifies Guido's domestic troubles with his own. Thus, his disqualifying bias is revealed: his version of the story is invalid because of his prejudice that, born of personal sympathy with Guido, affects and influences his discourse and judgment.

Half-Rome not only identifies his situation with that of Guido, but attempts to universalize the situation to include his listener and all the husbands of Rome:

What are we blind? How can we fail to learn  
 This crown of miseries make the man a mark,  
 Accumulate on one devoted head  
 For our example? --yours and mine who read ~  
 Its lesson thus-- "Henceforward let none dare  
 Stand, like a natural in the public way,  
 Letting the very urchins twitch his beard  
 And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,  
 Be styled a male-Grissel or else modern Job!"

(II. 1469-77)

And later:

All which is worse for Guido, but, be frank--  
 The better for you and me and all the world,  
 Husbands of wives, especially in Rome.

(II. 1526-28)

Half-Rome's viewpoint cannot be objective because he is involved in the kind of society where the crafty, the selfish, and the worldly-wise pursue their amoral ways. Self-respect is gained only by preserving one's honor. Half-Rome's argument insists that men like Guido are representative of the virtues of civilized society. Any of Guido's negative qualities are glossed over as necessary for the preservation of his honor. Thus, Guido's defence by honoris causa is entirely plausible to Half-Rome. He states that if his wife had been murdered earlier by the Count, when he found her in flight, the world would have understood it as an act of "natural law." Had he

--exacted his just debt  
 By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe  
 Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,  
 And with that axe, if providence so pleased,  
 Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,  
 In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,  
 --Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,

. . . . .  
 I say, the world had praised the man....  
 (II. 1481-93)

Half-Rome cannot see that this interpretation of honor runs counter to God's law. Instead, he sees it as a natural virtue which corresponds to the customs of "civilized" society. Therefore, his approach to the situation is a crude misrepresentation of the truth, revealing his own spiritual condition.

Half-Rome is not a profound or subtle person; his monologue offers few difficulties and complexities. His purpose is to tell the story; nevertheless he is interested in winning the listener over to his point of view. His method of imagistic persuasion is partly name-

calling, but he is also skillful in exhibiting resourcefulness within his imagistic connotations. Half-Rome's images tend to involve the total situation in terms leaving no doubt as to where his sympathies lie.

It is evident that for Half-Rome woman is the villain of the piece and the direct cause of the tragedy. Twice he applies the "Eve" figure--to Violante and Pompilia--to indicate a woman's deceiving of an unsuspecting husband. Of Violante, he says she added lie to lie,

lest Eve's rule decline  
Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot  
Throve dubiously since turned fool's-paradise,  
Spite of a nightingale on every stump.  
(II. 251-54)

He describes Caponsacchi as a "Lucifer/I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured/Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall" (II. 166-68). Violante is the chief object of attack: "It was Violante gave the first offence" (II. 33); "She who had caught one fish, could make that catch/A bigger still, in angler's policy" (II. 268-69); "Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all,/All the lie hers" (II. 550-51). But the language is hardly distinguishable when applied to Pompilia--"Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,/The way to put suspicion to the blush!" (II. 859-60). Both could

Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick,  
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,  
Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool  
Her (husband) into patience: so it proved.  
(II. 74-77)

Half-Rome sees the "worm i' the core, the germ/O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived" (II. 208-9) in the "Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counter-blast" (II. 501) of the whole Comparini family.

In the pervasive "angler" figure, Violante plays the scheming and skilled caster, Pompilia the bait, and Guido the unsuspecting victim. Half-Rome introduces the image immediately after picturing Violante in terms of Eve ruling over her Adam:

She who had caught one fish, could make the catch  
 A bigger still, in angler's policy:  
 So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,  
 Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb  
 And tossed to mid-stream; which means, this grown girl  
 With the great eyes and bounty of black hair  
 And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,  
 Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped.  
 (II. 268-75)

The image is reiterated in "Such were the pinks and grays about the bait/Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all" (II. 339-40). The last treachery of the Comparini is imaged as:

yes, the pair  
 Who, as I told you, first had baited hook  
 With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,  
 Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore  
 And gutted him, --now found a further use  
 For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again  
 I' the way of a new swimmer passed their stand.  
 (II. 1345-50)

All references to Guido in Half-Rome's monologue are interlaced with references to poison to represent his mental and emotional suffering in terms of intense physical pain. The recurrence of this image, used figuratively and literally, builds a subtle kind of sympathy for the Count. The notion of marrying Pompilia is presented first as a kind of healing balm after a lifetime of frustration and disappointment: "What if he gained this much,/Wrung out of this sweet drop from the bitter Past" (II. 322-23)? This use of "drop" is echoes with sharply different overtones when Pompilia leaves him, and the Comparini continue to plot against him:

on Guido's wound  
 Ever in due succession, drop by drop,  
 Came slow distillment from the alembic here  
 Set on to simmer by Canidian hate,  
 Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw.  
 (II. 1258-62)

Later, speaking of the same plot, Half-Rome says: "Let a scorpion nip,/ And never mind till he contorts his tail!/But there was sting i' the creature; thus it struck" (II. 1296-98). The poison image becomes literal as Pompilia is advised by her parents to put poison in Guido's cup and make her escape. The final use of the figure recalls the earlier ones:

Come, here's the last drop does its worst to wound,  
 Here's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,  
 Your boasted still's full strain and strength: not so!  
 One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth  
 The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence.  
 (II. 1364-68)

In the same vein, but not as fully developed or intense, is the image of Pompilia as a "plague-seed set to fester in [Guido's] sound flesh" (II. 624). Half-Rome's speech lessens the tragedy of the story. He belittles it to the point where it becomes a ludicrous, farcical performance:

Here was a priest found out in masquerade,  
 A wife caught playing truant if no more;  
 While the Count, mortified in mien enough,  
 And, nose to face, an added palm in length,  
 Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him:  
 (II. 1044-48)

Approximately two-thirds of the images in Book II are brief, qualitative, static types used for their sympathetic or prejudicial connotations. For example, Pompilia is variously represented as a "noisome lazar badge" (II. 627), a "plague-seed" (II. 624), a "cur-cast creature" (II. 632), a "poor rag" (II. 628), a scorpion (II. 1296), a

snake (II. 232), and a "find in a filth-heap" (II. 553). The relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi is represented as analagous to that between a fox and a chick, and in a second instance,

Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,  
He's risk his brush for your particular chick,  
When the wide town's his hen-roost!  
(II. 830-32)

Again, Pompilia and Caponsacchi are likened to Apollo and the snake transfixed upon his spear:

there posed he  
Sending his god-glance after his shot shaft,  
Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake  
Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires.  
(II. 784-87)

There is a preponderance of images from nature--plants, animals, birds and insects. In Book I the association of image patterns with the chief figures of the poem was begun. Guido was associated with fire and voracious animals. Since Half-Rome is sympathetic with Guido, these unflattering associations receive little emphasis in Book II, but are not entirely missing. Guido is represented as a lion (II. 1114-15), a wolf (II 1081) and directly as a badger that "shows his teeth" to the fox, Caponsacchi (II. 857-58). Guido's vengeance, the murder, is a "wash of hell-fire" (II. 1427). Guido is also a beast of burden (II. 387) and a "ferreting, poor soul" (II. 1059) as well as a dog,

trooping after, piteously,  
Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now--  
No honor set firm on its feet once more....  
(II. 1052-54)

Caponsacchi is imaged as another fish for Pompilia to catch (II. 271) and as a fox for Guido to sniff out (II. 816, 830). Half-Rome imbues the priest with disagreeable overtones of furtiveness and treachery



so that Guido appears harassed and preyed-upon.

No particular themes were advanced in Book I for Pompilia, but in Book II appear two imagistic themes that are reinforced, with many variations, in all the monologues that follow: the plant image, and the preyed-upon animal image. Pompilia is actually the daughter of a prostitute, whom Violante took to rear as her own. Pompilia is beautiful, and according to some of the speakers, pure and innocent, even saintly. Hence, the plant images usually contrast her beauty with her shameful origin. She is a "rose-bud from the prickly brake" (II. 324), varied to become "a find in the filth-heap" (II. 553) and a "jewel in the much" (II. 560). When Pompilia marries Guido and moves to Arezzo she is "striking fresh root in new soil" (II. 392-93); once there, she is a "graft . . . on (Guido's) ancient stock" (II. 622-23); and when she leaves, she "shift(s) her root/From the old cold shade and unhappy soil/Into a generous ground that fronts the south" (II. 1189-92). Half-Rome scoffingly refers to Pompilia as a "lamb-like innocent of fifteen years" (II. 905), and represents Guido and Pompilia as "the wolf and sheep turned litigants" (II. 1181) in which it is difficult to judge whether Pompilia or Guido is the sheep. For the most part, however, Pompilia is imaged as an animal in prejudicial terms. She is a snake (II. 232, 786, 1434), a "Catch from the kennel" (II. 553), of "bestial birth" (II. 604), and a scorpion (II. 1296).

The color images of Book II range from the "pinks and greys about the bait" (II. 339), representing the worldly advantages offered to Guido by the proposed marriage to Pompilia, to the image of Pompilia as a gilded fly, (II. 1347), the gilding, like the pink and

grey, in obvious contrast to whiteness, and thus tainted and morally corrupt in Half-Rome's view. In a theatre image, the tragedy is a "stealing sombre element" that eventually makes all "black or blood-red in the piece" (II. 618-20). Red is again used symbolically in an image representing the events leading up to the murder as a red line, a maze, leading "from source to sea" (II. 182-84). The connotations of black and white become confused as Pompilia sues for divorce. Guido's cruelty, his mother's malice, and his brother's hate "Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths/Blackened its centre" (II. 1278-82). This image suggests the "obscene ring" in Book I in which Browning describes Pompilia's encirclement by the Franceschini family. The confusion is reiterated when Half-Rome states that Guido "killed them all" to bathe "his name clean in their blood" (II. 1428). In the same vein, Pompilia is figured as the traditional "black" female, the "black-eyed babe" (II. 243) with a "bounty of black hair" (II. 273) who captures Guido, "Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all" (II. 242)<sup>1</sup>. Half-Rome depicts Pompilia as "pink[ing] her man/Prettily" "With a flourish of red all round it" (II. 1020-31).

The light imagery includes Caponsacchi as an "officious orb" that brings eclipse to Guido's solar "system" (II. 837-38); a "love star," its rise and "stand at fiery full" (II. 1065); a plant shifted from the shade to sunlight; a stormy sky in opposition to a clear one

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<sup>1</sup>Song of Solomon 4: 9: "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes . . ."

to contrast trouble and peace of mind (II.218-20); and the further opposition of light and dark as "a gleam i' the gloom" (II.322) signifying the attraction that Pompilia had for Guido in his age and disillusionment.

Half-Rome, whose auditor is a cousin of the man suspected of flirting with Half-Rome's wife, and whose narration is conditioned by his own personal predicament, uses the fire image in reference to the relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi. When speaking of the letters purported to have been found by Guido at the inn at Castelnuovo, Half-Rome states:

All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair  
 Since the first timid trembling into life  
 O' the love-star till its stand at fiery full.  
 (II.1063-65)

And later, quoting "law", concerning letters that were supposed to have been received by Pompilia from Caponsacchi before the flight, he says: "she read no more than wrote" and "burned them, quenched the fire in smoke" (II.1128-31). Appropriately enough, to the jealous husband, furtive love is "fiery" and love-letters are "fire". The image connotes not only passion but also the inflammatory nature inherent in the elicited exchange of letters. The speaker hopes to impress upon his auditor the destructive and tragic consequences of such a love.<sup>2</sup>

Guido's vengeance is a "wash of hell-fire" (II.1427) that is the result of his "overburdened mind" when "what was a brain became a blaze" (II.1380-81). In contrast, Caponsacchi, the "officious orb," is a love-star which

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<sup>2</sup>Christopher G. Katope, Patterns of Imagery in Robert Browning's The Ring and The Book (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1955), pp. 72-73.

Did in a trice turn up with life and light,--  
 The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,  
 The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!

(II. 772-75)

A Guido-Satan relationship is suggested in Book II through a single image consistent with the identification with Satan in other parts of the poem. The figure concerns Pompilia's situation at Arezzo after her parents have left:

Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed  
 In rubric by the enemy on his rounds  
 As eligible, as fit place of prey,  
 Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!  
 Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,  
 Presently at the window taps a horn,  
 And Satan's by your fireside, never fear!

(II. 759-65)

This image recalls similar ones in Book I, but here Half-Rome's judgment is not the same as Browning's. He couples hell with the fires of vengeance not to stress Guido's evil nature, but to show that the Count's actions are those of an unjustly and repeatedly provoked husband seeking retribution from Pompilia and the priest of "life and light." The girl who "light[s.] the dark house" at Arezzo is also a "candle-flame" (II. 449) that sings the wings of the Guido-fly.

-II-

### Book III - "Other Half-Rome"

Book III deals with Other-Half Rome's version of the story. He is a bachelor, and therefore little concerned with the honor of husbands. His sympathies are with Pompilia, whom he envisions as a pure and hapless flower of a girl lingering on her deathbed as if by a miracle. Other Half-Rome has deep sensibilities which allow him to

eulogize Pompilia with reverence. The bulk of his monologue is a judicious weighing of evidence on both sides--until he reveals he is personally interested in the case because he is nursing a long-standing grievance against Guido stemming from the Count's claim to an estate<sup>3</sup> Other Half-Rome administered. Thus, he considers Guido's objection to his performance on that trust a stain upon his honor as malign as that Guido has suffered according to Half-Rome:

One's honor forsooth? Does that take hurt alone  
 From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,  
 Being yet sensitive in my degree  
 As Guido, --must discover hurt elsewhere  
 Which, half compounded for in days gone by,  
 May profitably break out now afresh,  
 Need cure from my own expeditious hands.  
 The lie that was, as it were, imputed me  
 When you objected to my contract's clause,--  
 The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,  
 When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,  
 To my administration of effects,  
 --Aha, do you think law disposed of these?  
 My honor's touched and shall deal death all around!  
 (II. 1668-81)

Three qualities of Other Half-Rome distinguish him from Half-Rome: his greater susceptibility to beauty, his vulnerability to pity, and his greater intellectual grasp of character and events.<sup>4</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup>Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, p. 43, have suggested that Guido expected an uncle to die "and leave me his estate" (II. 588). They speculate whether the uncle did die and favour Guido in his will, or if he was cheated out of his legacy by Other Half-Rome.

<sup>4</sup>These characteristics are mentioned by A. K. Cook, A Commentary Upon Browning's The Ring and The Book (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), pp. 53-4; W.C. DeVane in A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), pp. 331; and Louise Snitslaar in Sidelights on The Ring and The Book (Amsterdam: Pronto, 1934), p. 34.

characteristics offer a vehicle for Browning's dynamic and accretive imagistic technique through the variety and unity of the imagery in Book III. The subtle transformations, blendings, and cross-references gradually synthesize the developing patterns of imagery as the poem progresses.

Pompilia is the focal point of Book III. Other Half-Rome's purpose in speaking is to defend her, to vindicate her reputation, and to preserve the memory of her goodness after her death. Other Half-Rome describes Pompilia in terms which characterize her as saint--"Thus saintship is effected probably" (III.111) as she seems to live by divine intervention: "Alive, i' the ruins. 'Tis a miracle" (III.7). The power of her presence stems from her pathetic, helpless nature imbued with goodness and purity:

Here is the dying wife who smiles and says  
 "So it was, --so it was not, --how it was,  
 I never knew nor ever care to know--"  
 Till they all weep, physician, man of law . . .  
 (III.789-92)

For Other Half-Rome, "we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,/Must ask, --we cannot else, absolving her" (III. 809-10). He emphasizes the calmness and credibility of Pompilia's story, quoting her placid dying moments: "For her part,/Pompilia quietly constantly avers" (III. 903-4); "as she avers this with calm mouth/Dying I do think "Credible!" you'd cry" (III. 919-20). This tranquility captures the spirit of the girl he has idealized into a martyr and a saint.

A single non-figurative passage introduces the motif of Pompilia as the Virgin Mary. The speaker tells us that Maratta, who "paints virgins so," slips into the room where Pompilia lies dying and

begins to sketch her (III. 59-63). This is not an attempt to equate Pompilia with the Virgin in Book III, but rather anticipates more conclusive evidence later, constantly reinforced throughout the poem. Like the Guido-fire relationship, it is usually presented obliquely. Pompilia and the Virgin are brought into conjunction too often to be without significance.

The animal imagery of Book III is concentrated on the character of Pompilia. She is first seen as a lamb for sale in the marketplace as her marriage is arranged:

As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,  
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,  
Bears while they chaffer, . . .

(III. 462-64)

Later, Guido's proponents depict her as a worm that turns on him (III. 1280-82) after he had thought her to be his "restif lamb. . . cherished in his breast," that ate

". . . from his hand, and (drank) from out his cup,  
The while his fingers pushed their loving way  
Through curl on curl of that soft coat -- alas,  
And she all silvery baaed gratitude  
While meditating mischief!"

(III. 1296-1300)

The most prevalent animal images applied to Pompilia in Book III are those of birds. Maratta, the portrait-painter, describes her face "shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,/That hatches you anon a snow-white chick" (III. 64-5). Pompilia is viewed as the tragic heroine of the story who "Has had undue experience how much crime/A heart can hatch" (III. 107-8). Other Half-Rome believes that her troubles began when Violante bought her to raise as her own child:

This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped,  
 She had picked from where it waited the footfall,  
 And put it in her own breast till it broke forth finch  
 Able to sing God praise on mornings now.

(III. 215-18)

Raised by the Comparini, Pompilia becomes "a rare bird" and a phoenix (III. 335), is married to Guido, endures his cruelty for a time, and then escapes:

"God put it in my head to fly,  
 As when the martin migrates: autumn claps  
 Her hands, cries 'Winter's coming, will be here,  
 Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!  
 Flee! . . .'"

(III. 1116-20)

When she gives birth to her son, Gaetano, Pompilia is imaged as a dove protecting her nest from predators:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The "white teeth" may also be construed as the fangs of a Guido-animal.

<sup>6</sup>The legalities of the Franceschini affair are often confusing. When Pompilia was acquired by Pietro and Violante, a considerable dowry was settled for her. Pietro ceded his freehold property to Guido upon the occasion of the marriage, and the remainder of his estate, a usufruct (lands and tenements that can be used but not alienated from the head of the owning family) was to pass to Pompilia or to her lawful heir at Pietro's death. Guido was angered when he did not receive all the Comparini holdings, and at the birth of Gaetano, realized that they would pass to the child. Hence, the plans for murder to gain the property.



So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come  
 For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,  
 And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart  
 To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,  
 For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk  
 Contest the prize, . . . .

(III. 1526-31)

The bird theme is a variation on the helpless animal imagery that has represented Pompilia to this point. Usually the images are of an inoffensive and beautiful bird, though in Guido's monologues she will become a bird of prey, a contrast resulting from the device of using like images content with opposite connotations for the same person in two books with opposed points of view. In Book III, the Pompilia-bird group consists of the dove, finch, martin, peacock, and two unspecified birds. The connection of this image group with the animal group is revealed by the fact that the bird is often at the mercy of an animal or predatory bird.

In conjunction then, with the Pompilia-as-bird imagery, are the images of traps and decoy. Pompilia describes her situation at Arezzo:

The bird says, "So I fluttered where a springe  
 Caught me: the springe did not contrive itself,  
 That I know: who contrived it, God forgive!"  
 (III. 806-8)

Other Half-Rome wonders, "How of the part played by that same decoy/I' the catching, caging, was himself caught first" (III. 811-12)? The underlying significance of this series of images is to figure Pompilia as the bird, Guido as the trap, and Caponsacchi as the decoy. Using the analogy, Other Half-Rome ponders the moral considerations raised by Caponsacchi's bold rescue of Pompilia. In addition, the conception of

Guido as a mechanism anticipates a view made explicit later in Book III and succeeding Books of the poem:

Accordingly did Guido set himself  
 To worry up and down, across, around,  
 The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars,--  
 Chase her about the coop of daily life,  
 Having first stopped each outlet thence save one,  
 Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,  
 She needs must seize as sole way of escape  
 Though there was tied and twittering a decoy  
 To seem as if it tempted, --just the plume  
 O' the popinjay, not a real respite there  
 From tooth and claw of something in the dark,--  
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

(III. 774-85)

The ferret-Guido becomes metamorphosized into a "springe," or snare, the bird and decoy remaining the same in the previously quoted images (III. 3.806-12). Finally only the decoy and trap are explicitly figurative. The snare becomes a pit, over which is fixed the lure of the decoy:

But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,  
 The man who tortured thus the woman, thus  
 Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure  
 Over the pit should bury body and soul!  
 (III. 1350-53)

In Book III, Caponsacchi is only figured as an animal in one line: he is "Lamb-pure, lion-brave" (III.29). But Guido is a mouse "overburly for rat's hole" (III. 415), "an uncaged beast" whose claws Pompilia begs to have taken "from out her flesh" (III. 962, 967), "a beast below beast in brutishness" (III. 1293), who moves in "the wild-cat's way" (III. 1318). When the Comparini flee from Arezzo, Guido is "Left . . . lord o' the prey, as the lion is" (III. 533). Pompila's parents figure him as a fox as they plot their action against him:

"Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox;/Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all" (III.639-40). Suing the Comparini for misrepresentation concerning Pompila's origins, Guido is defeated in his attempt for damages,<sup>7</sup> and "Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl/worm-like, and so away with his defeat/To other fortune and a novel prey" (III.693-95). The Comparini have seen Guido's true qualities, his "wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell" (III.987), and Pompilia, driven to attach him with his own sword at the inn, "would have pinned him through the poison-bag/To the wall and left him there to palpitate,/As you serve scorpions" (III.1160-62).

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<sup>7</sup>The suits and counter-suits of the story progressed as following: when the Comparini fled from Arezzo, they alleged publicly that Guido had been brutal to them and to Pompilia. The parents returned to Rome, where Violante, taking advantage of the Pope's Jubilee, went to Church to be absolved of her sin concerning the lie of the origins of Pompilia's birth. She was absolved. The Comparini then attempted to have the marriage annulled on the basis of their misrepresentation, and sued to recover the dowry and to nullify Pietro's cession of property to Guido. The courts refused to interfere in the possession of the dowry, but ordered Guido to return the property back to Pietro. Both sides appealed the verdict, and the suits were still pending when the remaining events took place.

When the Castelnuovo affair took place, Guido produced a sheaf of letters he claimed the couple had exchanged, and had them charged with adultery and flight. The Roman court found them guilty-- Pompilia was sent to live with the Convertite nuns, and Caponsacchi was banished to Civita Vecchia. Thereupon Guido began divorce proceedings against Pompilia, and the Comparini in turn began proceedings against him on Pompilia's behalf.

In a final animal image, Guido's defeat is figured in dog-terms as the Count "ne'er showed teeth at all,/whose bark had promised biting; but just sneaked/Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs" (III. 1453-55).

Pompilia is most prominently imaged in Book III as a plant. The first references are to her "flower-like" (III. 6, 72) physical beauty. Other Half-Rome then proceeds to describe her as she is dying, in order to castigate those who now admire her but used to ignore her pleas for help:

'Tis just a flower's fate: past parterre we trip,  
Till peradventure some one plucks our sleeve--  
"Yon blossom at the brier's end, that's the rose  
Two jealous people fought for yesterday  
And killed each other: see, there's undisturbed  
A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!"  
Then cry we, "Ah, the perfect paragon!"  
Then crave we "Just one keepsake leaf for us!"  
Truth lies between: there's anyhow a child  
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,  
Ruined:--

(III. 75-85)

Other Half-Rome's treatment of the characters is for the most part sympathetic. Not only is Pompilia pictured in dignified, reverent terms, but even Violante is seen as a mother acting for the good of her child. Pietro is treated with pity rather than as a fool. Other Half-Rome uses little sarcasm or humour, preferring the serious approach, seeing the "fatal germ" "Out of the very ripeness of life's core/A worm was bred" (III. 143-47) in the Comparinis' lack of an heir to inherit their fortune. In contrast to Half-Rome, Other Half-Rome uses the Eden image to emphasize woman's weakness and mistaken judgment, rather than woman's deceit and greed: "Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more:/Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste,/So,

plucked it" (III. 169-71). Other Half-Rome sees Pompilia's tragic situation resulting, in part, from this intense desire for an heir that brought about her acquisition:

"Our life shall leave no fruit."  
 Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,  
 Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn  
 And keep the kind up; not supplant themselves  
 But put in evidence, record they were,  
 Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child.  
 (III. 147-52)

Pompilia was raised like a precious flower by Violante and Pietro, reiterating a circle motif:

Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,  
 Joining the other round her preciousness--  
 Two walls that go about a garden-plot  
 Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole  
 Of some tongue-leaved, eye-figured Eden tree,  
 Filched by two exiles and borne far away, . . .  
 (III. 231-36)

But Guido was to guess "through the sheath that saved" Pompilia "from the sun" to find this "Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf" (III. 365-66). For Other Half-Rome, Pompilia, like a white lily, represents both beauty and purity in their ideal forms. When Guido is presented to them as a match for their daughter, the Comparini are incredulous:

How somebody had somehow somewhere seen  
 Their tree-top-tuft of bloom above the wall,  
 And came now to apprise them the tree's self . . .  
 (III. 380-82)

Other Half-Rome also notes that although Caponsacchi was, in his opinion, "no novice to the taste of thyme," he "Turned away from such over-lucious honey-clot/At end o' the flower" (III. 899-90). The priest would not even kiss Pompilia's hand, his love for her was so

innocent. In a final flower image, after Guido's attack, she lies dying, and those that view her can see that the

paleness pushed  
 The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet  
 Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,  
 Might let shy life run back and raise the flower . . .  
 (III. 870-73)

Color imagery, when applied to Pompilia in Book III, is used primarily to spiritualize her, and to give emphasis to her purity and innocence. Color images repeatedly stress her "whiteness" (III. 64-5, 1272) and the "blue" that signifies escape and final peace:

earth was hell to her,  
 By compensation, when the blackness (of Guido) broke  
 She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,  
 To show her for a moment such things were, . . .  
 (III. 14-17)

As she lies dying, Pompilia tells her story so that "she makes confusion of the reddening white" (III. 1184), literally muddling the events of the sunset and sunrise at Castelnuovo in her illness. Figuratively, however, Pompilia's story will ultimately clarify the pure truth, thereby removing the tainted red from the white. Quite correctly, she sees the events at the inn in "a red daybreak," "a whitening red":

something like a huge white wave o' the sea  
 Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep  
 Blessedly, till it ebb'd and left me loose,  
 And where was I found but on a strange bed  
 In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,  
 Ruddy with flame, . . .  
 (III. 1142-47)

The "hell," and roaring ruddy flames are, of course, the vengeful

Guido.<sup>8</sup> Guido is also associated as Satan when he wishes for Pompilia's destruction:

So should the loathed form and detested face  
 Launch themselves into hell and there be lost  
 While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms; . . .  
 (III. 723-25)

Other Half-Rome images Caponsacchi's love for Pompilia in terms of color. Caponsacchi carries his love

not thrusting, like a badge to hide,  
 'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame--  
 But flirting flag-like i' the face of the world  
 This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love  
 For the lady, --oh, called innocent love, I know!  
 Only, such scarlet fiery innocence  
 As most folk would muffle up in shade, . . .  
 (III. 886-92)

Caponsacchi's punishment is to be banished, where the "dubious color" (III. 1409) of the man-priest can be brought under control.

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<sup>8</sup>In the images that link Guido with fire, the association is made in an oblique manner. In the first, Pompilia asks her parents to take her away from Guido, "to pluck from out the flame the brand/Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep" (III. 1024-25). In the second, Pompilia awakes at the inn and finds herself in a "strange room like hell"--the room "ruddy with flame" (III. 1146-47); Guido has arrived. Guido appears in a third image as Vulcan, god of fire, but with no explicit reference to fire, and in a fourth, he sets out to commit the murder "i' the blue of a sudden sulphur blaze" (III. 1563), wherein the Satan or hell theme fuses with the fire theme as hell-fire.

Throughout his monologue, however, Other Half-Rome's sentimental bachelor's bias, greatly influenced by his interest in the star-love between Pompilia and Caponsacchi, and colored by his view of Pompilia's whiteness, serves to leave the essential truth clouded and render his view invalid:

Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood;  
 When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,  
 'Tis no such great ill-fortune; finding gray,  
 We gladly call that white which might be black,  
 Too used to the double-dye. So, if the priest,  
 Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave  
 Way to natural weakness . . . Anyhow,  
 Here be facts, character; what they spell  
 Determine, and thence pick what sense you may!  
 (III. 827-35)

Other Half-Rome finds it entirely plausible that Caponsacchi may have been dazzled by Pompilia's beauty and innocence and she by his courage and encouragement for her escape. He completely misses the point of their pure, platonic regard for each other.

In this manner, the relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi is imaged almost entirely in terms of light: "they recognized in a critical flash/From the zenith, each the other" (III. 1041-43). Their love "Blazed as when star and star needs go close/Till each hurts and there is loss in heaven" (III. 1054-55). Caponsacchi is furthered imaged as a "proper star to climb and culminate," to

Have its due hand breadth of the heaven at Rome,  
 Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,  
 As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,  
 To rub off redness and rusticity  
 Ere it sweeps chastened, gain the silver-sphere!  
 (III. 847-48)



In this image, light is involved in the star, light and fire in the candle, and color in the redness and silver. In addition, both the light, the obscuration of light and white vs. color oppositions are prominent in signifying Caponsacchi's stay at Arezzo as a kind of "god-send" for Pompilia, trapped in the gloom of Guido's home.

Guido marries Pompilia because "he was slipping into years apace,/And years make men restless--":

they needs must spy  
Some certainty, some sort of end assured,  
Some sparkle, though from topmost beacon-tip,  
That warrants life a harbor through the haze.  
(III. 285-88)

Pompilia and her dowry represent security and assurance to Guido, who is a disappointed and frustrated man. She is his final hope to live comfortably.

Fire images first occur when Other Half-Rome quotes an Augustinian friar's comment on Guido to stress his evil nature and his cruelty to Pompilia: "Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts/While hearts are men's and so born criminal" (III. 99-100). The fire of Guido's hate and cruelty appears in Other Half-Rome's reference to Pompilia's plea for help to the Comparini to save her from Guido at Arezzo.

Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand  
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep  
To send gay-colored sparkles up and cheer  
Their seat at the chimney-corner . . .  
(III. 1020-23)

The fire image associated with hell is used in the speaker's

reference to Guido's intent to murder. According to Other Half-Rome, Guido, having failed to achieve his plans by the discovery at the inn, now feels

Success did seem not so improbable,  
 But that already Satan's laugh was heard,  
 His black back turned on Guido --left i' the lurch,  
 Or rather, balked out of suit and service now,  
 Left to improve on both by one deed more,  
 Burn up the better at no distant day,  
 Body and soul one-holocaust to hell.  
 (III. 1239-45)

And when he learns of Gaetano's birth, he is driven to murder, enraged that the child may inherit the Comparini fortune:

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,  
 . . . . .  
 He saw --the ins and outs to the heart of hell--  
 And took the straight line thither swift and sure.  
 He . . . found four sons o' the soil,  
 Brutes of breeding, with one spark i' the clod  
 That served for a soul, . . . .  
 (III. 1563-64)

These passages recall the fire imagery used by Half-Rome in respect to Guido. But the variations in their use differentiate the two biased speakers. Other Half-Rome, unlike Half-Rome, employs the image to stress Guido's cruelty and Pompilia's suffering. Other Half-Rome's association of the fire of vengeance recalls Half-Rome's image of the "wash of hell-fire"; but whereas Half-Rome's emphasis is on Guido's action as an uncontrolled fury stemming from a series of maddening provocations, Other Half-Rome's emphasis is on Guido as a calculating avenger.

The characterization is more explicit about Guido's reason for the decision to murder, in order to assure himself of Pietro's property: "A whole week/Did Guido spend in the study of his part"

(III. 1587-88).

The speaker of Book III also uses fire imagery in reference to passion or love. He speaks of Guido's brother, Paolo, attracted to Pompilia because she possesses "fraternal fire" (III 3.359). He views the relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi romantically as "scarlet firey innocence" (3.891) which to Other Half-Rome is perfectly understandable and heroic, for

Men are men: why then need I say one word  
More than that our mere man the Canon here  
Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

(III. 877-79)

Later, referring to the meeting of Pompilia and Caponsacchi that led to the flight, his words suggest fire as the two stars "blaze" when they come in contact (3.1054-55). In a final fire image, Other Half-Rome quotes Caponsacchi's words in defense of Pompilia's discovery at the inn in the fire of truth image used repeatedly throughout the rest of the poem:

If, with the mid-day blaze of truth above,  
The unlidde eye of God awake, aware,  
You needs must pry about and trace the birth  
Of each stray beam of light may traverse night,  
To the night's sun that's Lucifer himself  
Do so, at other time, in other place,  
Not now or here! . . .

(III. 1359-65)

In addition to these major imagistic patterns, Book III also contains minor motifs which occur throughout The Ring and The Book. For example, in terms of theatre imagery, Guido sees Pompilia as a puppet:

" . . . Keep the puppet of my foes--  
 Her voice that lisps me back their curse, her eye  
 They lend their leer of triumph to --her lip  
 I touch and taste their very filth upon?"

(III. 705-8)

Caponsacchi is imaged "in masquerade" "playing truant to his church"

(III. 1380-81); and Guido studies his part "A whole week," "Then

played it fearless of a failure" (III. 1580-82).

Disease images figure in Book III in reference to the courts:  
 the case is "leprosy" that has made the officials "unclean" (III.1385-38);  
 Pompilia is a "domestic plague" that Guido is well rid of" (III. 1401);  
 and Caponsacchi is imaged as a physician to Pompilia who "cured her  
 of the vapors in a trice" (III. 1443).

In a machine image, Guido "turned the screw too much/On his  
 wife's flesh and blood, as husband may" (III. 1423-24), and in his  
 revenge the Count sets into motion

the winch o' the winepress of all hate,  
 Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,  
 Take a last turn that scews out pure revenge  
 With a bright bubble at the brim beside--  
 By an heir's birth he was assured at once  
 O' the main prize, all the money in dispute: . . .  
 (III. 1535-40)

Other Half-Rome's bias and subterfuge is set to counteract  
 Half-Rome's monologue. The speaker of Book III has attempted to "hold  
 a light, display the cavern's gorge" and to "show truth" (III. 787-88)  
 in his version of the story, but his prejudice and stance blinds him  
 to the real truth of the Franceschini case. Other Half-Rome sides  
 with Pompilia, not because he has insight into her true character, but  
 because there exists a long-standing grudge between the speaker and Guido

based upon an inheritance. Just as he cannot recognize Pompilia's real "truth", he cannot recognize the "truth" of Guido's mistaken sense of honor and his sadistic cruelty which will emerge as the poem progresses.

-III-

Book IV - "Tertium Quid"

The speaker in Book IV is a nobleman who narrates and discusses the pros and cons of the murder case in the presence of a group of high-born friends. Though Tertium Quid states at the beginning of his monologue that he will make everything clear and set things right in the confused murder tale, and though he asks his listeners to "class him with the mob/As understander of the mind of men" if he fails to do so, he does not arrive at any final judgements, but reviews the evidence and leaves it to his listeners to pass judgement themselves.

Tertium Quid "sifts and weights the opinions of the street just as the Pope weighs the cases presented by the advocates."<sup>9</sup> Introducing him in Book I, Browning speaks in an ironic tone of "the critical mind," the "rational word" to characterize this member of "the superior social section." Those who are familiar with Browning's skepticism regarding the ability of reason or the purely rational processes of the mind to arrive at truth will detect a damning note in these phrases. The sophisticated speaker in Book IV looks upon the

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<sup>9</sup>Cook, Commentary, p. 73.

whole tragic episode with a kind of amused superiority. Though he speaks often of "truth," he is not sincerely interested in its attainment and perhaps even doubts the possibility of arriving at any certainty of truth in this situation. He speaks only to entertain his listeners and, he hints, to advance himself with his superiors: "(You'll see, I have not so advanced myself,/After my teaching the two idiots here)" (IV.1629-30)!

Like Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid is also a biased speaker, although his commitment is betrayed only subtly through the cloud of assumed neutrality. Tertium Quid, it must be remembered, is a "man of quality" in Book I, and is therefore bound to sympathize with Guido, a nobleman who also has a thirst for preferment. Tertium Quid's self-interest requires that he accommodate his argument to the class sympathies of his audience, and these are obviously on Guido's side. In the first Book, Browning has set out that "Quality took the decent part, of course;/Held by the husband, who was noble too."<sup>10</sup>

To counteract the "rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools/Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome" (IV.10-11), Tertium Quid attempts to "lift the case/Out of the shade into shine" (IV.6-7). His rational version views Guido's giving

Money for money, --and they, bride for groom,  
 Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child  
 Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray.  
 According to the words, each cheated each;

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<sup>10</sup> Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, p. 136

But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,  
 Each did give and did take the thing designed,  
 The rank on this side and the cash on that--  
 Attained the object of the traffic, so.  
 The way of the world, the daily bargain struck  
 In the first market! . . .

(IV.522-32)

Tertium Quid seems to be offended by the case which presents "Lies to God, lies to man, everyway lies/To nature and civility and the mode" (IV.216-17), and hopes that the courts will test "The truth, weigh husband and wife alike/I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam" (IV.12-14).

Tertium Quid obscures rather than clarifies the distinction between right and wrong. He will allow no great good on either side of the issue, nor any great evil, believing that the distinction hardly exists. His moral faculties have been dulled by court life so that he can find some justification for every act in the tragic narrative. Analogy is a favourite device of the rationalizer, and Tertium Quid uses it freely. For example, he justifies Violante's acquisition of Pompilia by saying,

Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs--  
 'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat  
 And robbin a man, but . . . Excellency, by your leave,  
 How did you get that marvel of a gem,  
 The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek?  
 The story is, stooping to pick a stone  
 From the pathway through a vineyard --no man's land--  
 To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this:  
 Why now, do those five clowns o' the family  
 O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse  
 That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch  
 To do flint's-service with the tinder-box?  
 Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend!

(IV.255-67)

In other words, misrepresentation and cheating cannot be said to have occurred if the "injured" party does not know the true facts. Tertium Quid also partly justifies the murder itself through an image representing Guido as a furious bull:

"Is this the honest self-forgetting rage  
We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull  
Pick out for help-mates from the grazing herd  
And journey with them over hill and dale  
Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save  
That friends accept our bill-similitude.  
Bull-like, --the indiscriminate slaughter, rude  
And reckless aggravation of revenge,  
Were all i' the way o' the brute who never once  
Ceases, amid all provocation more,  
To bear in mind the first tormentor, first  
Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight:  
And, though a dozen follow and reinforce  
The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,  
Continues undisturbedly pursuit,  
And only after prostrating his prize  
Turns on the prettier, makes a general prey.  
So Guido rushed against Violante, first  
Author of all his wrongs, fons et origo  
Malorum - drops first, deluge since, --which done,  
He finished with the rest. Do you blame a bull?  
(IV. 1549-69)

Tertium Quid uses analogies of various kinds, including simple name-calling images and figures depicting relationships between persons and situations that excuse evil behavior or find fault with innocent and admirable behavior, thus confusing white and black until all is a dull gray. This middle way of moral uncertainty expressed in the imagery appears to be the most distinctively characteristic function of the imagistic techniques in Book IV.

The bull simile quoted above reappears in a number of forms later in the poem, especially in the Guido monologues. Like the bird and animal imagery which Guido uses, the bull image contains a subtle



but vicious implication: if a man is like an animal, he cannot be held morally responsible for what he does. All must be put down to beastly instinct.

In a long metaphor, Tertium Quid makes use of the ring image. Speaking of Pompilia, he says:

All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,  
 On either side Pompilia's path of life,  
 Built round about and over against by fear,  
 Circumvallated month by month, and week  
 By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,  
 Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,  
 No outlet from the encroaching pain save just  
 Where stood one savior like a piece of heaven,  
 Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap.  
 She, they say further, first tried every chink,  
 Every imaginable break i' the fire,  
 As a way of escape: . . .

(IV. 782-93)

Tertium Quid then relates Pompilia's attempts to escape by seeking help from the Governor of Arezzo (IV.793-94) from the Archbishop (IV.795-800) and from the Augustinian friar (IV.801-35) until finally rescued by Caponsacchi:

Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more  
 And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,  
 Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, "This way,  
 Out by me! Hesitate one moment more  
 And the fire shuts me out and shuts in you!  
 Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon  
 She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew  
 Pompilia out o' the circle now complete.

(IV.836-43)

The circle of torture and pain, of "Hell's arms", recalls the "obscene ring" image of Book I. This circle imagery is also blended with disease patterns that illustrate the technique mentioned in the discussion of Books II and III, the representation of mental or emotional suffering in terms of physical pain. In the following figure, Guido's

cruelty to Pompilia is seen as a torture upon the rack: "from this time forth the rack/Was tried upon Pompilia: 't was to wrench/Her limbs into exposure that brings shame" (IV.681-83).

The first theatre image of Book IV occurs in the description of the populace awaiting the trial:

"Now for the Trial!" they roar: "the Trial to test  
The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike  
I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam!"  
Law's a machine from which, to please the mob,  
Truth the divinity must needs descend  
And clear things at the play's fifth act --aha!  
(IV.12-17)

Here, it is given an extra dimension with the law-as-machine image. The machine as the scales of justice and a mechanical device of the theatre by which a supernatural agency, a god from heaven, is lowered in order to disentangle the complicated plot.

The second theatre image describes the case mounting "to the stage/In the law courts" (IV.1205-6). The third:

You've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play, --  
Punch and his mate, --how threats pass, blows are dealt,  
And crisis comes: the crowd or clap or hiss  
Accordingly as disposed for man or wife--  
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,  
Donning what novel rag-and-feather trim  
Best suits the next adventure, new effect:  
And, --by the time the mob is on the move,  
With something like a judgment pro and con, --  
There's a whistle, up again the actors pop  
In t' other tatter with fresh-tinselled staves,  
To re-engage in one last worst fight more  
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce.  
Note, that the climax and the crown of things  
Invariably is, the devil appears himself,  
Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail!  
Just so, nor otherwise it proved --you'll see:  
Move to the murder, never mind the rest!  
(IV.1274-92).

The speaker refers to a Punch and Judy show; the puppet allusion recalls the puppet image of Book I. But the insight provided in the earlier image is totally lacking here. Although Tertium Quid is perceptive enough to see much of the deviousness of Guido, and although he cleverly extends his analogy to include Guido as the devil-puppet, his judgment ultimately lacks depth. He recognizes Caponsacchi playing a part in the piece (4.1459) and then asks:

What if a tragedy be acted here  
 Impossible for malice to improve,  
 And innocent Guido with his innocent four  
 Be added, all five, to the guilty three,  
 That we of these last days be edified  
 With one full taste o' the justice of the world?  
 (IV.1602-7)

In the first instance is a repetition of the playing-a-part image in reference to Caponsacchi. Assuming that Tertium Quid is trying accurately to voice the opinion of Guido's proponents, one is reminded of Caponsacchi's true role in "a spectacle for angels"; and the contrast reinforces the total inability or unwillingness of the biased Tertium Quid to see the priest in true perspective.

In terms of religious imagery, Guido is associated with hell (IV.600, 748-49, 1592-93) and with Satan in an image embodying Tertium Quid's view of the entire affair as a Punch and Judy show. Guido is unmistakably the devil that pops up at the end of the puppet play, and this identification is strengthened when "the fiend" (IV.1586) is imaged as Satan when he plunges Pompilia's "thin white delicate hand i' the flame/Along with [his] coarse horny brutish fist" (IV.1092-93). Pompilia is cynically referred to as "Quite angel" (IV.1584), and her error is seen in an Eve-image:

But then this is the wife's --Pompilia's tale --  
 Eve's . . . no, not Eve's, since Eve, to speak the truth,  
 Was hardly fallen (our candor might pronounce)  
 When simply saying in her own defense  
 "The serpent tempted me and I did eat."  
 So much of paradisal nature, Eve's!  
 Her daughters ever since prefer to urge  
 "Adam so starved me I was fain accept  
 The apple any serpent pushed my way."  
 (IV.845-53)

When Pompilia is represented as a lily set in the way of "Joseph and his spouse," the Comparini (IV.324), the image contributes to the Pompilia-Virgin Mary imagery that is gradually building as the poem progresses.

Tertium Quid's animal imagery depicts Violante as "the harmless household sheep" (IV.123) who "in her first difficulty showed great teeth/Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime" (IV.132-33). The Comparini are "selfish beasts" (IV.696) who, according to the speaker, instigated the tragedy; but his monologue never definitively persuades "which bird o' the brace/Decoyed the other into clapnet?/ Who was fool, who knave" (IV.503-5). For Tertium Quid, the characters, "Whether goat or sheep/I' the main," have "wool to show and hair to hide" (IV.1214-15).

Guido is imaged as a fox (IV.1089) and a stock-fish (IV.1140) as well as a "very cur" fit only to be kicked (IV.1192-93). This "ignoble hound" (IV.1198) is "bull-like" (IV.1555) and a "monster" (IV.1591) in the piece. Caponsacchi is represented by only one animal image in which he is figured as a grub that hatches into a hornet to plague Guido (IV.1150-51). The only other images which figure the priest are those of color which serve to demonstrate that Tertium Quid shifts from pro to con in his arguments, shifting the connotations of his figures.

In terms of prejudicial imagery, Pompilia is also "a cur-cast mongrel" (IV.608), a pythoness (IV.1165), and a snake which Guido lifts up "by the long dishevelled hair,/Holds her away at arm's length with one hand" (IV.1377-78). But Pompilia is also "like a dove among the lightnings in her brake" (IV.1375), a hare (IV.913), and a pet lamb nurtured by her parents to be butchered:

A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,  
Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,  
Will strike grinners to the grave: . . .

. . . . .  
These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,  
Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake,  
Out of the bower into butchery.

(IV.660-72)

Pompilia is also a "lure" (IV.935) used to catch Guido and his cruelty, and then the bait withdrawn from the fish:

They baited their own hook to catch a fish  
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then  
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float  
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped.

(IV.702-5)

In this manner, the image is used both prejudicially and sympathetically; Pompilia is a luring bait for Guido, but also left to her husband's mercy after her parents flee Arezzo to save themselves.

Pompilia is imaged by nature figures in Book IV as "dewy-dear,/ O' the rose above the dungheap" (IV.245-46). This "pure child" (IV.246) is "Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock" who bows "its white miraculous birth of buds" (IV.322-23) to the Comparini. Pompilia-as-lily later becomes the flower Pietro and Violante wish they could "transplant/And set in vase to stand by Solomon's [Guido's] Guido's porch" (IV.325-26). These images are variations of the "rose

at briar's end" figure, and contain references to Pompilia's low birth and her motif of whiteness.

Pompilia is also a morsel on a dish for Guido to gobble up:

'Twere hard to serve up a congenial dish  
 Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, . . .  
 By the best exercise of the cook's craft,  
 Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet!  
 But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess  
 With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's dung --  
 Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,  
 Kith, kin and generation, shake all slab  
 At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,  
 Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,  
 That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,  
 Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,  
 Was never pheasant but a carrion-crow.

(IV.720-32)

Tertium Quid sees the Comparini's conniving gradually eroding what little regard Guido may have had for Pompilia until she is "carrion-crow" on his table.

Color, light and fire imagery are by far the most predominant imagistic figures of Tertium Quid's monologue. As he attempts to "lift the case/Out of the shade into shine", he is speaking literally of the confusion, uncertainty, and obscurity of the issues on the one hand, and the order, certainty and clarity of perception on the other. Unfortunately, his effort to reach the final truth fails due to his middle-of-the-road views.

The speaker recognizes the "blood that fell and splashed the diagram" and tries to accustom his eyes to "the violent hue" in order to "look through the crimson and trace lines" (IV.38-40). He also recognizes that the crime is "Black hard cold/ . . . like a stone you kick up with your foot/I' the middle of a field" (IV.230-32). For

Tertium Quid, "there's something dark i' the case" (IV.315) to "which brownness is least black" (IV.627), but he cannot seem to pinpoint it.

The Comparini feel that Guido's suits against Pompilia are an attempt to "blacken . . . a soul they boasted white" (IV.690). Pompilia is represented as an "icicle" (IV.857) of whiteness and transparency on one hand, and a bait that swims "up i' the whirl, (to) bury (Caponsacchi)/Under abysmal black" (IV.943-44) in her plans for escape. But in sympathetic imagistic terms, Pompilia is surrounded in a ring image by Guido's "Hell's arms" which "strain round" her "but for this blue gap" representing Caponsacchi (IV.790-93).

When the Comparini are presented with Guido as a groom for their daughter, they see him as

exceptional white  
Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks  
A burgess nearly an aristocrat  
Legitimately in reach.

(IV.341-44)

Guido views his situation as his "own black share" (IV.1081) of the tragedy, stemming from the fact that the Comparini would not "put up with the minor flaw/Getting the main prize of the jewel" (IV.621-22), not realizing that the Comparini feel he misrepresented his status, "using the candle-flame/Unfairly" (IV.560-61).

Tertium Quid employs fire imagery in many instances. His character, as sketched in the prefatory first Book, and the circumstances under which he speaks, determine the variations in his imagery. Although the majority of applications are the same as those of the speakers of Books II and III, (especially in reference to Guido's

cruelty at Arezzo, Pompilia's suffering, the murders, Guido's reactions to Gaetano's birth, and to the legal controversies), the nuances and emphases in Tertium Quid's monologue differentiate him from Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome--the "rabble's drabble"--because he represents the "quality . . . in the case."

The essential difference between Tertium Quid and the preceding speakers may best be seen in a comparison of the fire-image used in reference to the legal squabbles between the Comparini and Guido:

They brandish law 'gainst law;  
The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,  
Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,  
And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,  
Than the very wounds that follow.

(IV.632-37)

"Terrible sparks", contrasted to Half-Rome's image of "fire-drops" in Guido's "wound" and to Other Half-Rome's "the suit/That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,/This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire", differentiates the sophisticated speaker from the emotionally involved Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome. Tertium Quid's image lacks the impassioned qualities of the images of the jealous husband and the sentimental bachelor, though it contains a subtlety not found in either.

Tertium Quid's attempt at impartiality results in the presentation of both sides of the argument in the case. As a consequence, his imagery echoes that of the other two speakers. His description of the relationship between the Comparini and Guido at Arezzo is as follows:



Such unprofitable noise  
 Angers at all times: but when those who plague,  
 Do it from inside your own house and home,  
 Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,  
 Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad.  
 The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame  
 Unfairly, . . .

(IV.555-61)

The image is an interesting and clever juxtaposition of images used by Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome. Guido's cruelty as a candle-flame recalls Other Half-Rome's images of Guido's cruelty as fire; and the juxtaposition of the flame image with the idea of Guido's being maddened by the Comparini brings to mind Half-Rome's image of the breaking down of "the overburdened mind" of "what was a brain [became] a blaze." The sophisticated speaker's passage contains the idea of maddening provocation, and the fire motif recalls the parallel concepts of the preceding speakers.

Tertium Quid quotes Guido's reply to the charges of cruelty: "You fled a hell of your own lighting-up" (IV.600). The image of Arezzo as a place of hell-fire is a repetition of Other Half-Rome's similar images; but the condemnatory force found in those images is lacking in Tertium Quid's reference. He gives the image to Guido to utter in his denial of responsibility.

At one point in his narrative, Tertium Quid's imagery identifies him with Half-Rome. Speaking of the Comparini, he uses an image associated with the fire pattern. It occurs as an imagistic detail in a larger image of food: "But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess/With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's dung . . . the compounded plague o' the pair/Pricked Guido" (IV.724-35). Tertium

goes on to image the slaying of Pompilia as a "blotting out, as by a belch of hell,/Their triumph in her misery and death" (IV.748-49). The Comparini's "abuse" of Guido echoes Half-Rome's imagery of fire used in justification of the repeatedly provoked husband's vengeance. But the critical balance of the view is restored by the hell-fire image in reference to Guido's evil and ferocious revenge. It recalls similar images of Other Half-Rome, and Half-Rome's "wash of hell-fire," but in contrast to the latter, there is no concept of Guido's cleaning himself by his act.

The characterization of Tertium Quid's monologue may be further noted in his references to Pompilia's suffering at Arezzo. Presenting the view of those sympathetic to Pompilia, he uses images that recall Other Half-Rome's:

Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap.  
 She, they say further, first tried every chink,  
 Every imaginable break i' the fire,  
 As way of escape: . . .

(IV.790-93)

And he later quotes Caponsacchi: "Hesitate one moment more/And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you" (IV.839-40)! But the force of the explanation for Caponsacchi's intervention and Pompilia's flight-- Guido's cruelty--is counterbalanced by Tertium Quid's cynical comment:

What an elaborate theory have we here,  
 Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously  
 Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,  
 To account for the thawing of an icicle,  
 Show us there needed Aetna vomit flame  
 Ere the crystal run down into dewdrops!

(IV.854-59)

Later in the monologue, Tertium Quid quotes Caponsacchi in his rebuttal to Guido:

Also, the disgrace  
 You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her:  
 You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame  
 Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,  
 Held them a second there, then drew out both  
 --Yours roughened a little, hers ruined through and through.  
 (IV.1090-95)

The image of Guido's cruelty and evil as fire which burns Pompilia repeats comparable imagery expressed by Other Half-Rome. But unlike the emotionally committed speaker of Book III, Tertium Quid merely quotes Caponsacchi's rebuttal without evaluating the testimony. He is content, as he says, to present both sides of the issue. As he does so, the imagery of the preceding speakers repeatedly occurs. This characteristic may be further noted as Tertium Quid quotes the skepticism of those who doubt Guido's defense for his vengeance as the act of a maddened husband whose honour has been injured:

Here you smile:  
 "And never let him henceforth dare to plead--  
 Of all pleas and excuses in the world  
 For any deed hereafter to be done--  
 His irrepressible wrath at honor's wound!  
 Passion and madness irrepressible?  
 (IV.1118-23)

The image echoes Half-Rome's fire images of the "fire-drops" in Guido's "wound" and of Guido's mind's becoming a blaze, which had been presented as his defense.

The skepticism is prompted by Guido's failure to act immediately as a wrathful husband would have, at the discovery of the fugitives at the inn. Tertium Quid attempts to explain away his failure, saying Guido

Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands  
 Bewildered at the critical minute, --since  
 He has the first flash of the fact alone  
 To judge from, act with, not the steady lights  
 Of after-knowledge, --yours who stand at ease  
 To try conclusions: he's in smother and smoke,  
 You outside, with explosion at an end:  
 The sulphur may be the lightning or a squib--  
 (IV.1174-81)

The image suggests Other Half-Rome's use in the description of the same scene, in which Pompilia finds herself "In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise/Ruddy with flame." Although Tertium Quid's image with its "explosion" and "sulphur" details suggests the hell-fire of Other Half-Rome's image, a significant difference is that in the former the hellishness in the scene is directed toward Caponsacchi and Pompilia, while in the latter it is associated with Guido.

Despite Tertium Quid's pretensions of objectivity, his monologue repeatedly reflects a tendency to side with Guido. The final argument of his narrative (IV.1513-69) clearly expresses this sympathy and significantly contains an image of Half-Rome's. The argument concerns the important point of the true motives for the crime. Was it an act of an enraged husband maddened by a series of unjust provocation avenging his injured honor? Tertium Quid, in his expression of this issue, uses the following images in Guido's defense:

A wound i' the flesh no doubts wants prompt redress;  
 It smarts a little to-day, well in a week,  
 Forgotten in a month; or never, or now, revenge!  
 (IV.1521-23)

Men, plagues this fashion, get to explode this way,  
 If left no other.

(IV.1533-34)

Guido, having tried the weapons of law, of "wit and common-sense,"  
and of logic (IV.1540-43), then

discovers last  
He has been blind to the combustibles--  
That all the while he is aglow with ire,  
Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so  
May try explosives and discard cold steel,--  
So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!  
Is this the honest self-forgetting rage  
We are called to pardon?

(IV.1543-50)

In his rage, Guido killed Violante first, the "first/Giver o' the wound  
that goaded him to fight" (IV.1559-60), again recalling Half-Rome's  
fire-drop-wound image, thus identifying Tertium Quid with the pro-  
Guido faction and with Half-Rome's conclusion that Guido "is noble  
and he may be innocent" (IV.1614).

All the fire images discussed above are repetitions of those  
used by Half-Rome and Other Half-Rome. But other fire images remain  
to be considered. The first is a lengthy and elaborate lamp-and-fire  
image by which Tertium Quid describes the status of the Comparini  
before Pompilia is acquired:

This Pietro, this Violante, live their life  
At Rome in the easy way that far from worst  
Even for their betters, --themselves love themselves,  
Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp  
That their own faces may grow bright thereby.

(IV.70-74)

The image is extended: "their wick swims in the safe broad bowl/o' the  
middle rank, --not raised to beacon height" (IV.84-85). Then,  
"having got through fifty years of flare,/They burn out so" (IV.95-96).  
The childless couple realize that they, at death, must "Let the lamp  
fall, no heir at hand to catch" (IV.104).

Tertium Quid refers to Violante's successful arrangement for the acquisition of the infant Pompilia and describes her as "triumphing in a flourish of fire/From her own brain, self-lit by such success" (IV.193-94). More important in the imagistic pattern is that the "fire" associated with Violante's act conveys the suggestion of evil, as the speaker makes plain later: "As for the wife, --I said, hers the whole sin" (IV.298). In view of the fire images repeatedly employed by preceding speakers and by Tertium Quid in reference to the unhappy events at Arezzo and the tragic vengeance of Guido, the fire images applied to the Comparini's financial affairs and the acquisition of Pompilia are appropriate. These are the "fires" preliminary to and related to the fires of suffering and death.

Also, according to Tertium Quid, the impoverished Franceschini's attempts to find financial support turned them towards the Church. The sisters had married well, "But that sort of illumination stops,/Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth" (IV.387-88). Thus they "feel out for its fire/To the Church" (IV.389-90) which helped the youngest brother, Paolo, to catch the "sympathetic flame" (IV.396) and to become a cardinal.

Guido also entered the Church, but as a member of a minor order which did not impose celibacy: he was "ordained to wife" (IV.401). Failing promotion, he found himself after many years of service without "a penny in purse to show for it" (IV.416). In this manner he caught a wife with a dowry and made the match with Pompilia. The whole

point is that the events subsequent to the marriage are imaged repeatedly by fire. The chain of events which leads to the fatal marriage has as one of its links Guido's entrance into and failure in the Church. Thus this "fire" is also preliminary to the tragedy.

Mary Rose Sullivan has noted that Books II, III, and IV expose the reader to "the very life and heartbeat of Rome, from the man in the street to the man in the palace,"<sup>11</sup> carrying the narrative forward in time from the day after the murder to the day on which the actual trial begins with Count Guido Franceschini's testimony. In this manner, Browning has prepared us to listen with sharpened interest to the voices of the principal actors in the Books to come.

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<sup>11</sup>Mary Rose Sullivan, Browning's Voices in The Ring and The Book: A Study of Method and Meaning (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 73.

### CHAPTER THREE

Books V, VI and VII contain the monologues of Guido, Caponsacchi and Pompilia in which Browning presents their interpretations of the case, allowing a basis for controversy and misunderstanding--and affording a need and opportunity for the functioning of the poet's intuitive imagistic insight. When the poet approached the problem of presenting the limitations of human speech for communicating truth, he circumscribed his opportunities for utilizing different means of characterization. As a result, the ideas of the speakers, and the manner of expression of those ideas, allow the reader to evaluate not only the speakers and the degree of credibility of their narrations of the action, but also the speakers' estimates of the characters of the other speakers in the poem. The reader's later acceptance of the Pope's judgment cannot occur unless the other monologues convince the reader that the pontiff has been able to see the truth behind the documents presented to him. Therefore, the element of self-revelation in the monologues of the three main characters comes closest to the true understanding of their motives, hopes and fears.

-I-

#### Book V - "Count Guido Franceschini"

Book V contains Guido's first monologue, which takes place in the course of the murder trial. There is no doubt in the minds of Guido's judges that he has committed murder. Pompilia lived to name her attacker, and Guido himself has confessed to the crime under torture. Only one way remains for Guido to escape conviction and execution--to show that he was justified in doing the deed. Consequently, he uses



every device his cunning mind can conceive of to give conviction to his role as an outraged and wronged husband.

The narrative element in Book V continues to receive great emphasis as Guido pauses frequently to give reasons to justify his course of action at a particular point. His only hope of being acquitted is to give his version of the whole story and to make it convincing. Guido is, he says, concerned for his "self-respect," his "care for a good name,/Pride in an old one," and "love of kindred" (V.31-32). He considers himself to be the "representative of a great line" (V.140) fallen upon hard times because

none o' the line  
Having a single gift beyond brave blood,  
Or able to do aught but give, give, give  
In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,  
Not get and garner as the vulgar may,...  
(V.159-63)

Viewing himself as a humble servant of the Church (V.246), Guido tells of his unfulfilled desires for advancement:

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court:  
Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung  
Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings  
And fly aloft,...

(V.291-94)

While I--kept fasts and feasts innumerable,  
Matins and vespers, functions to no end  
I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,...

(V.335-37)

Eventually, Guido felt "The tick of time" inside him, a "turning point" (V.342) at which he knew he had to find another path to follow to fulfill his desires. Guido entered the marriage--market to find a suitable wife with a large dowry, relying on his family name and status as a drawing-card. He asks the court to

Admit that honor is a privilege,  
 The question follows, privilege with what?  
 Why, worth the market-price, --now up, now down,  
 Just so with this as with all other ware;  
 Therefore essay the market, sell your name,<sup>1</sup>  
 Style and condition to who buys them best!<sup>1</sup>  
 (V.458-63)

Guido, the "old bruised and battered year-by-year/Fighter with fortune"  
 (V.384-85), exaggerates his prospects to the Comparini, justifying his  
 half-truths to the courts in the light of their lies concerning Pompilia's  
 origins. After his marriage, the situation at Arezzo deteriorates to an  
 almost unbearable level. Guido realizes that his efforts to re-establish  
 his wealth and family line have been in terms of his sense of honour and  
 dignity:

Go bid a second blockhead like myself  
 Spend fifty years un guarding bubbles of breath,  
 Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,  
 Guarded and guided, all to break at touch  
 O' the first young girl's hand,...  
 (V.446-50)

It becomes clear that Guido's defence is not only a justifi-  
 cation of the murder, but also an apology for the whole course of his  
 life. His emotions imply acquiescence and submission to an ordained  
 order, and remonstane against such a course and an attempt to remedy  
 it. Guido's monologue develops within these two frames of reference; by  
 shifting from one to the other he appears to explain and excuse himself.  
 His falseness is hard to detect because each frame of reference is a  
 plausible view of life. On the one hand, Guido looks primarily to human

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Guido's description of himself as a market-ware  
 corresponds to images of Pompilia as a lamb for sale in the marketplace  
 in previous Books.

society, embracing concepts of self-interest, the pursuit of wealth, competition and individualism. On the other hand, he views the Church as God's institution on earth, and society as an extension of that institution. He accepts an orderly hierarchy and the necessity for humility, obedience, responsibility, and duty to maintain one's social position. Guido attacks aspects of life not to his liking by applying this double value system, either by using the weapons of moral value, order, and degree in society, or by viewing them as unrealistic in a world of struggle and self-interest. In the end, he presents himself to the court as a man patiently waiting for recognition through his humility and obedience, and yet attempting to maintain his social status and wealth by secular means.

There are a number of ways in which figurative language may be used for persuasive purposes, and Guido ranges over a great many of them. For the most part, he figures his enemies in prejudicial terms, identifying himself with laudable and approved objects and actions which elicit favourable or sympathetic reactions. Guido tends to slip easily over his past actions with a neat system of rationalizing analogies.

Brought to face the court after being tortured to gain "true" testimony, Guido attempts to present himself as a Christ-figure. In Book I, he "folds his arms/Crosswise" as he confronts the court (V.965-66), and Tertium Quid has noticed that he has "clipped/His top-hair and thus far affected Christ" (IV.403-4). Guido is surprised and delighted that the wine offered him is "not vinegar and gall" (V.5) or a "cup of bitterness" (V.877). He alludes to his family's resemblance to "Our Lord" in their saintliness and sacrificial poverty (V.156-63), to his "crown of punishments" (V.83), and to the indignity of being spat

upon (V.1099, 1452). He even makes an analogy between his conduct and that of the church, the bride of Christ (V.722-27). When he describes the Comparinis' situation at Arezzo as the "stiff cruxifixion by my dais" (V.530), he is comparing them to the two thieves and himself to Christ.

Toward the end of his monologue, Guido recounts a mystical vision suggested by the birth of Gaetano at the Christmas season that prophesies his own fact and re-enacts the events at Gethsemane:

I stopped my ears even to the inner call  
 Of the dread duty, only heard the song  
 "Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face  
 O' the Holy Infant and the halo there  
 Able to cover yet another face  
 Behind it, Satan's, which I else should see.  
 But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:  
 The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,  
 Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,  
 Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,  
 And showed only the Cross at end of all,  
 Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me  
 And the dread duty, --for angels' song,  
 "Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed,  
 "O Lord, how long, how long, how long be unavenged?"  
 (V.1589-1603)

Guido gives an image of his only-begotten son, for the sake of inviting still more sympathy for himself. The aim of his life

is now to evoke life from death,  
 Make me anew, satisfy in my son,  
 The hunger I may feed but never sate,  
 Tormented in to perpetuity,--  
 My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,

Moulded into the image and made one,  
 Fashioned of soul as featured like in face, ...  
 (V.1963-72)

When Guido's vision of a balance of justice righted and husbands reigning Jehovah-like comes to pass:

Then will I set my son at my right-hand  
 And tell his father's story to this point,  
 Adding, "The task seemed superhuman, still  
 I dared and did it, trusting God and law:  
 And they approved of me: gave praise to both!"  
 And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss  
 My hand, and peradventure start thereat, --  
 I engage to smile, "That was an accident  
 I' the necessary process, --just a trip  
 O' the torture-irons in their search for truth, --  
 Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."  
 (V.2047-57)

Nothing could so conclusively remove Guido from the reader's sympathy as his attempts to portray himself as Christ.

Guido also presents himself as Moses (V.346-47) in search of the Promised Land; a tortured Job (V.906-8); St. Peter (V.965); Lazarus (V.1069); Jacob (V.1304); David (V.2019); and a soldier-saint. He assumes all these roles to promote his view of himself and his actions as "the anterior right,"

The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench  
 The antagonistic spark of hell and tread  
 Satan and all his malice into dust,  
 Declare to the world the one law, right is right.  
 (V.1568-71)

However, Guido also characterizes himself inadvertently as Satan, stating that Pompilia found "I was a devil and no man" (V.611). In describing the discovery at the inn, Guido uses the analogy to state that the journey seemed interminable and to give a color of evil to Pompilia's and Caponsacchi's escape. But in doing so, he represents himself as Lucifer:

and so at last,  
 As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,  
 [I] tumbled into the court-yard of an inn...  
 (V.1042-44)

In terms of animal imagery, Guido describes himself in a manner that is complimentary or sympathetic, in balanced opposition to

imagery in anti-Guido Books of the poem representing him as a ferocious animal. For example, he states to the court that

all this trouble has come on me  
Through my persistent treading in the paths  
Where I was trained to go, --wearing that yoke  
My shoulder was predestined to receive,  
Born to the hereditary stoop and crease....  
(V.123-27)

I protruded nose  
To halter, bent my back of docile beast,  
And now am whealed, one wide would all of me,  
For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day  
Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass:....  
(V. 133-37)

Guido is alluding to his sense of duty and obedience. All his life he has directed his actions in terms of his view of order in society. He attempts to present himself to the court as a man who stands bewildered by the charges against him, charges he can only interpret as a questioning of his motive based on "honour" and duty.

Guido extends the fish and bait images of preceding Books to figure himself as a hapless fish, born for the deep sea but relegated to a lower existence:

My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin  
Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed  
In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile  
Reared of the low-tide and aright therein.  
(V.172-75)

He feels that he has been left "cramped and gasping, high and dry/I' the wave's retreat" (V.180-81) in his attempts for success. Other members of his family have advanced through marriage or the priesthood, but Guido has been left "bat-like.../'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege" (V.359-60).

Guido claims that he did not expect Pompilia to go against the wishes of her husband or the customs of wifely duty and obedience.

He is so absorbed in his philosophies of value systems that he never suspected her relationship with Caponsacchi until too late. And thus, he states, he could not "Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold" because he was not listening "for a growl" or the sheep's bleat. Guido's use of the sheep-and-wolf imagery opposes other figures linking him with the wolf; here he applies it to Caponsacchi. He argues in his own favour that he has been "Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb," and asks,

Does that deprive me of my right of lamb  
And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?  
(V.1092-93)

In other words, Guido attempts to negate the lion image applied to him by the anti-Guido characters, while at the same time maintaining the image of himself as lion, Pompilia as lamb, and Caponsacchi as wolf. His cunning therefore only serves to reinforce previous ferocious images.

In the same manner Guido shifts the analogy of lamb and wolf applied to Pompilia and Caponsacchi to set himself up as the "spoil and prey" (V.1389) of the case. Again he extends the fish image to represent his situation. The Comparini have "the wealth again/They hazarded awhile to hook me with,/Have caught the fish and find the bait entire" (V.1393-95). Pompilia's parents have their holdings once more, and their daughter as well, safe in their hands, but Guido sees only "How this threefold cord could hook and fetch/And land leviathan that king of pride" (V.1497-98). Guido may be stating his recognition of his own pride, but it is more than likely that this image is another slip-of-the-tongue, reflecting subconsciously Guido's predominant associations with evil.

In a subtle transition from the fish-in-water image, Guido

asks the court to

Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me  
 Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched  
 Head-foremost into danger as a fool  
 That never cares if he can swim or no--  
 So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.  
 (V.1705-8)

He attempts to present himself merely keeping his head above water after his marriage and the suffering which resulted from the presence of Pompilia and her parents at Arezzo. The tragic events of the case are viewed by the Count as the desperate actions of a near-drowning man.

Guido claims that the purpose of the murders by honoris causa was to act as

a soldier-bee  
 That yields his life, exenterate with the stroke  
 O' the sting that saves the hive.  
 (V.2008-10)

It is clear that when Guido associates himself with favourable figures of animals, he is attempting to present himself as a hapless, or helpless, or brave creature; in fact, he appears without any moral standards. And in that sense, his animal images are entirely appropriate to him.

The majority of the animal imagery Guido applies to Pompilia has either a prejudicial connotation or a shifting of emphasis from sympathetic to negative implications. He calls her a "mongrel of a drab" (V.88) and a "mongrel brat" (V.89), referring to her low origins which are an offence to his sense of social order, and he later refers to her as

That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,  
 Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,  
 Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,...  
 (V.653-55)

This image is the first of several which attempt to negate the Pompilia-



as-bird image in previous Books. Guido tries to sway popular sympathetic connotations applied to his wife in further derogatory images:

Swans are soft:

Is it not clear that she you call my wife,  
That any wife of any husband, caught  
Whetting a sting like this against the breast, --  
Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,  
Married a month and making outcry thus, --  
Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?  
(V.656-62)

Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,  
That shuffled from between her pressing paps  
To sit on my rough shoulder, --but a hawk,  
I bought at a hawk's price and carried home  
To do hawk's service -- at the Rotunda, say,  
Where, six o' the callow nestings in a row,  
You pick and choose and pay the price for such.  
I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,  
So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,  
And, should she prove a haggard, --twist her neck!  
Did I not pay my name and style, my hope  
And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss  
I am here! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court  
Will blame my that I never piped a tune,  
Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.  
The obligation I incurred was just  
To practice mastery, prove my mastership:--  
Pompilia's duty was -- submit herself,  
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.  
(V.699-717)

Guido sees the husband-wife relationship in terms of his sense of order, obedience and duty. He argues that Pompilia's character has been misrepresented to the world, and claims he has not displayed cruelty towards her. He does admit that his husbandly superiority and control over his wife is a right granted to his through marriage, and he images Pompilia as a hawk, perhaps ruffled by her owner in the relationship, but with not morally culpable mistreatment involved:

Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright  
My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,  
Twitch out five pins where plucking one would serve--  
What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?  
And, if you find I pluck five more for that,

Shall you weep "How he roughs that turtle/dove there"?  
(V.746-51)

Pompilia, the "Dirt/O' the kennel" (V.711-72), is quoted by Guido as she questions her parents' motives and schemes, imaging herself as a lamb and Guido as a lion:

I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,  
I who have done you the blind service, lured  
The lion to your pitfall, --I, this, left,  
To answer for my ignorant bleating there,  
I should have remembered and withdrawn  
From the first o' the natural fury, . . .  
(V.794-99)

This animal image applied to Pompilia introduces one of the most disturbing elements in Guido's monologue. Here he is quoting an analogy which places him in a bad light as the ferocious lion. Later images and remarks which the Count makes have an uneasy balance between affection and hate for Pompilia. The most dramatic evidence of this uneasy balance occurs when Guido confronts Violante on the night of the murders, as she opens the door of the villa. He states to the court that if it had been Pompilia who answered the door, he might not have committed the murders. The reader must realize that this technique is a cunning trick on Guido's part. It is far more likely that had Pompilia answered his cry of "Capon-sacchi" that she would have been the first to die. Guido slyly plots this argument throughout the imagery in order to attempt to exonerate himself.

But for the most part, Guido applies prejudicial imagery to his wife to reverse the opinions of her character. Relating the incidents at the inn, Guido describes the behavior of Pompilia and

Caponsacchi<sup>2</sup> in animal terms:

They braved me, --he with arrogance and scorn,  
 She, with a volubility of curse,  
 A conversancy in the skill of tooth  
 And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,...  
 (V.114-17)

Referring once again to the fish and bait imagery, Guido calls Pompilia "the lure/That led to loss" (V.1393) and later "my lamb" who "lay in my bosom" (V.1631-32). Pompilia is also figured as a snake as she lies dying following Guido's attack. She and the Comparini are "More or less serpent-like," and in his fury, Guido "Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,/And ended so" (V.1659-60). This snake imagery is reiterated when Guido believes that after the murders his soul is "safe from serpents" (V.1668) and that

"Now I was saved, now I should feel no more  
 The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye  
 And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned,  
 There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,  
 Renewing its detested spire and spire  
 Around me, rising to such heights of hate  
 That, so far from mere purpose now to crush  
 And coil itself on the remains of me,  
 Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,  
 Its aim is now to evoke life from death,  
 Make ne anew, satisfy in my son  
 The hunger I may feed but never sate,...  
 (V.1954-65)

The image of the snake's arising from the dead, just when Guido feels free of all torment through the murder of the three victims, points to

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<sup>2</sup> Caponsacchi is represented in animal terms only twice in Book V. He is a "gad-fly" (V.910) annoyance to Guido; and a "provident shepherd" who leaves his "safe flock/To follow the single lamb and strayaway" as a component of the Pompilia-as-lamb imagery. Guido, of course, misses the further connotation of Caponsacchi as the Good Shepherd.

Gaetano--the son who will inherit the Comparini holdings lost to Guido. The "spires" of the serpent suggest a ring-figure of evil which the Count transforms into the "witches' circlet intact" that "raised the spirit and succubus" of the "love-laden" letters (V.1131-33) supposedly exchanged between Pompilia and Caponsacchi. In view of the "obscene ring" of goblins and monsters--Guido and his family--that encircles Pompilia in Book I, the Count's crafty reference ironically gives additional significance to the obscenity of his attempt to picture Pompilia as an evil serpent coiling about him to choke his breath away.

Guido also assumes the sympathetic plant imagery previously applied to Pompilia. The first instance of this figure occurs when he realizes that he will not be successful in the Church. He accepts the fact that he must instead "Be not the vine but dig and dung its root" (V.230). He will marry and seek his success in this new manner. When he does not murder Pompilia at the inn, the general public opinion is that he is a coward. Guido admits to the charge, stating that he played "the reed, not the oak to the breath of man" (V.1088) and that he accepted the stain upon his pride and honour.

He had expected his marriage to be a success:

With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,  
As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree--  
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.  
(V.602-4)

Instead, he found Pompilia to be a "misgrowth of infectious mistletoe/  
Foisted into my stock for honest graft" (V.811-12). He believes that his "sweet tremulous flower-like wife" was involved in a carnal relationship with Caponsacchi, and views the love-letters allegedly exchanged between the pair as

Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore  
 Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive, --  
 Now, poetry in some rank and blossom-burst,  
 Now, prose, --

(V.1133-36)

All the flower images applied to Pompilia to reinforce her purity, helplessness and beauty are negated by overly-sensual connotations and figures of Pompilia as an evil growth on Guido's lineage.

Disease imagery is prominent in Book V. Guido considers Pompilia "the rag/Smear'd with plague" (V.807) that has cause/his suffering and torment. He intends to bare his sores "O' the soul and not the body" to the court and to

shun no shame  
 Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part,  
 Since confident in Nature, --which is God, --  
 That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,  
 Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too  
 Law renovates even Lazarus, --cures me!

(V.1164-69)

Guido's images of disease re-emphasize those of preceding Books. He believes that Pompilia is a plague sent from God to make him suffer as Job suffered, to test his faith. Thus, he presents himself as a noble and tormented servant of God to the court, which he believes will heal his wounds and end his pain, which was renewed at the news of Gaetano's birth: "the nerve thus laid bare/To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail" (V.1474-75)! This new, exquisite pain has resulted from the marriage-ring which Guido sees as causing gangrene while it chokes him (V.1803-4).<sup>3</sup> The marriage, from which he had considered himself to be

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<sup>3</sup> Guido speaks of rings in Book V in two other instances: the ring given as a token for advancement in the Church (V.264-65) which he is never to receive; and his reference to how he should have discouraged Pompilia by threatening to "slice away" the joints of her "ring-finger" (V.950-55), unconsciously underlining his basic cruelty.

free after the murders, is temporarily viewed as "the core/Of the bad ulcer" lanced so that he feels himself "whole now" (V.1694-98). But he has faith that the legal process will cure him completely and exonerate him on the basis of honoris causa:

That in the process you call "justice done"  
 All along you have nipped away just inch  
 By inch the creeping climbing length of plague<sup>4</sup>  
 Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,...  
 (V.1947-51)

As in preceding Books, color, light and fire imagery are interrelated. In Book V, Guido states that he has no belief in romantic love, and that therefore there was no reason for him to "bestow one drop/Of blood" to dye his wife's "true-love-knot pink" (V.697-98). After Pompilia turns to Caponsacchi for help, and escapes to Castelnovo, Guido, upon discovering the pair, does not murder them. The disgrace he suffers because of his failure to act results in such pressures that he asks,

When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?  
 Solidifies into a blot which breaks  
 Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine, --  
 (V.1077-79)

This rage which rivals even the evil colors of hell is finally avenged by the triple murder. Upon his apprehension by the law, Guido finds that "the deeds avowed" have taken "another color" (V.1889-90). Still, he pleads that his "blackened" (V.1996) honour will be cleansed when he is proved to be "One white integrity from head to heel" (V.1896).

Guido presents the antithetical view of Pompilia's purity

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<sup>4</sup> This image reflects another: Pompilia-as-plant undergoes a transition to become plague, an echo of a preceding image.

and "whiteness" as he states,

when you chant us next  
Epithalamium full to overflow  
With praise and glory of white womanhood,  
The chaste and pure -- troll not such lies o'er lip!  
(V.589-92)

Cunningly, and by the same means by which he tried to present himself as an affectionate husband, he asks the court to judge Caponsacchi mercifully:

Concede him then the color charity  
Casts on a doubtful course, --if blackish white  
Or whitish black, will charity hesitate?  
(V.1188-91)

By presenting himself as a charitable and forgiving wronged husband, Guido hopes to gain the approbation of the court.

In terms of light imagery, Guido figures himself as a source of hope to his family. The Franceschini "looked up to my face when days were dim,/And fancied they found light there" (V.34-5). In depicting himself as a source of light, Guido shifts the image to the court, asking the judges "in the plenitude of their light" to "weigh well that all this trouble has come upon me" (V.122-23) through the misrepresentations and the lies of the Comparini and the scheming faithlessness of Pompilia.

Guido depicts his situation before his marriage as one in which the Church, the court and the "Camp" wanted no more of him. Still, he believed that he had a "coat to back,"

Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,  
But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze  
From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,  
Entitle you to carry home a wife  
With the proper dowry,...

(V.406-10)

This shine has attracted the Comparini with the offer of their daughter,

and has been one of the direct causes of the tragedy. At the conclusion of his monologue, Guido presents a most affecting light image as he begs for the custody of his son:

Give me-- for last, best gift --my son again,

Let me lift up his youth and innocence  
 To purify my palace, room by room  
 Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow  
 Light to the old proud palladin my sire  
 Struck now for shame into the darkest shade  
 O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!  
 Then may we, --strong from that rekindled smile, --  
 Go forward, face new times, the better day.

(V.2025-35)

Like his protestations of affection for Pompilia and his call for merciful judgment for Caponsacchi, his plea for the custody of his son has an ulterior motive: Guido wants the Comparini fortune and not Gaetano in a loving and warm father-son relationship.

The fire imagery of Book V helps to emphasize the conciliatory attitude Guido takes towards the court. He pretends to take his torture lightly, craftily comparing it to what he says was a more severe torment--the events of the years after his marriage to Pompilia:

Needs must the Court be slow to understand  
 How this quite novel form of taking pain,  
 This getting tortured merely in the flesh,  
 Amounts to almost an agreeable change  
 In my case, me fastidious, plied too much  
 With opposite treatment (forgive the joke)  
 To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,  
 And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.  
 Four years have I been operated on  
 I' the soul, do you see -- its tense or tremulous part --  
 My self-respect, my care for a good name,  
 Pride in an old one, love of kindred,...

(V.21-32)

The passage presents Guido's principle line of defense, and the images of "the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine" (V.27) and "Four



years have I been operated on/I' the soul" recall Half Rome's "Shy, the overburdened brain becomes a blaze" and Tertium Quid's "But a wound to the soul" and "Men plagued in this fashion, get to explode this way." These suggestions of the fire image in Guido's monologue become more explicit as he recounts his version of the case. Guido contrasts his torture not only to his past "tortures" but also to his future punishment:

Then, I say,  
A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours,  
While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,  
Is naught....

(V.74-77)

Guido asks, "What! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate/For the future when you mean me martyrdom" (V.65-66)? The image of Guido's execution as a burning in hell-fire recalls similar images in Book I, but there they present no implications of martyrdom, stressing rather Guido's just reward.

Two fire images occur in the lines which Guido insists express what should have been Pompilia's protestation after the Comparini had fled Arezzo and revealed the true origins of Pompilia. According to Guido, she should have rejected the Comparini, saying,

"Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt  
Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed  
In your own shape, no longer father mine  
Nor mother mine!"<sup>5</sup>

And Pompilia should have explained Guido's anger:

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<sup>5</sup> Later, Guido will state, "See fate's flare/Full on each face of the dead guilty three" (V.933-34), thereby categorizing Pompilia with her parents.

Anger he might show, --who can stamp out flame  
 Yet spread no black o' the brand? --yet, rough albeit  
 In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,  
 What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!  
 (V.826-29)

The first image is an attempt to prejudice the audience against the Comparini and to build up the defense of justifiable murder. The second image is an attempt to absolve himself of willful cruelty, echoing Half Rome's and Tertium Quid's imagery used in vindication of Guido's actions. But the image, with its implication that the "fire" at Arezzo was the Comparinis' doing, and that Guido blamed himself in stamping it out, is in marked contrast to the images in previous Books in which the "fire" is Guido's doing and the burned victim is Pompilia.

Guido's attempts to impress the court with a defense based upon the fires of provocation causes him to refer to the effects of the drug with which Pompilia purportedly filled his wine: "Flames in my brain, fire in my throat, my wife/Gone God knows whither" (V.991-92), "heart of me/Fire, and each limb as languid" (V.1040-41). Guido hopes to impress his audience with the provocation of three events: Pompilia's counter-suit for divorce, her removal from the convent to the Comparini villa, and the birth of Gaetano. Half-Rome's fire images of maddening instigation were applied to Guido's reactions to these events, and in his own monologue Guido makes use of fire to describe his reactions. He underplays his reaction to the news of the first two events:

Now, --I see my lords  
 Shift in their seat, --would I could do the same!  
 They probably please expect my bile was moved  
 To purpose, nor much blame me: now, they judge,  
 The fiery titillation urged my flesh  
 Break through the bonds....

(V.1367-72)

Instead, he claims he meekly acquiesced to his fate, realizing that his

enemies had beaten him. But upon hearing of the child's birth:

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.  
 What, all is only beginning not ending now?  
 The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh  
 To the bone and there lay biting, did its best, --  
 What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,  
 Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?  
 (V.1476-81)

A comparison between Guido's image of "fiery titillation" applied to the previous bad news and this more direct fire image reveals his guile. His making light of the former will, he hopes, serve to emphasize the seriousness of the latter. His life depends on his ability to convince the judges that the slayings were the work of a maddened man avenging his honour.<sup>6</sup>

As Guido goes on to describe his plans for vengeance, he refers to his intent to slay the Comparini and Pompilia as the

impulse to quench  
 The antagonistic spark of hell and tread  
 Satan and all his malice into dust,  
 Declare to the world the one law, right is right.  
 (V.1568-71)

The image echoes previous images applied to the act of murder, in particular, Half-Rome's "wash of hell-fire", Other Half-Rome's "burn up the bitter at no distant day,/Body and soul one holocaust to hell", and Tertium Quid's "blotting out, as by black of hell,/Their triumph in her misery and death."

All these images cast Guido as a devil and his act as hell-fire. In contrast, Guido images his victims as an evil fire to

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<sup>6</sup> The cause of the violent reaction imaged by the roaring fire is made more clear when Guido calls Gaetano "the priest's bastard" (V.1531).

be extinguished. As he describes the murders, he states that if Pietro or Pompilia had opened the door he might have paused,

But it was she the hag, she that brought hell  
 For a dowry with her to her husband's house,  
 She the mock-mother, she that made the match  
 And married me to perdition, spring and source  
 O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart  
 To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth, --  
 (V.1641-46)

The fire image is a logical extension of the preceding images of fire used by Guido in his defense, especially in reference to himself on hearing the news of the child's birth. But although Guido insists its source is Pompilia, the fire is really hell-fire, reiterating the concepts found in previous images.<sup>7</sup>

Guido pretends that Pompilia yearned for romantic love which he was unable and unwilling to provide. If it had been illicit love, however, Guido says he "Might have fired up" (V.683). He also refers to the churchmen-judges' celibacy: "My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul/And neither marry nor burn" (V.723-24). These fire images applied to illicit love and sexual passion parallel Half-Rome's images and help to contrast Caponsacchi's attitude toward love with Guido's.

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<sup>7</sup> Further evidence of Guido-as-devil can be seen in his caustic statement that Pompilia felt he meant

--To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,  
 Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,  
 That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones  
 O' the common street to save her,...

(V.633-36)

Pompilia's horror at the consummation of her marriage will be reiterated in Book VII.

Guido uses theatre images five times in Book V. Since he is attempting to win the sympathy of the judges, he pictures the relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi as "A comedy the town was privy to" (V.1001):

They never tried to put on mask at all:  
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart  
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,  
Ay, and with proper clapping and applause  
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.  
(V.1122-26)

Guido sees Caponsacchi as "A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art" and Pompilia as "a gamesome wife. Able to act Corinna without a book" (V.1531-32). Finally, Guido pictures himself as an actor duped by Caponsacchi so that he must

[hitch] my hap  
Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled  
At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,  
And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,  
Beating the bagpipes....

(V.1444-48)

Guido's monologue shows that the hand of God may be seen in the humble, unregarded events of everyday life, as the story of Pompilia and Caponsacchi illustrates. But it is equally true that the Prince of Darkness may lurk there. Guido is a Satanic character, but he is human. And by that very reason, he is terrible.<sup>8</sup>

-II-

Book VI - "Giuseppe Caponsacchi"

Caponsacchi's monologue is no whining, ingratiating argument, but an indignant, impassioned thirsting for the truth. Henry James has

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<sup>8</sup> Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, p. 53.

stated that "Caponsacchi regales us . . . with the rarest fruit of a great character, a great culture and a great case; but Caponsacchi is acceptedly and naturally, needfully and illustratively, splendid. He is the soul of man at its finest--having passed through the smoky fires of life and emerging clear and high."<sup>9</sup> Caponsacchi is not on trial, but he has been called back to Rome to restate his version of the case. Agonizingly aware of the fact that Pompilia lies dying, and under no compulsion to give a reasoned defense of himself and Pompilia, Caponsacchi gives full vent to his hatred of Guido and his reverent feeling for Pompilia in Book VI.

Caponsacchi's purpose is to act as a "hollow rock" to condense/The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you/The mystery of this murder" (VI.72-4) which "seems to fill the universe with sight/And sound" (VI.76-7). Pompilia, "The glory of life, the beauty of the world/The splendour of heaven" (VI.118-19), has touched the priest's life so that he has "recognized [his] food in her" (VI.124). When Caponsacchi entered the Church, he lived "according to prescription,"

--Conformed myself, both read the breviary  
And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place  
I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post  
Where beauty and fashion rule.

(VI.340-43)

He lived from day to day in a hypocritical balance between the secular and the divine until he met Pompilia and encountered her plight. Then he realized

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<sup>9</sup> Henry James, "The Ring and the Book," in Notes on Novelists (New York: Scribner, 1914), p. 315.

how my life  
 Had shaken under me, -broke short indeed  
 And showed the gap, 'twixt what is, what should be, --  
 And into what abysm the soul may slip,  
 Leave aspiration here, achievement there,  
 Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes--  
 Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,  
 How utterly dissociated was I  
 A priest and celibate, . . .

(VI.480-88)

Caponsacchi recognizes Pompilia's "crystalline soul" (VI.918) "at potency of truth" (VI.917) in the same way that Pompilia recognizes the essence of his soul. He finds himself passing "Into another state, under new rule" (VI.949) of spiritual rebirth, realizing that "Duty to God is duty to her" (VI.1015). Caponsacchi's love and deep respect for Pompilia's "perfect soul" (VI.1044) is the key to their relationship. He negates all previous suggestions of carnal love by stating,

I never touched her with my finger-tip  
 Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,  
 Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,  
 As we priests carry the paten: . . .

(VI.1591-94)

Caponsacchi realizes his mortal imperfection:

If I pretended simply to be pure  
 Honest and Christian in the case, --absurd!  
 As well go boast myself above the needs  
 O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,  
 Wine tastes, --a saint above the smack!

(VI.1699-1703)

But when "The spark of truth was struck" between Pompilia and the priest, Caponsacchi felt he was made "fair and honest" within a "permissible love/O' the good and true" (VI.1878-79) "By the revelation of Pompilia" (VI.1847). Therefore he stands before the court to state "how things stand,/State facts and not be flustered at their fume" (VI.1957-58). Caponsacchi thirsts for God's truth to teach the world

(VI.2057). He sees himself as "A relagated priest" of God (VI.2066), but realizes

priests  
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,  
Who come for help in passionate extremes?  
(VI.2068-70)

Throughout his monologue, Caponsacchi gives way to the self-remorse he feels for not having been able to prevent the murders in some way. He dwells on his frivolous early life (even after becoming a priest), his first meeting with Pompilia, the escape and journey to Castelnuovo. However, Caponsacchi's imagery is more imaginative, sensitive, poetic, and touching than the imagery that has gone before.

In terms of religious imagery, Caponsacchi continues the association between Pompilia and the Virgin Mary begun in earlier Books. The first device for the association is a painting of a Madonna by Raphael, which hangs in his Church. He is immediately reminded of the picture when he first sees Pompilia:

Well, after three or four years of this life,  
In prosecution of my calling, I  
Found myself at the theatre one night  
With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind  
Proper enough for the place, amused or no:  
When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself  
A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad,  
It was as when, in our cathedral once,  
As I got yawningly through matin-song,  
I saw facchini bear a burden up,  
Base it on the high-alter, break away  
A board or two, and leave the thing inside  
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,  
There was the Rafael!

(VI.389-402)

Just as Doubting Thomas doubted no longer after receiving the gift of Mary's girdle, so Caponsacchi's faith is renewed through Pompilia:

'T was a Thomas too  
Obtained, -more favoured than his namesake here, --



A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt, --  
 Our Lady's girdle; down he saw it drop  
 As she ascended into heaven, they say:  
 He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.  
 I too have seen a lady and hold a grace.

(VI.1083-89)

When Caponsacchi sees Pompilia at her window in the Franceschini villa at Arezzo, she is "Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand" (VI.691), transformed into a likeness of a statue of the Virgin:

the same great, grave, grieffful air  
 As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,  
 Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,  
 Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt--  
 Assured myself that she was flesh and blood--  
 She had looked one look and vanished.

(VI.692-97)

Pompilia is even more specifically portrayed as a Christ-figure--the victim of Golgotha:

a multitude of worthy folk  
 Took recreation, watched a certain group  
 Of soldiery intent upon a game, --  
 How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,  
 Threw dice, --the best diversion in the world.  
 A word in your ear, --they are now casting lots,  
 Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,  
 For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!

(VI.52-59)

Caponsacchi portrays Pompilia further as a saint:

Saints, to do us good,  
 Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:  
 We never find them saints before, at least.  
 Be her first prayer then presently for you--  
 She has done the good to me...

(VI.174-78)

Moreover, he pictures himself and Pompilia as "two martyrs somewhere in a tomb" (VI.1165), and quotes Pompilia's words describing himself at the scene of her "crucifixion" by Guido:

you came in  
 Like a thief upon me. I this morning said  
 In my extremity, entreat the thief!

Try if he have in him no honest touch!  
 A thief might save me from a murderer.  
 'Twas a thief said the last kind words to Christ:  
 Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft:  
 (VI.851-57)

Guido, on the other hand, is seen in terms of hell and Satan by Caponsacchi. He is the "Lord of show/And Prince o' the Power of the Air" (VI.1802-3). As Caponsacchi and Pompilia travel to Rome, Caponsacchi knows that they must reach the city "Lest hell reach her!" (VI.1401). This association is reiterated as Pompilia cries at the inn,

"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:  
 "Hell for me, no embracing any more!  
 I am God's, I love God, God--whose knees I clasp,  
 Whose utterly most just award I take,  
 But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"  
 (VI.1502-06)

Attacking Guido with his own sword, Pompilia cries, "Die . . . devil, in God's name" (VI.1520), completing the analogy of Guido-as-Satan.

In terms of animal imagery, Caponsacchi pictures himself as a

coxcomb, fribble and fool  
 Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,  
 A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound  
 Kicked for his pains to kennel;...  
 (VI.98-101)

Banished to Civita Vecchia in obedience to the law, Caponsacchi feels an agonizing guilt for leaving Pompilia to Guido's cruelty, and an overwhelming bitterness towards the court that sentenced him falsely on a charge of adultery by not recognizing the true intent of his motives. He calls himself a "bishop in the egg" (VI.254) who obeyed his superiors in the Church to go

Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards  
 Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose  
 Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and made faith!  
 (VI.977-79)

Caponsacchi images Pompilia as a lamb which Guido has butchered (VI.42), and continues the analogy of the bait and trap:

But as I heard him bid a farming-man  
 At the villa take a lamb once to the wood  
 And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf  
 Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,  
 Enticed to the trap: he practised thus with me  
 That so, whatever were his gain thereby,  
 Others than I might become prey and spoil.  
 (VI.1339)

Pompilia is also a dove (VI.110), and a dog who begs him to take her to Rome (VI.800). Pompilia's terror of being overtaken by Guido on the journey is evident when

her whole face changed,  
 The misery grew again about her mouth,  
 The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's  
 Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels  
 The probing spear o' the huntsman.  
 (VI.1264-68)

Guido is assigned the majority of animal images in Book VI. He is a hawk (VI.109), a cat (VI.422), a bear (VI.538), a monster (VI.562), "hell's worm" (VI.597), a spider (VI.607), a "soft sly adder" (VI.611), a mad dog (VI.1487), and a "transfixed scorpion" and "reptile" (VI.660) who forged the love letters between Pompilia and Caponsacchi. The snake analogy is further emphasized when Caponsacchi pictures Guido leering and scowling when he finds the pair at Castelnuovo:

Soon triumph suppld the tongue  
 A little, malice glued his dry throat,  
 And he part howled, part hissed...  
 (VI.1413-15)

In terms of images of vegetation, Caponsacchi has been told that "Nobody wants you in these latter days/To prop the Church by breaking your backbone" (VI.287-88). Instead, he is admonished to

Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,  
 Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose

Shall make amends and beautify the pile!  
(VI.293-95)

Like Hercules, Caponsacchi has been in the "fabled garden" (VI.987)  
of the Church,

plucked in ignorance  
Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,  
Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,  
And scorned the achievement:....  
(VI.988-91)

When Pompilia enters his life, she becomes "the prize o' the place,"

the thing of perfect gold,  
The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,  
Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.  
(VI.992-94)

When Caponsacchi makes the final decision to help Pompilia escape, he

Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit  
Give way through all its twines, and let me go.  
(VI.1109-10)

Further, Pompilia's torture at the hands of Guido has been like the

"Dipping" of "the bough of life, so pleasant once,/In fire which  
shrivelled leaf and bud alike" (VI.765-66). Caponsacchi quotes

Pompilia's own words:

I sought release from that--  
I think, or else from, --dare I say, some cause  
Such as is put into a tree, which turns  
Away from the north wind with what nest it holds,--  
The woman said that trees so turn:....  
(VI.1352)

As Pompilia describes her search for escape in terms of  
plant imagery in the preceding lines, she also describes it in terms  
of disease imagery elsewhere:

"I have heard say  
Of some sick body that my mother knew,  
'T was no good sign when in a limb diseased  
All the pain suddenly departs, --as if  
The guardian angel discontinued pain  
Because the hope of cure was gone at last:

The limb will not again exert itself,  
 It needs be pained no longer: so with me,  
 --My soul whence all the pain is past at once:  
 All pain must be to work some good in the end."  
 (VI.1196-1205)

Pompilia's relationship with Caponsacchi has, for the moment, erased all memory of Guido's tortures. And one of the main purposes of Caponsacchi's testimony is to clarify the accusations previously presented in terms of plague:

Could you fail read this cartulary aright  
 On head and front of Franceschini there,  
 Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print,--  
 That he, from the beginning pricked at the heart  
 By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,  
 Plotted to plague her into overt sin  
 And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,  
 And save his mean self -- miserably caught  
 I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?  
 --That himself wrote those papers, --from himself  
 To himself, --which, i' the name of me and her,  
 His mistress-messenger gave her and me,  
 Touching us with such pustules of the soul  
 That she and I might take the taint, be shown  
 To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?  
 (VI.1774-88)

By his use of color imagery, Caponsacchi denies the charges of adultery in his relationship with Pompilia:

Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,  
 I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy  
 As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place  
 Suspected of a spot would damn us both.  
 (VI.184-87)

In other words, Caponsacchi has been open about his feelings for Pompilia, and she for him. If they had designed to hide their love, they would have been assumed guilty. Ironically, their very truthfulness has resulted in a verdict of guilty on a charge of adultery. Although Caponsacchi recognizes his human imperfections, in this matter he is adamant: "I know/I too am taintless, and I bare my breast"

(VI.193-94). Pompilia's innocence and purity is reiterated as Caponsacchi pictures her as "a wonderful white soul" (VI.198) and "The snow-white soul that angels fear to take/Untenderly" (VI.192-94). As he waits for her to join him in the journey to Rome, Pompilia approaches like

a whiteness in the distance, waxed  
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,  
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:  
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,  
Certainly, for the body was one black,  
Black from head to foot.

(VI.1121-26)

In contrast, Caponsacchi figures Guido as a "black, mean and small" man (VI.423), "a man and murderer calling the white black" (VI.199) who tries to convince the court of a carnal relationship between the priest and his wife. Caponsacchi gives "color to the very be o' the man/The murderer" who tries to "make as if" the priest "loved his wife/In the way he called love" (VI.181-83).

The theatre imagery which Guido has introduced appears twice in Book VI. Caponsacchi describes the scene at the inn:

--that Guido, wiping brow  
And getting him a countenance, was fast  
Losing his fear, beginning to strut free  
O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there,--  
(VI.1540-43)

Caponsacchi's words ironically recall Guido's own image of himself as a "tyrant in a playhouse scene" (V.1123). But Caponsacchi sees that Guido truly is a tyrant, implying that the Count was not an innocent participant in the drama, but rather a knowing contributor to the incidents. Later, Caponsacchi tells the judges how Guido dressed himself in rural garb for the murder: "He needs must vindicate his honor, --ay,/Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,/Away from the

scene" (VI.1989-91). Guido's disguise indicates his intent to murder, and not the repairing of an injured honour:

Fire imagery is contained in Caponsacchi's opening words, and they echo Guido's charge:

In this sudden smoke from hell,--  
So things disguise themselves, --I cannot see  
My own hand held thus, broad before my face  
And know it again.

(VI.2-5)

The explicit coupling of smoke with hell and deceit reminds us of the images of Book I, and confirms the true nature of Guido. Later, Caponsacchi speaks of his sudden revelation of the truth of the letters:

I gave a passing glance  
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred  
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon  
Out now to tolerate no darkness more,  
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass  
For truth and solid, not an empty lie:  
"So, he not only forged the words for her  
But words for me, made letters he called mine:...

(VI.907-14)

Caponsacchi's impassioned plea before the court in defense of Pompilia and their relationship is also an equally impassioned condemnation of Guido. Caponsacchi's fire images are intended to reveal much of the truth, and therefore much of it is applied to concepts of purity and goodness through the light of the fire of truth:

Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause  
To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,  
Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.

(VI.146-48)

The image echoes Browning's own in Book I, describing the creative process:

I can detach from me, commission forth  
Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage  
O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,  
May chance upon some fragment of a whole,

Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,  
 Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein  
 I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,...  
 (I.742-48)

The image in the last line is borrowed from Isaiah 42:3: "A bruised seed shall he not break, and the smoking flax he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." The recurrence of the image equates Caponsacchi with the poet himself; it gives Caponsacchi's testimony the authenticity missing in the monologues of the preceding four speakers. Caponsacchi asks the court:

Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave  
 Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,  
 My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench  
 Of minutes with a memory in each,  
 Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,  
 Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,  
 Mirror you plain, --As God's sea glassed in gold,  
 His saints, --the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,  
 You must know that a man gets drunk with truth  
 Stagnant inside him!

(VI.1137-46)

Therefore, in order to articulate the truth of the case, Caponsacchi uses the image of truth-as-fire throughout Book VI:

Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff  
 O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth  
 For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!  
 (VI.169-71)

Calmly! Each incident  
 Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight  
 For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch  
 O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth  
 To idiots who name Parian -- coprolite.  
 After all, I shall give no glare -- at best  
 Only display you certain scattered lights  
 Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:  
 Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks  
 Wavelet from wavelet:...

(VI.1147-56)

--That when at the last we did rush each on each,  
 By no chance but because God willed it so--  
 The spark of truth was struck from out our souls--



Made all of me, descried in the first glance,  
 Seem fair and honest and permissible love  
 O' the good and true--

(VI.1794-99)

These images recall others that deal with the Pompilia-Caponsacchi relationship: Half-Rome's "love-star" at "fiery-full" with its implications of illicit love; and Other Half-Rome's romantic image of two colliding and blazing stars. But in contrast to these two concepts, the spark of truth in the relationship is an idealistic love that neither of the two gossips can fully perceive.

Caponsacchi repeatedly employs the fire image in reference to Pompilia's effect upon him. He speaks of his inability to erase from his memory Pompilia's gaze at the theatre:

That night and next day did the gaze endure,  
 Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam through shut eyes,  
 And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.

(VI.430-32)

He is unable to read Aquinas, for,

How when the page o' the "Summa" preached its best,  
 Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock  
 The silence we could break by no one word,--

(VI.495-97)

He later makes clear the meaning of this light and fire in Pompilia, taking it to be "The first authoritative word" of God's that could not be disobeyed (VI.998).

The spiritual significance of the image is again revealed in the description of the scene where he awaited Pompilia's appearance for the escape:

There was I at the goal, before the gate,  
 With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,  
 A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,  
 Ever some spiritual witness new and new  
 In faster frequency, crowding solitude  
 To watch the way o' the warfare, --till, at last,

When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,  
 Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed  
 Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,  
 Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:  
 The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,---  
 (VI.1114-24)

Later, Caponsacchi quotes Pompilia's remark on the flight to Rome.

After a night's rest, Pompilia, holding an infant, had said to him:

"How much good this has done!  
 This is a whole night's rest and how much more!  
 I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.  
 How do you call that tree with the thick top  
 That holds in all its leafy green and gold  
 The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"  
 (VI.1312-17)

The image suggests renewed hope and confidence in the rightness of her act of flight since she is with child. When Pompilia attacks Guido with his sword, the fire image occurs with a spiritual connotation:

She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,  
 Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy  
 O' the blade,...

(VI.1518-20)

She calls Guido a "devil" in the next lines. Her action is therefore, that of an avenging angel against her husband for his cruelty and deceit.

Caponsacchi repeatedly applies the fire image to Pompilia's suffering at Arezzo and to Guido. He quotes Pompilia:

I found I had become Count Guido's wife:  
 Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed  
 Into a fury of fire, if once he was  
 Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,  
 He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,  
 All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,  
 Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,  
 In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,  
 Burning not only present life but past,  
 Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.  
 (VI.759-68)

The image of the burning Pompilia at the hands of Guido is a repetition

of similar preceding images. The image of Guido as a "fury of fire" seems to echo Half-Rome's figures, Tertium Quid's, and Guido's own, used in defense of his vengeance. But closer examination shows that, as Pompilia implies, Guido's cruelty was immediate and unprovoked -- an expression of his essential nature.

The devil-like character of Guido recurs in Caponsacchi's references. It appears as a detail in his description of the discovery at the inn:

She started up, stood erect, face to face  
 With the husband: back he fell, was but tressed there  
 By the window all aflame with morning-red,  
 He the black figure, the opprobrious blur  
 Against all peace and joy and light and life.  
 "Away from between me and hell!" she cried:  
 "Hell for me, no embracing any more!  
 I am God's, I love God, God --whose knees I clasp,  
 Whose utterly most just award I take,  
 But bear no more love-making devils:..."  
 (VI.1497-1506)

Other Half-Rome has included the image of the room "Ruddy with flame," but in Caponsacchi's description on the "flame" of the window is "peace and joy and light and life," an association that follows logically from the fire-images of spiritual significance that occur throughout his monologue.

The evil and monstrous fire of Guido is suggested when Caponsacchi quotes Guido's remarks at the inn:

Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing,--  
 Still at the last here pant I, but arrive,  
 Vulcan--

(VI.1434-36)

Guido is alluding to that part of the Vulcan myth in which Vulcan apprehends his unfaithful wife, Venus, fleeing with Mars. But ironically, Vulcan was also the god of fire and devouring flame who lived with

Venus in the dark caves of Aetna. These details recall Tertium Quid's reference to Pompilia's reasons for flight from Arezzo: "Show us there needed Aetna vomit flame/Ere run the crystal dewdrops!" (IV.858-59). Fire images are used to represent evil as Caponsacchi describes Guido as a "dragon belching flame" (VI.1758) in the St. George legend, and more specifically as a devil:

How miss, then,  
 What's now forced on you by this flare of fact--  
 As if Saint Peter failed to recognize  
 Nero as no apostle, John or James,  
 Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch  
 O' the blood and fat to show his features by!  
 Could you fail to read this cartulary aright  
 On head and front of Franceschini there,  
 Large-lettred like hell's masterpiece of print,--  
 That he, from the beginning pricked at heart  
 By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,  
 Plotted to plague her into overt sin  
 And shame,---

(VI.1768-80)

Guido the devil burns the martyr Pompilia. Once again the image recalls the hell-fire images of the other speakers and the fire-image of Pompilia's suffering and death at the hands of Guido.

One fire image has no precedent in any of the earlier monologues:

Death meant, to spurn the ground  
 Soar to the sky, --die well and you do that.  
 The very immolation made the bliss;  
 Death was the heart of life, and all the harm  
 My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil  
 Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:  
 As if the intense centre of the flame  
 Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly  
 Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,  
 Saint Thomas with his sober gray goose-quill,  
 And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,  
 Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,  
 Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.  
 (VI.936-48)

The lines are a reference to Caponsacchi's final decision to aid

Pompilia and to his recognition that salvation can come through self-sacrifice and bold action in the service of God. The meaning of the fly-flame image is made clearer when Caponsacchi says,

I found out first that life and death  
Are means to an end, that passion uses both,  
Indisputably mistress of the man  
Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:---  
(VI.981-84)

In other words, through Pompilia's spiritual influence upon him, Caponsacchi learns the lesson of giving oneself for another in the service of God.

Caponsacchi, then, in his masculine dignity and his righteous sense of outrage, his energy, and his chivalric mien, represents the church militant in the manner of Spenser's Red Cross Knight.<sup>10</sup> He is a fallible human being, but it is through such men that the Gospel is extended into the lives of ordinary mortals who must apprehend divine truth through experience rather than through the intellect.<sup>11</sup> At the end of his monologue, Caponsacchi states that he will now use his office to enable others

To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,  
Out of the low obscure and petty world--  
Or only see one purpose and one will  
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:  
To have to do with nothing but the true,  
The good, the eternal -- and these, not alone  
In the main current of the general life,

---

<sup>10</sup> This analogy is presented in the image of Caponsacchi as St. George, Pompilia as Cleodolinda, and Guido as the dragon in VI. 1753-59.

<sup>11</sup> Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, p. 56.

But small experiences of every day,  
 Concerns of the particular hearth and home:  
 To learn not only by a comet's rush  
 But a rose's birth, --not by the grandeur, God--  
 But the comfort, Christ.

(VI.2075-86)

-III-

Book VII - "Pompilia"

Browning created Pompilia to exemplify Christian virtues.

In Book VII, she appears as the meek, all-loving, all forgiving. Altick and Loucks have noted that "If Caponsacchi is the Red Cross Knight, she is Una. If he is the church militant, she is the great exemplar of Christian morality. Where he is vigorous and active, she is wrapped in innocent passivity; where he denounces the evil embodied in men like Guido, she finds it impossible to conceive of that evil, recognize or cope with it."<sup>12</sup>

Pompilia is a victim of evil and deceit, but all she knows is that her whole life has been a series of unreal episodes occurring as if in a dream:

The history of me as what some one dreamed,  
 And get to disbelieve it at the last:  
 Since to myself it dwindles fast to that,  
 Sheer dreaming and impossibility,--  
 (VII.108-11)

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.  
 (VII.195-98)

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<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 57

Even her infant son "withdraws into a dream/As the rest do" (7.210-11).

Pompilia can only understand evil as an absence of good, a blank:

All since is one blank,  
Over and ended; a terrific dream....  
And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,  
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! so here.  
I know I wake, --but from what? Blank, I say!  
This is the note of evil: for good lasts.  
(VII.579-90)

Throughout her monologue, Pompilia bears no hostility or enmity towards Guido, the Comparini, or the others who have victimized her. She implies that the evil which surrounded her was a result of man's fallen condition and of a world in which appearance masquerades as reality. For Pompilia, evil has been the result of ignorance or a misapplied desire to do good. Therefore, she remains untouched by the taint of evil that has surrounded her -- a pure spirit of goodness that inspires Caponsacchi to action on behalf of true moral and religious values. Pompilia's mystic affinity with good draws good to recognize and align with her.

Pompilia perceives life as appearance clothed in the disguise of reality, but instinctively clings to the pure, true goodness beneath:

The hovel is life: no matter what dogs bit  
Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,  
All outside is lone field, moon and such peace--  
Flowing in, filling up as with a sea  
Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,  
Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,  
To meet me and calm all things back again.  
(VII.362-68)

Pompilia looks towards death to "see things clear" (VII.727), asking for God's counsel, not mankind's (VII.853). She realizes that "All human plans and projects come to nought/My life, and what I know of other lives,/Prove that: no plan nor project! God shall care! (VII.896).

Thus, as she withdraws "from earth and man" to tell her story, she composes herself for God (VII.1752) and prepares herself to relate her truth.

Pompilia's truth is personal, individual and uncomplicated by any attempt on her part to see herself disinterestedly or to evaluate her particular experience in relation to the general pattern of society. Any estimate of the value of her truth depends on one's belief in the innate purity of her soul and in the universality of her character. Pompilia has never forgotten the intimations of truth with which she was born; her devotion to truth and purity of heart is the source of an insight which enables her to see God. While ordinary life is unreal and unsubstantial to Pompilia, her perception of her life as a dream points to the ultimate reality; her moment of dying is the vantage point for her whole life and for reality. Her calmness as she tells her story proceeds from the peace of God and her withdrawal from the conflict of the world. Pompilia discerns in life the things of eternal worth.

Pompilia speaks, not before the judges, but to her confessor and a few friends. She speaks calmly, resignedly, simply, but not always with perfect understanding. After living a happy, carefree child's life with the Comparini, she was suddenly thrown into a complex adult world with Guido that was filled with horror, shame, despair, and evil human emotions. In her monologue she tries to explain her life, not only to those around her, but to herself and to God.

Her relationship with Caponsacchi and the birth of her child, deeply spiritual experiences, partially compensate for the years of fear and hopelessness, and seem to her to justify the ways of God. Still, there is much to ponder, to try to comprehend, concerning the



confused thoughts, impulses, and emotions of her own that accompany and partly explain her role in the events now past. Pompilia tells her story, often pausing, searching half-baffled for words that will satisfactorily objectify the complex psychological and emotional states that she has experienced in the course of the events.

A large part of the imagery in Pompilia's monologue reflects this searching and demonstrates its method. Quite naturally, Pompilia turns to the familiar and the comprehensible in her effort to understand and explain the unfamiliar and incomprehensible.

The ring image<sup>13</sup> occurs twice in Pompilia's monologue. In the first instance, she makes reference to a seizure of fear on the journey to Castelnuovo with Caponsacchi:

I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world  
Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,  
As if the broken circlet joined again,  
Tightened itself about me with no break,--  
(VII.1530-33)

The image recalls the obscene ring of Book I, and Tertium Quid's reference to the circle of torture and pain. The circlet is now broken because of Pompilia's rescue by Caponsacchi. The second ring-image is presented when Pompilia states,

I wish nor want  
One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand  
Traced round about with white to front the world.  
(VII.1628-30)

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<sup>13</sup> On a literal level, Pompilia quotes her maid Margherita, Guido's "Intimate" (VII.1087) who warns Pompilia that Caponsacchi is in great danger, and that Guido plans to kill him. Her maid asks for "a ring to show for token" to put Caponsacchi on his guard (VII.1084), hoping to compromise Pompilia and encircle her with evidence of adultery.

Pompilia presents herself as the pivotal point in the circle of truth, reiterating her "whiteness" in alliance with pure truth and goodness.

Pompilia does not resort to elaborate analogies from the theatre as the other speakers do. As she utters her dying words, her tone is pious, and she makes constant reference to God. She tells of how she prayed before her escape:

To God the strong, God the beneficent,  
 God ever mindful in all strife and strait,  
 Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,  
 Till at last He puts forth might and saves.  
 (VII.1372-75)

She speaks of Guido as a creation of God ("So he was made; he nowise made himself" (VII.1710) ), and similarly of her son:

Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,  
 His marvel of creation, foot would crush,  
 Now that the hand He trusted to receive  
 And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?  
 (VII.1732-35)

God is conceived of by Pompilia as providential, wise and powerful, a spirit who creates but does not desert his creatures. Through his omnipotence, his "actors" play their parts in the human drama. The resolution takes place through the Pope and Caponsacchi, who respond to the promptings from heaven.

In terms of religious imagery, the first suggestion of the Pompilia-Virgin Mary association is a non-figurative one. Pompilia begins by asking whether she does not look nearer to twenty than to seventeen years old, and compares herself to a statue of the Virgin:

Do I not . . . say, if you are by to speak...  
 Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least,  
 Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,  
 Than the poor Virgin that I used to know  
 At our street-corner in a lonely niche,--  
 The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,--  
 Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more:

She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.  
(VII.73-80)

The separation of the Baby from the Virgin has a parallel in Pompilia's forced separation from her child. The "thin white glazed clay" of the statue is consistent with the whiteness and white light used to image Pompilia. Later, pleading with the Archbishop to sanction her refusal to live conjugally with Guido, Pompilia cries,

"Let me henceforward lead the virgin life  
You praise in Her you bid me imitate!"  
(VII.747-48)

But the Archbishop replies that she should rather imitate Eve:

Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar  
Virginity, --t'is virtue or t'is vice.  
That which was glory in the Mother of God  
Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve  
Created to be mother of mankind.  
Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech  
'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth'--  
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!  
(VII.750-60)

If the spiritualization of Pompilia in previous Books has had the intended effect, it becomes clear that Pompilia has no more in common with the Virgin than with Eve. Instead, Pompilia must be identified with the human Mary:

I never realized God's birth before--  
How He grew likest God in being born.  
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe  
Lying a little on my breast like hers.  
(VII.1674-77)

The Caponsacchi-star<sup>14</sup> is conceived as leading the Virgin to the place where her child is born, to correspond with the circumstances of Pompilia's flight to Rome, and the birth of her child:

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,  
Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still  
Above the House o' the Babe, --my babe to be, ...  
(VII.1434-36)

Thus, the star and Virgin motifs are joined in a single figure to draw a parallel between Mary and the Star of Bethlehem, and Pompilia and her star, Caponsacchi.

Pompilia views Guido as a Satan-figure, as "master, by hell's right" (VII.1570), from whom Gaetano must be hidden "for fear his foe should find" (VII.48). This is an analogy linking the infant to Jesus being hidden from Herod's soldiers, and to Moses hidden in the bullrushes from the Pharoah's guards.

Pompilia pictures Caponsacchi as "my angel helplessly held back" (VII.1571) at the inn, and the angel that saved her (VII.1627) from her life with Guido at Arezzo. She can see Caponsacchi's goodness and true worth and his religious devotion to her inspired by her own pure influence. She is bewildered by the opinions of Rome and the courts toward him:

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<sup>14</sup> There is a cumulative effect resulting from the repeated juxtapositioning of Caponsacchi-as-star and Pompilia-as-Virgin. Margherita whispers the name "Caponsacchi" when Pompilia is in a swoon. To Pompilia, hearing his name is like waking to see a star (VII.1128-33). When Pompilia and Caponsacchi meet for the first time, he appears as a "deliverer" in the dark of her life in the form of a star (VII.1391-93). Pompilia identifies Caponsacchi as a star when a cloud, shrouding the star she watches from her terrace, finally breaks (VII.1444-47).

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!  
 Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st once,  
 "He hath a devil" --say he was Thy saint,  
 My Caponsacchi! Shield and show --unshroud  
 In Thine own time the glory of the soul  
 If aught obscure,...

(VII.1468-73)

Caponsacchi is her deliverance from the hands of Guido. Not only is he a saint in her eyes, but an angel battling with the devil Guido. Pompilia requisitions his aid

Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,  
 And take the angel's hand was sent to help--  
 And found the old adversary athwart the path--  
 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 thee,---

(VII.1600-5)

Relating her version of the knock at her parents' door in Rome that was to herald Guido and his hired assassins, Pompilia begins her animal imagery. She figures herself and her parents as sheep, and Guido as an evil angel:

"There's the fold,  
 And all the sheep together, big as cats!  
 And such a shepherd, half the size of life,  
 Starts up and hears the angel" --when, at the door,  
 A tap: we started up: you know the rest.

(VII.260-64)

The helpless sheep image is reiterated as Pompilia relates her reactions to Margherita's attempts to incriminate her with the forged love-letters:

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

(VII.382-84)

When her marriage to Guido is being discussed by her parents, Pietro asks her to leave the room because

She is not helpful to the sacrifice  
 At this stage, --do you want the victim by  
 While you discuss the value of her blood?

(VII.519-21)

This image re-emphasizes others in preceding Books of Pompilia as a lamb trapped in a market-sale.

The lamb and sheep images undergo a subtle transformation as the monologue continues. In the first instance, Pompilia becomes a goat in a parable underlining her situation with Guido:

There was a foreigner had trained a goat,  
 A shuddering white woman of a beast,  
 To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks  
 Put close, which gave the creature room enough:  
 When she was settled there, he, one by one,  
 Took away all the sticks, left just the four  
 Whereon the little hoofs did really rest,  
 There she kept firm, all underneath was air.

(VII.604-11)

After her marriage, Pompilia finds that one by one all her supports are removed from her, both her parents and all other sources of aid to which she might turn.

The Pompilia-as-bird images of preceding Books are further developed in Pompilia's monologue. She claims that she stood "stupified, profitless, as cow or sheep/That miss a man's mind; anger him just twice/By trial at repairing first fault" (VII.668-70) when Guido accused her of tantalizing men at the theatre. Pompilia states that he blamed her, saying, "You are a coquette,/A lure-owl posturing to attract birds" (VII.671-72). Pompilia develops the bird imagery further as she wishes for escape from Arezzo:

"Had I a dove's wing, how I fain would flee!"  
 The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings,"--  
 Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast,"--  
 Simply "How good it were to fly and rest,  
 Have hope now, and one day expect content!  
 How well to do what I shall never do!"  
 So I said, "Had there been a man like that,  
 To lift me with his strength out of all strife  
 Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!"

(VII.985-93)

Pompilia perceives her desire for escape as an instinctual longing, not unlike a bird's instinct for nest-building or migration:

The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool,  
 And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks rank,  
 Falls out of the procession that befits,  
 From window here to window there, with all  
 The world to choose, --so well he knows his course?  
 I have my purpose and my motive too,  
 My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!

(VII.1229-35)

As for Guido, Pompilia sees him as "an owl and used for catching birds" (VII.394), "a scurvy dog" (VII.1078), and "the serpent towering and triumphant" (VII.1573). He "has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth" (VII.1304), and eyes Pompilia as a butcher eyes a "cast panting ox" (VII.574). Just as Pompilia has figured herself in relation to the statue of the Virgin, so she describes Guido in relation to a marble lion:

I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high  
 As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,  
 With half his body rushing from the wall,  
 Eating the figure of a prostrate man--  
 (To the right, it is, of entry by the door)--  
 An ominous sign to one baptized like me,...

(VII.21-26)

This voracious connotation applied to Guido is developed as Pompilia quotes others who have asked 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!"

(VII.123-26)

The passage reiterates others which depict Guido as a wolf and a snake.

Pompilia's plant imagery begins as she is relating events from her childhood. She and a playmate used to associate themselves with figures from a tapestry. The friend had pointed out to Pompilia:

"--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?"  
 (VII.190-93)

Referring to her humble origins and her subsequent adoption by the  
 Comparini, Pompilia states,

God plants us where we grow.  
 It is not that, because a bud is born  
 At a wild briar's end, full i' the wild beasts's way,  
 We ought to pluck and put it out of reach  
 On the oak-tree top, --say, "There the bud belongs!"  
 (VII.298-302)

From Pompilia's viewpoint, Violante did not sin when she passed the  
 child of a whore off as her own offspring. Rather she fancied that

she saw God's very finger point,  
 Designate just the time for planting me  
 (The wild-brier slip she plucked to love and wear)  
 In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,  
 And get to be the thing I called myself:---  
 (VII.325-29)

Pompilia sees her adoption as an act of love by her parents, and the  
 marriage contract with Guido as an event that must have caused them  
 much pain to see "The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,"  
 they "had got used to feel for and find fixed" in their lives (VII.338-  
 39). When her marriage becomes a torture to her, Pompilia does not turn  
 upon her parents in anger and hate as the world expects her to, but  
 rather believes that the evil that has befallen her is a result of mis-  
 applied good. She believes her parents wanted the best for her, that  
 they saw her marriage to Guido as a chance to improve her status and  
 position in life. They did not, in her view, realize that the  
 intrinsic, unpalpable matters were the most important to her. To the  
 end, she views Pietro and Violante as two well-meaning souls who  
 gathered her from the "bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree/But drew



back from" (VII.882-83) and raised her as their own.

When Pompilia pleads with the Archbishop to sanction her refusal to live conjugally with Guido, he relates to her a parable that is parallel to the situation at Arezzo as he sees it. He tells Pompilia about a fig on a tree that would not be plucked by a bird:

'I much prefer to keep my pulp myself:  
He may go breakfastless and dinnerless,  
Supperless of one crimson seed, for me!"  
(VII.828-30)

As a result, the bird flew away, and in his place, bees and wasps fed upon the fig. "Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite!" says the Archbishop, pointing out the moral that

--fools elude their proper lot,  
Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.  
Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!  
(VII.836-38)

Pompilia did return home, and "the worst befell" (VII.841). She sees herself as a flower in the care of a cruel gardener:

I have a keeper in the garden here  
Whose sole employment is to strike me low  
If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.  
Life means with me successful feigning death,  
Lying stone-like, eluding notice so,  
Foregoing here the turf and there the sky.  
(VII.994-99)

Pushed to the limits of her endurance of Guido's mistreatment, Pompilia subtly blends the plant and bird imagery of her monologue into one passage containing her yearning for comfort and solace:

The saints must bear with me, impute the fault  
To a soul i' the bud, so starved by ignorance,  
Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year  
Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know.  
But if meanwhile some insect with a heart  
Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy--  
Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,  
Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,  
Comfort against the cold, --what through excess

Of comfort should miscall the creature --sun?  
 What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands  
 Petal by petal, crude and colorless,  
 Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!  
 (VII.1499-1511)

Caponsacchi as a fire-fly nestling against Pompilia's petals brought more comfort to her than the sun with its warmth.

Near the end of her monologue, Pompilia completes her plant imagery in one of the most moving passages of the poem. She pictures herself as a flower-gift for her creator:

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  
 At this supreme of moments!  
 (VII.1778-84)

Pompilia's flower-state is the result of Caponsacchi's actions and supreme devotion to her as an inspiration to him from God. Their truth of goodness and purity is the truth which Pompilia represents in her whiteness as she dies.

Pompilia's monologue further develops the disease imagery of the poem. She pictures Guido as a disease:

Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague  
 It caught, and disinfection it had craved  
 Still but for Guido; I am saved through him  
 So as by fire;---

(VII.1719-22)

There is an essential difference in the disease imagery used by Pompilia and that used by other speakers. She speaks of the "plague" as a means of suffering, and as the eradication of that torment through the fires of purgation. She views her mistreatment as a trial sent by God to purify her spirit. As a result, she is able to ask God to forgive

Guido, for in God's face

Is light, but in His shadow healing too:  
 Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!  
 (VII.1704-5)

In terms of color imagery, Pompilia describes her relationship with Caponsacchi in colors with a sympathetic and positive connotation. She tells him that

't is arranged we never separate,  
 Nor miss, in our gray time of life, the tints  
 Of you that color eve to match with morn.  
 (VII.555-57)

When Caponsacchi presents her with his plans for escape, Pompilia realizes it may be her last chance to save herself and her unborn child. If she does not accept Caponsacchi's help, the "one star" "that was so white before" will turn red;" "just/A word of mine and there the white was black!" (VII.1453-56).

In her attempt to clear Caponsacchi's name and absolve him of any guilt the world has applied to him,

my last breath shall wholly spend itself  
 In one attempt more to disperse the stain,  
 The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,  
 About a lustrous and pellucid soul:....  
 (VII.926-29)

Pompilia applies the whiteness of goodness, purity and truth to Caponsacchi as he has applied it to her. In the same manner, Pompilia swears that "this blood of mine/Flies forth exultingly at any door,/Washes the parchment white" (VII.1699-1701) to reveal the truth. This images recalls Guido's statement that his reputation would be washed clean in the blood of his victims. It is important to note that Pompilia offers her own life for the truth; Guido offers the lives of others. Self-sacrifice is natural for Pompilia, for she is secure in the knowledge

that God is her counsel, and that his "glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,/Was witness why all lights were quenched inside" (VII.851-52) Arezzo. Pompilia needs only God's counsel because only He knows the whole truth.

Pompilia applies light imagery to her pregnancy, describing it as

That fancy which began so faint at first,  
That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,  
Which I perceive was promise of my child,  
The light his unborn face sent long before,--  
God's way of breaking the good news to flesh.  
(VII.617-21)

Up I sprang alive,  
Light in me, light without me, everywhere  
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall  
From heaven to earth,--

(VII.1212-15)

It is small wonder that Pompilia considers the flight to freedom with Caponsacchi a deliverance for her child: "and where's time/To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?" (VII.1512-13) on the journey to Rome. When the pair are overtaken by Guido, Pompilia describes her attack upon him in terms of light:

I struck, bare,  
At foe from head to foot in magic mail,  
And off it withered, cobweb-armory  
Against the lighting!

(VII.1621-24)

Here, Pompilia's light is the glow of truth pitted against deceit and lies, and the protective anger of a mother shielding her unborn child. But Pompilia always maintains that the light within her is inspired by the light of God. As she dies, this becomes her definitive statement. She views Caponsacchi as the instrument of God's revelation to her:

Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of His light

For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.  
(VII.1826-28)

Caponsacchi is a star (VII.1392, 1433) that

Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth  
Through every atom of his act with me:  
Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,  
Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,---  
(VII.916-19)

Waiting for Caponsacchi to be spurred to action by God, Pompilia waits  
at Arezzo, praying there will be

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know.  
Next night there was a cloud came, and not he:  
But I prayed through the darkness till it broke  
And let him shine....

(VII.1444-47)

Pompilia realizes that the decision Caponsacchi has to make, whether or  
not to help her, is a difficult one, filled with dangerous implications.  
Caponsacchi must voluntarily assume the armor of St. George<sup>15</sup> in  
Pompilia's cause.

Caponsacchi does not fail her, and they escape Arezzo.  
After the tragic events that follow, Pompilia spends her dying moments  
defending the splendour of St. George-Caponsacchi's light of truth

displayed in my behalf  
The broad brow that reverberates the truth,  
And flashed the word God gave him, back to man!  
(VII.1778-80)

In the midst of Pompilia's dream-state, as she tells her story, Capon-  
sacchi is the one clear point of light in all the events that have

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<sup>15</sup> Margherita specifically images Caponsacchi as St. George:  
Our Caponsacchi, he's your true Saint George  
To slay the monster, set the Princess free, ...  
(VII.1312-1313)

befallen her:

As I look back, all is one milky way;  
 Still bettered more, the more remembered, so  
 Do new stars bud while I but search for old,  
 And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him--  
 Him I now see make shine everywhere.

(VII.1550-54)

Pompilia employs fire imagery in ways that echo its use by preceding speakers. The image of fire applied to Guido recurs repeatedly to confirm his true character. When Violante consoles the young bride, she says, "What do you care about a handsome youth?/They are so volatile, and tease their wives!" (VII.551-52). Her statement is ironic in terms of the fire imagery applied to Guido's cruelty and fury.

The image is more explicit in the section of her monologue dealing with the sexual courtship of her husband. Pompilia recalls "reluctantly to mind" Guido's treatment of her at Arezzo (VII.628-32). Having resisted consummation of the marriage for six months because she and Guido were "in estrangement, soul from soul" (VII.717), Pompilia sought advice from the Archbishop. Awed by his authority she obeys his order to give herself to her husband:

Then I obeyed, --as surely had obeyed  
 Were the injunction "Since your husband bids,  
 Swallow the burning coal he proffers you!"

(VII.722-24)

The image reappears in Guido's angry insistence that

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

(VII.775-78)

For the first time fire-as-suffering images refer to Pompilia's sexual relationship to Guido as a cause of her torment. They also reveal Guido's character and his treatment of Pompilia:

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,  
 "We have been man and wife six months almost:  
 How long is this your comedy to last?  
 Go this night to my chamber, and not your own!"  
 (VII.735-40)

The phrase, "for hate's sake", which deals with the sexual relations of husband and wife, and the line "since hate was thus the truth of him" (VII.1710) in reference to physical intercourse, reveal the manner and cause of Guido's cruelty. When Guido burns "that garment spotted by the flesh" (VII.1718), the image echoes others referring to Pompilia's suffering.

But when Pompilia states of their sexual union, that "I am saved through him/So as by fire", the thought is characteristic of her Christ-like capacity to pardon those who have inflicted suffering upon her. Significantly, the image expresses the concept of salvation through purgation and spiritual renewal through the cleansing fires of suffering.

Like Caponsacchi's monologue, Pompilia's contains fire imagery applied to the concepts of truth, purity and goodness. Most of these occur in reference to Caponsacchi:

That man, you misinterpret and misprise--  
 The glory of his nature, I had thought,  
 Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth...  
 (VII.914-16)

Later, she charges that the slander of Caponsacchi had merely "flecked the blaze," "the glory of the soul" (VII.1471-76). As well, when Pompilia decides to escape with Caponsacchi, she thinks of "an old rhyme" in which a virgin hides herself in a cave from pursuing "Paynims":

until a thunderstone,  
 Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey:  
 And they laughed--"Thanks to lightning, ours at last!"  
 And she cried, "Wrath of God, assert His love!  
 Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!"  
 And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,  
 Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword  
 She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,  
 So did the souls within them die away,  
 As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,  
 She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:  
 So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!

(VII.1379-90)

The "servant of God, thou fire" signifies Caponsacchi, Pompilia's saviour. The reference to the sword of fire recalls Caponsacchi's image used in describing Pompilia's confrontation with Guido at the inn ("the sunrise burned for joy/O' the blade") and anticipates Pompilia's own image of the same act in which Guido is driven back by the power of her "lighting" (VII.1624).

Books V, VI and VII set Guido's self-defense in opposition to the sincere vindication of Pompilia and Caponsacchi. The poem is moving closer to the centre of pure truth because this trial is based on natural instinct. In Guido's case it is debased and missapplied; in Caponsacchi's and Pompilia's case it is a matter of communion with God and not merely of cold rationality. Guido's slippery defense has not led to truth. Caponsacchi has sacrificed himself and found his soul in the process. Pompilia has given her life for her child and the possible redemption of her husband's soul. But none of the three sees the broader significance of the events of which they have been a part. The ultimate truth has not yet been revealed.



#### CHAPTER FOUR

In Books VIII, IX, and X, truth is subjected to the inquiry of the social institutions of the law and the inquiry of the social institutions of the law and the Church. The two lawyers, Archangelis and Bottinius, devote themselves to the devices of rhetoric, language, and logic, which narrow the perspective of human law as a means to discover truth in its entirety. Pope Innocent proves that human institutions do not necessarily entail the abuse of truth in Book X; he emerges as a wise and humane man who rises above the fallibility of the Church which he serves.

-I-

#### Book VIII - "Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis"

Book VIII demonstrates that shrewdness and intelligence may be abused to make judgment and dispassionate choice between appearance and reality, good and evil, impossible. Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis has a calculating mind geared to moral laxity. His mental agility lacks moral responsibility and is therefore villainous. In his legal performance for the court, his ingenuity is based upon sophistry; he attempts to prove that honour is only as natural in man as it is in animals. By applying the precepts of natural law to civilized society, and by twisting Mosaic law, the Gospels, and biblical texts to suit his purposes, Archangelis produces a morally reprehensible "monster" in his brief for Guido's defense.

In Book VIII, Archangelis' monologue presents a transformation of preceding ring images. Rather than connoting circularity, the lawyer uses the image in an auditory sense associated with the true

"ring" of the poem. Archangelis argues that Guido's vindication of his injured honour finds support in the Athenian Code, the Laws of the Twelve Tables, "The Julian, the Cornelian and Gracchus' Laws", and states that these legal codes constitute "So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves" (VIII.562-67). Thus he presents his legal brief on Guido's behalf as an echo of the legal precedents that have gone before him, hoping to justify honoris causa in historical relief.

Archangelis composes his speech while he is preoccupied with the preparations of a feast for the birthday of his son. His speech is thus intermixed with food images, and the effect is grotesque, serving to emphasize the ineptitude of the law, and reiterating his characterization from Book I. Archangelis' argument is presented as food, extended and elaborated upon to become the dominant motif of his monologue. Speaking of his son, he says,

Ah, my Giacinto, he's no ruddy rogue,  
 Is not Cinone? What, today we're eight?  
 Seven and one's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!  
 --Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,  
Amo -as -avi -atum -are -ans,  
 Up to -aturus, person, tense and mood,  
Quies me cum subjuntivo (I would cry)  
 And chews Corderius with his morning crust!  
 Look eight years onward, and he's perched, he's perched,  
 Dapper and deft on a stool beside this chair,  
 Cinozzo, Cononcello, who but he?  
 --Trying his milk-teeth on some crusty case  
 Like this, papa shall triturate full soon  
 To smooth Papinianian pulp!

(VIII.1-14)

Archangelis' ironic reference to "love" demonstrates his incapability to understand the spiritual force of love found in Pompilia's monologue. His only interest in love is purely paternalistic and pedagogic. Archangelis' principle concern is the stomach, not the heart or the soul. He repeatedly expresses his thoughts in food imagery.

The lawyer hopes to flatter his wealthy father-in-law into making Giacinto his heir. This deceitful attempt to cater to the grandfather by luring him with "smell-feasts" parallels the similarly deceitful attempt to sway the judges in Guido's favour. When he says, "There's cookery in a certain dwelling-place!" (VIII.39), he is referring to the birthday banquet, and also to the preparation of the Count's defense.

Archangelis is completely content with "the attainable." For him, "home-joys, the family board, altar, and hearth" and "a brisk career," are "reality, and all else, --fluff/Nutshell and naught" (VIII.48-56). In other words, the material possessions of his life are the meat of the nut of reality, together with his sense of pride in his career; all other concepts are part of an insignificant nutshell. In opposition to his narrowness, the very ideals for which Pompilia and Caponsacchi stand are the true and pure "meat" of life and reality that Archangelis cannot grasp.

Archangelis intends to "spread" precedents "fine," and toss [them] flat/This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass/Of matter into argument" (VIII.64-66). As a reward for a successful legal career, he hopes

To earn the Est-est, merit the minced herb  
That mollifies the liver's leathery slice,  
With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,  
Cemented in an element of cheese!

(VIII.114-17)

Later, when Archangelis decides what elements and devices are to go into his argument, he speaks of his rhetoric as food, a "fry":

"Law is the pork substratum of the fry,  
Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity,"--  
And in this case, if circumstance assist,

We'll garnish law with idiom, never fear!  
(VIII.149-52)

Pondering his strategy, Archangelis admits that the honoris causa plea has been overworked:

The main defense o' the murder 's used to death,  
By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap to pick:...  
(VIII.253-54)

Referring to the strategy of the defense of the four accomplices in the murders, he says,

I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve  
Myself the jucier breast of argument--  
Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc,  
Who furnished me the tid-bit:...  
(VIII.1563-66)

His pity for Guido, who "must be all goose-flesh in his hole" (VIII.277), arises from the thought that there is "no sliced fry for him" (VIII.279); it will be difficult to frame rhetoric to prove Guido's case and to turn the court in his favour.

Although Archangelis praises man as "confessed creation's masterstroke . . . intellectual glory . . . a god . . . of the nature of my judges here" (VIII.526-28), he wonders if man shall

prove the insensible, the block,  
The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace?  
(Come, that's both solid and poetic!) Man  
Derogate, live for the low tastes alone,  
Mean creeping cares about the animal life?  
(VIII.530-33)

Later, it becomes clear that Archangelis is a man who exemplifies the lower and baser traits of human nature. This is the principal reason for the predominance of food imagery in his monologue, finally made explicit in the following lines:

(There is a porcupine to barbecue;  
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,

With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips, but, good Lord,  
 Suppose the devil instigate the wench  
 To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?  
 If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!  
 Come, I must go myself and see to things:  
 I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)  
 Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul--is stirred within,....  
 (VIII.1368-76)

Archangelis' slip of the tongue reveals the essential materialistic nature of the man. It is this quality that prevents him from seeing the "truth" of Pompilia and Caponsacchi.

In terms of biblical references, Archangelis first speaks of Guido's promise of payment to his accomplices, attempting to justify it by saying,

What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope,  
 The only motive they could masticate,  
 Milk for babes not strong meat which men require?  
 (VIII.1606-8)

The image refers to I Corinthians 3:2 in a misapplication of St. Paul's words to justify the hiring of the assassins: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat."

Archangelis praises himself for having modelled himself by "Agur's wish":

"Remove far from me vanity and lies,  
 Feed me with food convenient for me!"  
 (VIII.1765-66)

This passage is taken from Proverbs 30:8: "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." The food "convenient" for Archangelis is literally food, and not the biblical metaphor for moral balance. Archangelis leaves out the reference to poverty and riches; he is after all, planning how best to induce the rich father-in-law to leave his bequest

to his grandson. The whole of Chapter 30 of Proverbs contains lines that could be applied to Archangelis as Agur describes himself as being "Surely . . . more brutish than any man and have not the understanding of a man" who "neither learned wisdom, nor [has ] the knowledge of the holy."

According to Machen,<sup>1</sup> there are at least seventy-one scriptural quotations and allusions in Book VIII. These are not a sign of Archangelis' piety, but are rather mere rhetorical devices:

you have to plead before these priests  
 And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass  
 For heathen and, what's worse, for ignorant  
 O' the quality of the Court and what it likes  
 By way of illustration of the law.  
 Tomorrow stick in this, and throw out that,  
 And, having first ecclesiasticized,  
 Regularize the whole, next emphasize, . . .  
 (VIII.1724-30)

Archangelis thus hopes to impress the court with his wisdom, and refers to himself as

the favoured advocate,  
 Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon  
 Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match,  
 And set the same in Cinoncino's cap!  
 (VIII.86-89)

Matthew 6 states, "And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." In following passages of the same chapter, Christ says, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink . . . Is not the life more than meat?" and "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his

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<sup>1</sup> Minnie Gresham Machen, The Bible in Browning (New York: Macmillan, 1903), p. 275.

righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:25,33). Once again, the juxtaposition of Archangelis' references and their Biblical context points out with savage irony the basic materialism of his wretched soul.

Archangelis seeks to justify the murder of an unfaithful wife by paraphrasing Psalms 119:9,10:

What dictum doth Society law down  
I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife?  
Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way?  
Be patient and forgive?...

(VIII.741-44)

The biblical passage is as follows: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments." The defender of murder uses a line that pleads for guidance in following God's commandments, one of which is "Thou shalt not kill."

Archangelis also quotes a passage from Proverbs 6:32-35 in order to justify Guido's crime:

says Solomon,  
(The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth  
In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end)  
--Because, the zeal and fury of a man,  
Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,  
Non parcet, in the day of his revenge,  
In die vindictae, nor will acquiesce,  
Nec acquiescet, through a person's prayers,  
Cujusdam precibus, --nec suscipet,  
Nor yet take, pro redemptione, for  
Redemption, dona plurium, gifts of friends,  
Mere money-payment to compound for ache.

(VIII.605-16)

The scriptural passage reads, "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding . . . A wound and dishonour shall he get . . . . For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not

spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts." In order that Guido's plea of jealousy may be taken seriously, Pompilia's adultery must be proven beyond a doubt. Archangelis is unable to do this. In this instance, the lawyer is making good use of a scriptural reference. Upon closer examination, it is important to note that he directs his words to the end of the sixth chapter of Proverbs. At the beginning of the scripture is a passage that could have destroyed his argument: "These six things doth the Lord hate: . . . A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:16-17).

Archangelis is determined to identify Guido with Christ. He presses the analogy by saying:

Our Lord Himself, made up of mansuetude,  
 Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received  
 Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting  
 Without complaint: but when He found Himself  
 Touched in His honor never so little for once,  
 Then out broke indignation pent before --  
 "Honorem meum nemini dabo!" "No,  
 My honor I to nobody will give!"  
 (VIII.652-59)

The Bible attributes no such statement to Christ. Even the Pope is later to query "When, where?" (X.1985) upon examining Archangelis' brief. Cook has found the scriptural passage in Isaiah 42:8: "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images", in a reference to Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> The Lawyer's misquotation is entirely irrelevant and out of context.

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<sup>2</sup> Cook, Commentary, p. 170.



Archangelis next attempts to associate Guido with St. Paul:

No recreant to this faith deliverèd once:  
 "Far worthier were it that I died," cries he,  
Expedit mihi magis nori, "than  
 That anyone should make my glory void,"  
Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!  
 See, ad Corinthienses: whereupon  
 Saint Ambrose makes comment with much fruit,  
 Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart,  
 So I desist from bringing forward here.  
 (I can't quite recollect it.)

(VIII.666-75)

Just prior to the verse Archangelis quotes (I Corinthians 9:15) are the words, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel." The commentary Archangelis "can't quite recollect" is this "For who does not regard a bodily defect or a loss of patrimony more lightly than a defect of soul and a loss of reputation."<sup>3</sup>

Having finished his scriptural examples, Archangelis asks,

Have I proved  
Satis superque, both enough and to spare,  
 That Revelation old and new admits  
 The natural man may effervesce in ire,  
 O'erflood the earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage,  
 At the first puncture to his self-respect?

(VIII.675-80)

Archangelis has proved nothing. His reference to the "natural man" is a misapplication of I Corinthians 2:14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Archangelis is an instinctual "natural man" himself, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

his animal imagery reinforces this characterization. He reserves his most uncomplimentary images for his opponent, Bottinius, whom he calls a "pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends/T' is ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout" (VIII.221-22). But the "ermine-vermin" (VIII.227) does not fool him: "Do you suppose that I don't see the beast?" (VIII.226). Archangelis also implies that Bottinius is a rat (VIII.244-47) and applies two dog images to the lawyer for the prosecution. Speaking of his rival's use of Latin, he exclaims, "Don't I hear the dog!" (VIII.164). Archangelis' aide, Spreti, Bottinius, and himself are included in the other dog image:

I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve  
 Myself the jucier breast of argument--  
 Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc.  
 (VIII.1563-65)

The image occurs again in relation to fox-hunting:

I've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour,  
 To have the town anticipate my track?  
 The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,  
 The young hound's predilection, --prints the dew,  
 Don't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw?  
 No! Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush,  
 Thus I defend Count Guido.  
 (VIII.295-301)

He refers to himself, the other lawyers and the judges as dogs:

That we prayed the Pope, Majestas' very self  
 To anticipate a little the tardy pack,  
 Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay  
 Should start the beagles into sudden yelp...  
 (VIII.1381-84)

Archangelis also uses the dog image to demonstrate the translation of Guido's feelings of revenge into simple speech for his hired assassins:

Heaven speaks first  
 To the angel, then the angel tames the word  
 Down to the ear of Tobit: he, in turn,  
 Diminishes the message to his dog,  
 And finally that dog finds how the flea

(Which else, importunate, might check his speed)  
 Shall learn its hunger must have holiday,  
 By application of his tongue or paw:  
 So many varied sorts of language here,  
 Each following each with pace to match the step,....  
 (VIII.1490-99)

Guido-as-dog is again implied:

To wit, the husband posted with a pack  
 Of other friends, who fall back upon the first  
 And beat his love and life out both at once.  
 (VIII.1532-34)

This image recalls the dog-wolf image of Book I, in which Guido and his hirelings are depicted as a wild pack of werewolves hunting in the night for their victims. However, Archangelis' image robs the previous image of all negative implications.

Animal imagery is also present in the precedents Archangelis uses to defend his client. He cites the example of bees who sting to death unchaste members of the hive (VIII.490) and of "beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous" that "do credit to their beasthood." He also cites the absurd case of an elephant that killed his master's wife and her lover (VIII.504). These images associate Guido with the animal realm as Archangelis attempts to prove his client's liaison with the natural world and therefore with "natural man." The point is that in doing so, he portrays the Count as a morally reprehensible being.

The final animal image summarizes the whole monologue. As Archangelis finishes writing his draft, he cries,

Done! I' the rough, i' the rough, But done! And, lo,  
 Landed and stranded lies my very own,  
 My miracle, my monster of defence--  
 Leviathan into the nose whereof  
 I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn,  
 And given him to my maidens for a play!  
 I' the rough, --tomorrow I review my piece,  
 Tame here and there undue floridity....  
 (VIII.1716-23)

The Leviathan image emphasizes the vanity of Archangelis, for in Job 41:34 the monster-fish "is a king over all the children of pride."

Furthermore, this fish image is linked to similar images associated with Guido both in previous Books and in Archangelis' monologue. When the lawyer argues that Guido's injured honour requires vindication, pointing to the fact that such vindication is claimed by "bird and beast" and "the very insects," he makes an ironic exception of the creature Guido is most often identified with:

Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here,  
Nor gain nor guard connubiality:...

(VIII.500-1)

Later, the Guido-as-fish image is suggested by "the honour of him buried fathom deep/In infamy . . . might arise" (VIII.1625-26). Thus, the images which associate Guido with fish, and Archangelis' identification of his brief in Leviathan-terms, serve to link both characters to the "king of pride" analogy in Job.

Archangelis' monologue is intended to satirize law and to contrast the humble and intuitive perceptiveness of Pompilia and the divinely inspired wisdom of the Pope. These contrasts serve to illustrate an important theme of the poem: the inefficacy of the casuistic intellect as contrasted to the perceptiveness of the simple heart and of inspired wisdom. Furthermore, since Book VIII is analagous to Books II and V in the triadic structure of the poem, the monologue is intended to parallel the earlier two. Archangelis' main strategy is not to deny Guido's crime but to find excuse for him. The plea of honoris causa thus parallels Half-Rome's and Guido's arguments, and in the exposition of that plea, Archangelis employs fire imagery that echoes that of the analogous speakers. In a

continuation of the pattern of fire imagery throughout the poem, Archangelis refers to the world as a place of "smoke and noise" (VIII. 1422):

In a low noisy smoky world like ours  
Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed!  
(VIII.1424-25)

The association of smoke with sin recalls the previous images in the earlier Books. When Archangelis seeks to impress the rich uncle whose inheritance he hopes to gain, he says,

What to the uncle, as I did advance  
The smoking dish, "Fry suits a tender tooth!  
Behoves we care a little for our kin--  
(VIII.1087-89)

The suggestion of deceit in the context of the smoke image is apparent.

The first fire image of the monologue is suggested in the following lines:

Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all  
That Honor is a gift of God to man  
Precious beyond compare: which natural sense  
Of human rectitude and purity, --  
Which white, man's soul is born with, --brooks, no touch:  
Therefore, the sensitivist spot of all,  
Woundable by any wafture breathed from black,  
Is --honor within honor, like the eye  
Centred i' the ball, --the honor of our wife.  
Touch us o' the pupil of our honor, then,  
Not actually, --since so you slay outright, --  
But by a gesture simulating touch,  
Presumable mere menace of such taint,--  
This were our warrant for eruptive ire  
"To whose dominion I impose no end."  
(VIII.450-64)

Within the larger image of honour-as-eye, the details of "woundable" and "eruptive ire" echo Half-Rome's "fire-drops" in Guido's

wound<sup>4</sup> and other fire images used in reference to Guido's reaction to the news from Rome and his vengeance.

Fire imagery is applied to Guido in the following analogy to Samson. The reference is one of a lengthy series of precedents that the lawyer cites in defense of his argument:

Samson in Gaza was the antetype  
 Of Guido at Rome: observe the Nazarite!  
 Blinded he was, --an easy thing to bear:  
 Intrepidly he took imprisonment,  
 Gyves, stripes and daily labour at the mill:  
 But when he found himself i' the public place,  
 Destined to make the common people sport,  
 Disdain burned up with such an impetus  
 I' the breast of him, that, all of him on fire,  
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,  
Anima mea, with the Philistines!

(VIII.634-44)

In order to offset the negative connotations of images depicting Guido rising up in rage like a devil, Archangelis attempts to associate the Count with a "positive" biblical character in explaining his rage.

Quoting "Law, Gospel, and the Church," Archangelis employs the fire images of preceding speakers:

"But who hath barred the primitive revenge,  
 Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns more fierce?  
 Use thou thy natural privilege of man,..."

(VIII.712-14)

Archangelis attempts to associate Guido with fire images related to the authority of the Bible and with law and the Church rather than with the

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<sup>4</sup> Disease imagery occurs only once in Book VIII. Archangelis sees the murders as an operation to remove a wart from Guido's honour:

Surgery would have just excised a wart;  
 The patient made such a pother, struggled so  
 That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all.

(VIII.1478-80)

fires of hell which would impute evil to his client.

Unlike the monologues of Caponsacchi and Pompilia, Archangelis' contains no fires of spiritual significance. Instead, he uses an image of argument-as-alchemy, comparing himself to a "kingly alchemist":

Thus would you wrong this excellent personage  
Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,  
Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows, --in a word,  
Demonstrate:...

(VIII.387-90)

When he refers to a precedent for the murder of an unfaithful wife, he states:

Nevertheless I shall not hold you long  
With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn  
Candle at noon-tode, clarify the clear.  
There beams a case refulgent from our books--  
Castrensis, Butringarus, everywhere  
I find it burn to dissipate the dark.

(VIII.1518-23)

These fires of demonstration and the burning candle of precedence, images legalistic casuistry in support of honoris causa, may be contrasted to the fires of loving intuitive perception which Caponsacchi and Pompilia use.

Archangelis' account of the inn events may also be compared to previous accounts. Attempting to explain Guido's failure to act immediately, the lawyer says:

Nay, if you urge me, interval was none!  
From the inn to the Villa-blank or else a bar  
Of adverse and contrarious incident  
Solid between us and our just revenge!  
What with the priest who flourishes his blade,  
The wife who like a fury flings at us,...

(VIII.1043-48)

The description of Pompilia "like a fury" echoes Half-Rome's "the spit-fire" and is very much unlike Other Half-Rome's, Caponsacchi's,

and Pompilia's own description of the same event. There cannot be any suggestion of hell-fire and Guido-as-devil for fear of prejudicing the court against the Count. Notably lacking are references to the burning sword of truth, for the lawyer is unable to comprehend the truth of the case.

Another significant contrast may be seen in the following image of Guido

wholly rapt in his serene regard  
 Of honor, he contemplating the sun  
 Who hardly marks if tapers blink below,  
 He, dreaming of no argument for death  
 Except the vengeance worthy noble hearts,--  
 (VIII.1597-1601)

Archangelis equates the sun with Guido's honour in contrast to the spiritual significance that Caponsacchi and Pompilia give to the sun in their imagery.

Archangelis' preoccupation with the plea of honoris causa is reflected in the theatre imagery of his monologue. He alludes to Rome, the scene of the murders, as

The appropriate theatre which witnessed once,  
Matronam noblem, Lucretia's self,  
Abluere pudicitiae maculas,  
 Wash off the spots of her pudicity,  
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood;...  
 (VIII.1662-66)

The implication is that Guido's murder of Pompilia and her parents was analogous to Lucretia's suicide: in each case the act cleansed the stains upon honour. This image is an accretive transformation of the previous image in which Guido is depicted cleansing himself in the fires of his revenge. Archangelis sees the tragedy as a comedy:

Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque,  
 And wrap himself around with a mamma's veil  
 Done up to imitate papa's black robe,



(I'm in the secret of the comedy,--  
 Part of the program leaked out long ago!)  
 And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor,  
 Mimic Don father that defends the Count:...  
 (VIII.1740-46)

Thus, Archangelis' monologue comes full circle, back to the starting point of his son's birthday feast, as he imagines his child mimicking him as a lawyer of reknown.

Archangelis tries to uphold the argument that vindication of honour is justified by the laws of nature, man, and God. The lawyer sees the preservation of honour as a legitimate end, and therefore the means by which Guido attempts to maintain it is lawful. This kind of intellectual gymnastics can hardly promote the discovery of truth. Archangelis is hungry for the laurels which winning the case will bring to him; and as a married man, he holds the family and the preservation of the sanctity of the home in high regard. His sympathy with Guido is extended in the parallel between Guido's desire for the inheritance he will receive through his son Gaetano, and Archangelis' hope for inheritance through his son, Giacinto. Unfortunately, all his cunning arguments and "Latinity" circumvent the pure truth of the case, and his twisted misquotation of classical legal precedents and biblical passages only serves to underline his own moral laxity. Archangelis is certainly misguided in his personal motives and ambitions, but he remains a more sympathetic character than his leering colleague of Book IX.

-II-

Book IX - "Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius"

Book IX contains the presentation of further moral laxity.

Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius is the opposite of Archangelis--a thin, prurient bachelor who presents a finished brief to an imaginary court in a simulated practice-session in his home. Bottinius' character flaw lies in his moral indifference. Although he attempts to confirm Pompilia's physical and moral perfection, his argument is based upon the premise that as a maturing woman, Pompilia was only fulfilling her nature by her actions. Because her actions were natural, she is innocent.

Gradually, Bottinius reveals a basic lack of interest in the true character of Pompilia and his dislike of women in general. His arguments in defence of Pompilia eventually draw attention to the most questionable and dubious parts of the case. He assumes she was guilty of indiscretion, deceit, and even infidelity to her husband; therefore his defence is based on the concept that her escape and her relationship with Caponsacchi was justified by Guido's tyranny.<sup>5</sup> He demands that the court

--Hear law, appointed to defend the just,  
 Submit, for best defence, that wickedness  
 Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone  
 Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space,  
 And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief:....  
 (XII.577-80)

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<sup>5</sup> In his argument that the end justifies the means, Bottinius uses the ring image in the manner Archangelis used it--the auditory "ring" of truth:

How say you, good my lords?  
 I hope you heard my adversary ring  
 The changes on this precept: now, let me  
 Reverse the peal!....

(IX.517-20)

The premise for Bottinius' argument is based upon Pompilia's motive and behavior rather than upon the question of Guido's guilt:

No further blame  
 O' the man and murder! They were stigmatized  
 Befittingly: the Court heard long ago  
 My mind o' the matter, which, outpouring full,  
 Has long since swept like surge, i' the simile  
 Of Homer, overborne both dyke and dam,  
 And whelmed alike client and advocate:  
 His fate is sealed, his life as good as gone,  
 On him I am not tempted to waste word.  
 Yet though my purpose holds, --which was and is  
 And solely shall be to the very end,  
 To draw the true effigies of a saint,  
 Do justice to perfection in the sex,--  
 (IX.1378-90)

By painting saintship I depicture sin,  
 Beside the pearl, I prove how black the jet,  
 And through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime.  
 (IX.1401-3)

Bottinius feels that the court is weary of the case against Guido. He assumes, in the words of Altick and Loucks, that "his celibate listeners share his bachelor's proclivity for contemplating errant womanhood. They would rather entertain lubricious fancies about a woman than hear logical arguments about a man."<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, Bottinius titillates the imagination of the court with a series of courtly-love images and selected allusions to pastoral and erotic literature.

Bottinius' whole philosophy is that "Grime is grace/To whoso gropes amind the dung for gold" (IX.549-50). He does not trust the validity of the characterization of Pompilia as a pathetic child-bride, martyr, or saint. Instead, he chooses to emphasize the more

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<sup>6</sup> Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, pp. 165-66.

"probable" middle ground in which he portrays Pompilia as a voluptuous cunning female--the essence of a masculine fantasy in valid fleshliness. Thus, her "saintship" becomes "sin," her "pearl" becomes "jet", and her "virtue" becomes "crime" (IX.1401-3). It is impossible for Bottinius to conceive of Pompilia as a "flawless form" (IX.194) morally beyond reproach.

Bottinius begins his defence through an allegory associating himself with an artist commissioned to paint the flight of the Holy Family, intending to present the finished painting to the judges:

Exactly so have I, a month at least,  
Your Fiscal, made me cognizant of facts,  
Searched out, pried into, pressed the meaning forth  
Of every piece of evidence in point, . . .  
(IX.132-35)

But shall I ply my papers, play my proofs,  
Parade my studies, fifty in a row,  
As though the Court were yet in pupilage  
Claimed not the artist's ultimate appeal?  
Much rather let me soar the height prescribed  
And bowing low, proffer my picture's self!  
No more proof, disproof, . . .  
(IX.154-160)

The legal "portrait" Bottinius paints is one of the "Holy Family" Comparini: "patriarch Pietro", Violante-St. Anne, Pompilia-Mary, Gaetano-Christ, fleeing from Guido-Herod (IX.122-30). Bottinius also portrays Pompilia as Eve:

In early days of Eve-like innocence  
That plucked no apple from the knowledge-tree,  
Yet, at the Serpent's word, Eve plucks and eats  
And knows--especially how to read and write: . . .  
(IX.447-50)

This passage is one of the first instances in which Bottinius intends to put forward the argument of Pompilia's natural proclivity to follow her true nature. He argues that she did know how to write (and

therefore did write the love-letters to Caponsacchi), but she is innocent because she was following the dictates of her character. A strange defence for Pompilia's own advocate!

Bottinius also produces an analogy associating Pompilia with the biblical Judith, the woman who used her sexual wiles to lure Holofernes to his death. He challenges the court:

Must such external semblance of intrigue  
 Demonstrate that intrigue must lurk perdue?  
 Does every hazel-sheath disclose a nut?  
 . . . midnight meetings in a screened alcove  
 Must argue folly in a matron--since  
 So would he bring a slur on Judith's self,  
 Commended beyond women that she lured  
 The lustful to destruction through his lust.  
 (IX.560-68)

The lawyer argues that Pompilia is like Judith in her adultery, but more virtuous as a representative of active feminine virtue, according to her essential nature:

Pompilia took not Judith's liberty,  
 No faulchion find you in her hand to smite,  
 No damsel to convey in dish the head  
 Of Holo Fernes, --style the Canon so--  
 Or is it the Count?...  
 (IX.569-73)

Bottinius takes the biblical parallel too far, and is unable to complete his analogy, becoming entangled in his "similitudes" (IX.574) and unable to portray whether it was Caponsacchi or Guido who fell prey to Pompilia's wiles.

When Pompilia and Caponsacchi reach Castelnuovo, Pompilia is exhausted: "Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,/Pompilia must acquiesce and swoon" (IX.729-30). Bottinius twists the meaning of Matthew 26:41 to infer that Pompilia was too tired to indulge in intercourse with the priest. It is during this swoon that Caponsacchi

has relations with Pompilia, according to Bottinius. He ignores the connotation of the biblical passage, which requests help from God to resist temptation and applies a carnal connotation instead.

Although Bottinius intends at first to work on a grand scale as an artist-lawyer, it soon becomes clear to him that the task is too great. He attributes this failing to the dubious traits of Pompilia, but the cause actually lies in his own amoral character. He settles for analogies in the pastoral mode and portions of myth and legend instead:

I leave the family as unmanageable,  
 And stick to just one portrait, but life-size.  
 Hath calumny imputed to the fair  
 A blemish, mole on cheek or wart on chin,  
 Much more, blind hidden horrors best unnamed?  
 Shall I descend to prove you, point by point,  
 Never was knock-knee known nor splay-foot found  
 In Phryne? (I must let the portrait go,  
 Content me with the model, I believe)--  
 --I prove this? An indignant sweep of hand,  
 Dash at and doing away with drapery,  
 And, use your eyes, Athenians, smooth she smiles!  
 (IX.163-74)

Bottinius draws a parallel between himself and the Greek lawyer Hyperides, who defended the courtesan Phryne by having her stand naked before the judges to win his case, winning the court's favour by displaying her sexual attractiveness.

When Pompilia marries Guido, Bottinius implies that her life is transformed from a time of youthful promiscuity to a time of monogamy which goes against the grain of her true nature:

For lo, advancing Hymen and his pomp!  
Discedunt nunc amores, loves, farewell!  
Maneat amor, let love, the sole, remain!  
 Farewell to dewiness and prime of life!  
 Remains the rough determined day: dance done,  
 To work, with plow and harrow!....  
 (IX.238-43)

In answer to the allegation that Pompilia administered a drug to Guido before making her escape, Bottinius draws a parallel between the pair and Helen and Odysseus (IX.619-27). Assuming Pompilia is guilty of the action, he tries to justify it as a mark of her wifely solicitude: she administered her "nepenthe" so that Guido will be "Relieved/of woes." In the same manner, he responds to the allegation that Pompilia robbed Guido of money and jewels by arguing that any object should be put to its proper use:

what fitter use  
Was ever husband's money destined to?  
With bag and baggage thus did Dido once  
Decamp, --for more authority a queen!  
(IX.650-53)

Pompilia is associated with Dido, who escaped from Carthage after her husband's death. In the original story, however, there is no mention of infidelity; Bottinius' analogy is misapplied. He is merely trying to impress the court with his knowledge.

Bottinius' animal imagery is also based on natural evidence that each creature is true to its kind: "lamb and lamb,/How do they differ? Know one, you know all/Manners of maidenhood" (IX.219-21). Pompilia would be an unnatural creature if she did not make use of her feminine endowments:

Prepare to find that, lamb-like, she too frisks--  
O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex!  
Not strength, --man's dower, --but beauty, nature gave,  
"Beauty in lieu of spears, in lieu of shields!"  
And what is beauty's sure concomitant,  
Nay, intimate essential character,  
But meeting wiles, deliciousest deceits,  
The whole redoubted armoury of love?  
(IX.223-31)

At her marriage, Bottinius argues, she is a beast of burden unaccustomed to the yoke of marriage:

heifer brave the hind?  
 We seek not there should lapse the natural law,  
 The proper piety to lord and king  
 And husband: let the heifer bear the yoke!  
 Only, I crave he cast not patience off,  
 This hind; for deem you she endures the whip,  
 Not winces at the goad, nay, restive, kicks?  
 (IX.250-256)

Bottinius assumes Pompilia is guilty of adultery, but perversely he views the adultery as a virtue which reflects her generosity of spirit. He blames Guido for misunderstanding "such bounty in a wife":

Which butterfly of the wide air shall brag  
 "I was preferred to Guido" --when 'tis clear  
 The cup, he quaffs at, lay with olent breast  
 Open to gnat, midge, bee and moth as well?  
 (IX.310-13)

charm of cheek,  
 Lustre of eye, allowance of the lip,  
 All womanly components in a spouse,  
 These are no household-bread each stranger's bite  
 Leaves by so much diminished for the mouth  
 O' the master of the house at supper-time:  
 But rather like a lump of spice they lie,  
 Morsel of myrrh, which scents the neighbourhood  
 Yet greets its lord no lighter by a grain.  
 (IX.317-25)

According to Bottinius, Guido should also approve Pompilia's selection of Caponsacchi as her "paramour" since "She laudably sees all,/Searches the best out and selects the same" (IX.335-36). Pompilia has good taste in men:

Priest, ay, and very phoenix of such fowl,  
 Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous,  
 Comely too, since precise the precept points--  
 On the selected levite be there found  
 Nor mole nor scar nor blemish, lest the mind  
 Come all uncandid through the thwarting flesh!  
 (IX.349-54)

Seductive wiles are appropriate to Pompilia:

"With horns the bull, with teeth the lion fights,



To woman," quoth the lyrist quoted late,  
 "Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty, Nature gave!"  
 Pretty i' the Pagan! Who dares blame the use  
 Of the armoury thus allowed for natural,--  
 (IX.425-29)

For Bottinius, Pompilia is no more than "a poor hard-pressed all-bewildered thing," acting according to her nature, "misguided perhaps, / Meaning no more harm than a frightened sheep" (IX.926-28).

Bottinius speaks of Guido's being forsaken by Pompilia through a fish image which reiterates others in the poem. Guido was

Deserted by each charitable wave  
 Guido, left high and dry, shows jealous now!  
 (IX.373-74)

Bottinius pictures Pompilia, exposed by the Comparini in order to lure Guido, the "snorting orc," but eluding "the purblind monster" by an ugly trick" (IX.965-78). Later, Pompilia is imaged as being "wily as an eel that stirs the mud/Thick overhead, so baffling spearman's thrust" (IX.1409-10). Thus both characters are represented as fish. The emphasis, however, is on Guido as an evil fish from whom Pompilia tries to flee as "the brute came paddling faster" (IX.987-88).

Bottinius has a purpose in using fish images. He refers to the Pope who is also characterized as a fisherman:

(The Pope, you know is Neapolitan  
 And relishes a sea-side simile).  
 (IX.371-72)

But the lawyer misses the inferred connotation that the Pope is, as Christ's representative on earth, a Fisher of Men.

Bottinius follows the same line of reasoning when he assumes that a lovely woman is like a plant, and is prone to "Vernal pranks, dishevellings/0' the hair of youth that dances April in,/And easily-imagined Hebe-slips" (IX.230-34). He argues that the adverse

conditions under which Pompilia grew at Arezzo were the cause of her "indiscretions":

But what if, as 'tis wont with plant and wife,  
Flowers --after a suppression to good end,  
Still, when they do spring forth, --sprout here, spread there,  
Anywhere likelier than beneath the foot  
O' the lawful good-man gardener of the ground?  
He dug and dibbled, sewed and watered, --still  
'Tis a chance wayfarer shall pluck the increase.  
(IX.289-95)

Because Guido has pruned Pompilia too closely, her growth has extended beyond the walls of the villa at Arezzo to Caponsacchi.

Pompilia appears as a flower which reverses the traditional woman-flower-chastity images of preceding Books:

The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm  
And proper floweret of femininity  
To whosoever had a nose to smell  
Or breast to deck: what if the charge be true?  
(IX.297-300)

Pompilia has only been true to her nature. Therefore, her virtue has been misinterpreted by her detractors. More importantly, it has been misinterpreted by her defence counsel, who views her "adultery" as the act of an amoral female:

The fault were graver had she looked with choice,  
Fastidiously appointed who should grasp,  
Who, in the whole town, go without the prize!  
To nobody she destined donative,  
But, first come was first served, the accuser saith.  
(IX.301-5)

Bottinius reverses his argument that Pompilia was selective in her choice of Caponsacchi as her "lover." Here, he presents her as a promiscuous creature, who took the attentions of the first man sympathetic to her cause. He does, however, underline his argument with emphasis on the concept that Pompilia's "generosity" should be praised, not censured. On the road to Castelnuovo, he depicts the physical

contact between Caponsacchi and Pompilia in terms of plants:

Cheek meeting jowl as apple may touch pear  
 From branch and branch contiguous in the wind,  
 When Autumn blisters and the orchard rocks:--  
 (IX.697-99)

The lawyer bases this image on the word of the carriage-driver, which has been disallowed by the court as false. There was no carnal relationship on that night, but Bottinius cannot resist the temptation to pursue sensuous images whenever the opportunity arises.

In terms of colour imagery, Bottinius evokes the lapid-  
 arist's art to describe Pompilia:

First, infancy, pellucid as a pearl;  
 Then, childhood--stone which, dew-drop at the first,  
 (An old conjecture) sucks, by dint of gaze,  
 Blue from the sky and turns to sapphire so:  
 Yet both these gems eclipsed by, last and best,  
 Womanliness and wifhood opaline,  
 Its milk-white pallor, --chastity, --suffused  
 With here and there a tint and hint of flame,--  
 Desire, --the lapidary loves to find.  
 Such jewels bind conspicuously thy brow,  
 Pompilia, infant, child, maid, woman, wife--  
 Crown the ideal in our earth at last!  
 (IX.198-209)

Like an opal, Pompilia's loveliness is worth more for its impurity and imperfections. The flashes of natural desire beneath her white chastity will be revealed by Bottinius' skill. Pompilia will be portrayed as an off-white character, seemingly pure white, as she is set against the black background of the murder case.

Bottinius intends that his "Evidence shall be,/Plain witness to the world how white she walks/I' the mire she wanders through ere Rome she reach" (IX.588-90). Yet later, he states that "white and perfect to the end . . ./Not that,-- . . ./She daub, disguise her dainty limbs with pitch,/And so elude the purblind

monster!" (IX.966-69). Bottinius presents Pompilia as a wily woman who covered her lies and guilt by confessing and being absolved before her death:

The sacrament obliterates the sin:  
 What is not, --was not, therefore, in a sense.  
 Let Molinists distinguish, "Souls washed white  
 But red once, still show pinkish to the eye!"  
 We say, abolishment is nothingness  
 And nothingness has neither head nor tail,  
 End nor beginning! --better estimate  
 Exorbitantly, than disparage aught  
 Of the efficacy of the act, I hope!  
 (IX.1487-95)

Bottinius establishes Pompilia's innocence and sinfulness at the same time, by stating that her sins have been cancelled by absolution.

Bottinius' speech might be expected to prove Pompilia's innocence, but instead, through its insinuations and assumptions of guilt for the sake of argumentative ingenuity, it is a confession of depravity on her part. Bottinius is incapable of understanding the "truth" of Pompilia. Pretending to be "painting saintship" (IX.1401), he images Pompilia in terms of fire:

--chastity, --suffused  
 With here and there a tint and hint of flame,--  
 Desire, --the lapidary loves to find.  
 (IX.204-6)

The insinuation of sexual desire in Pompilia is repeated later when Bottinius argues that she lured Caponsacchi into rescuing her from Guido:

He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis she,  
 She burns, he freezes, --all a mere device  
 To catch and keep a man may save her life,  
 Whom otherwise nor catches she nor keeps!  
 (IX.538-41)

These fire images applied to passion echo the sentimental Other Half-Rome's images; they are even more like Half-Rome's and Guido's

especially the reference to "the love-star . . . at fiery full", to Pompilia as a "spitfire," and to the burnt child proverb. Bottinius' fire images applied to Pompilia are set in opposition to Caponsacchi's "The spark of truth was struck from out our souls" and to all those giving Pompilia a spiritual association. The relationship between the pair is an idealization of love and truth Bottinius is unable to comprehend.

When Caponsacchi rescues Pompilia, he is described as "all aglow with enterprise" (IX.656). In contrast to preceding fire images that Caponsacchi and Pompilia employ in reference to their lofty and spiritual intentions regarding each other and their flight, Bottinius' image is inadequate and barely realized, illustrating his inability to perceive the truth.

Fire images in reference to the events at the inn are conspicuously missing in Bottinius' monologue. Also absent are fire images associated with Guido's cruelty towards Pompilia. Instead, Bottinius refers to Pompilia's resolute act toward Guido as an act of "truth" qualified with "perhaps" (IX.884). The earlier images of the fire of God flashing on the sword of truth in Pompilia's hands are not even suggested.

Bottinius does make one small reference to Guido as Vulcan in the following passage:

Shall a Vulcan clap  
His net o' the sudden and expose the pair  
To the unquenchable universal mirth?  
(IX.861-63)

There is no reference to Vulcan's destructive fire, only an emphasis upon the Venus-Mars/Pompilia-Caponsacchi love analogy.

Bottinius' perverse strategy does not assume Pompilia's basic purity and goodness as a beginning premise. He does conclude that the allegations against her are false, but his tactical victory is based on ridiculous arguments that finally bring her defence to disaster. His concessions damage her reputation so that it cannot be repaired. The final picture of Pompilia at the end of Book IX is not of an innocent victim but of a wanton female. Any hopes for the triumph of truth almost fade into nothingness.

-III-

Book X - "The Pope"

Book X presents the monologue of Pope Innocent XII, an eighty-six-year-old man whom the "popular notion class[es]. . ./One of well nigh decayed intelligence" (X.1240-41). In the first section of his monologue, the Pope expresses his world-weariness and his hesitancy in taking upon himself the responsibility of condemning a man to death when he himself, nearing death, will soon be judged and required to answer to God for his last act of judgment. Like the two lawyers, he consults precedent in a ponderous history of the Papacy, and at first, seems to be an apparently senile Pope presenting no more than a superficially spiritualized version of the case, appealing to dubious authority and seeming to be incapable of perceiving the true issues underlying the story. Towards the end of this section, however, it becomes apparent that he possesses a degree of wisdom denied the other speakers: "Which of the judgments was infallible?/ Which of my predecessors spoke for God" (X.150-51)? The Pope emerges as the rare man in the poem who is ready to admit that he lacks the

delusion of certainty. He reasserts his belief in his Papal authority and in his moral convictions, and girds himself for the task ahead of him--to pronounce on a great and profound moral issue in which disinterestedness and moral laxity can have no place.

It is this monologue that has been praised as "one of the noblest utterances of Robert Browning"<sup>7</sup> and "the greatest of all the Books of the poem."<sup>8</sup> It is certainly one of Browning's most intellectually complex dramatic monologues, and the most highly philosophical in The Ring and The Book. The Pope's imagery reiterates the complex philosophical content by revealing the final and total sum of all the imagistic patterns of the poem finally seen in their true light. The imagery is not cold, for the Pope himself, though he is of meditative nature and is a deeply intellectual man, is also very human. He is responsive to the particular and concrete as well as the abstract, as deeply interested in individual human beings as he is in mankind; and he delight in the beautiful--both the sensuous and the spiritual.

In the second section of the monologue, which follows the discussion of precedent and Papal infallibility, the Pope reviews the lives of Guido, Pompilia, and Caponsacchi, and passes judgment on each. He applies to the rights and wrongs of the Franceschini affair the incisive intuition he has acquired through longevity sharpened

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<sup>7</sup> W.C. DeVane, A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1955), p. 335.

<sup>8</sup> Cook, Commentary, p. 198.

by the imminence of death. He claims no special access to the truth by virtue of his office, but his humble awareness that the whole truth is withheld from men enables him to fully discern whatever portion is vouchsafed from heaven. He applies God's law as he understands it, reviewing the case with a mind inspired and guided by God, and framed by his imagery.

The Pope sets out as his purpose the judgments of the motives underlying the tragedy:

For I am 'ware it is the seed of act,  
 God holds appraising in His hollow palm,  
 Not act grown great thence on the world below,  
 Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.  
 (X.271-74)

Since the Pope states that his purpose is to find the truth of the beginning of the tragic events, it is appropriate that his ring imagery finalizes the truth of all preceding ring images in the poem. The Pope sees that "force and guile" are "the ore's alloy" (X.708) that could not refine the "baser soul[s]" (X.709) involved in the murder case. This image recalls Browning's gold and alloy image of Book I in which he states his intention to fuse the facts of the case with truth to produce the poem. In this context, the Pope sees the facts and the truth for what they really are in this his final vision of God's truth.

Reiterating the previous image of Pompilia as the perfect white centre of the circle of truth, he states that she is

First of the first,  
 Such I pronounce Pompilia then as now  
 Perfect in whiteness:...

(X.998-1000)

The image echoes Pompilia's "one point o' the circle plainer, where I



stand/Traced around about with white to front the world" and confirms her "truth". Later, the ring image again recalls Pompilia's, in which she sees herself as the centre of the circle---symbolically the manifestation of the love and goodness of God when the Pope says:

I  
Put no such dreadful question to myself,  
Within whose circle of experience burns  
The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness, --God.  
(X.1624-27)

In speaking of Guido, the Pope "detects each shape" (X.870) in terms of the obscene ring image of Book I: "By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred/At the centre" (X.873-74). Unmistakably echoing the ring-furnace of Book I and the intercession of God's agent, he states:

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round  
And heat the furnace sevenfold: time indeed  
A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,  
Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,  
The main offender, scar and brand the rest  
Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole:....  
(X.989-994)

Again, speaking of Guido, the Pope makes further use of the circle figure: "He, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque,/The narrow penfold for probation" (X.426-27), thus picturing Guido himself as a trapped creature within the circle of justice.

In speaking of Caponsacchi, he says,

My athlete on the instant, gave such good  
Great undisguised leap over post and pale  
Right into the mid-cirque, free-fighting place.  
(X.1135-37)

In this "cirque" Caponsacchi challenges "the false knight" Guido as a Crusader who fights for Christ:

Ay, such championship  
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud

Of glove on ground that answers ringingly  
 The challenge of the false knight,--  
 (X.1150-53)

This image confirms the "truth" of Caponsacchi as St. George, and therefore a solidier-saint of Christ, and also reiterates the auditory "ring" presented by the two lawyers; in this case Caponsacchi's answer to the challenge of battle with Guido is the true ring of the poem.

The Pope does not need to use religious imagery as extensively as the other speakers in the poem for he is not attempting to make a case for any character in prejudicial or sympathetic terms. What religious imagery he does use, is short and to the point. He calls Pompilia a "martyr-maid" (X.1133) to be kept "Safe like the signet stone . . ./Saints are known by" (X.1019). He explicitly defines her story as

repetition of the miracle,  
 The divine instance of self-sacrifice  
 That never ends and aye begins for man.  
 (X.1649-51)

Guido is imaged as Judas "hard upon the donor's heel,/To filch the fragments of the basket--plead/He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat/Attent with fifties in a company" (X.470). Guido, the "plucking fiend" (X.1018), has tried to hide his guilt through his membership in the minor orders of the Church, hoping for protection. But in the final analysis, the Pope sees Guido's cunning and deviousness and pronounces his judgment on the relationship between Pompilia and Caponsacchi as one between saints, and on Guido as a Satan-figure:

No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,  
 No tablet signalize the terrace, teach  
 New generations which succeed the old,  
 The pavement of the street is holy ground;  
 No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed  
 And Satan fell like lightning!...  
 (X.664-69)

In terms of animal imagery, Pompilia is imaged as a dove (X.744-48); a "lamb that panted at [the foot of the Archbishop of Arezzo] /While the wolf pressed on her with a crook's reach" (X.985-86); a "fawn, flung with those beseeching eyes,/Flat in the covert" (X.914); and finally as a "poor trampled worm" who "Springs up a serpent" (X.696-97) as she attacks Guido at the inn. The sympathetic animal imagery applied to Pompilia by the Pope is not surprising, and is limited in quantity because he is not attempting to prove her innocence and purity: he knows the truth of her character.

Animal imagery associated with Guido is varied and numerous in Book X. The Pope calls him "religion's parasite" (X.452); a "soldier-crab" (X.508); a toad (X.548); a "gor-crow" (X.577); a swine with the devil inside him (X.846); and a "leviathan" (X.1097). The Pope emphasizes Guido's brutish moral laxity:

Not one permissible impulse moves the man,  
 From the mere liking of the eye and ear,  
 To the true longing of the heart that loves,  
 No trace of these: but all to instigate,  
 Is what sinks man past level of the brute,  
 Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.  
 (X.535-40)

Guido is a "wolf" that "Feast [ed] on . . . the lamb-like child his prey" (X.556-57); a bird of prey that "Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl/May dare the inimitable swoop" (X.585); and is "fashioned to use feet and walk" but instead "deigns crawl" (X.714). Guido is also a hunter of Pompilia-prey, and the Pope asks,

But how hunts Guido? Why, the fraudulent trap--  
 Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet  
 Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play--  
 Here he picks up the fragments to the least,  
 Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place  
 Where haply he may patch again, refit  
 The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew,

Make sure, next time, first snap shall break the bone.  
(X.721-28)

This image negates all the preceeding images of Pompilia as a bait and a lure to entrap Guido, and sets Guido as the real snare to catch Pompilia and Caponsacchi by cruel and fraudulent means.

It is appropriate that the Neopolitan Pope regards Guido as a fish in the majority of his animal images:

he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish,  
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,  
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)  
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.  
(X.484-87)

Guido is like a marine animal that can leave and return to its protective shell at will. While he now claims the protection of the Church in his appeal to the Pope, he has never accepted its moral restrictions. The shell is Guido's cover of nobility and his affiliation with the Church. When caught, Guido seeks refuge in his name and in the Church:

And when Law takes him by surprise at last,  
Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey,  
Behold, he points to shell left high and dry,  
Pleads "But the case out yonder is myself!"  
Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,  
Congenial vermin; that was none of thee,  
Thine outside,--

(X.502-8)

In contrast to the disguised and camouflaged fish-Guido, the Pope expresses no surprise that skeptics and worldlings have no use for "the pearl /lf grat price" that is Pompilia:

But this does overwhelm me with surprise,  
Touch me to terror, --not that faith, the pearl  
Should be let lie by fishers wanting food,--  
Nor, seen and handled by a certain few  
Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned  
To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves,--

But that, when haply found and known and named  
 By the residue made rich for evermore,  
 These, --that these favoured ones, should in a trice  
 Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,  
 Mud-worms that make the savoury soup!...  
 (X.1434-44)

The Pope is surprised that Churchmen like the Archbishop of Arezzo do not recognize Pompilia's true worth as a perfect white pearl. He censures these "fishers of men" for being deceived by the deceitful Guido-fish, accepting his "truth" instead of hers.

Some of the Pope's most poetic and touching images occur when he figures Pompilia as a plant. He describes her treatment at Arezzo, as she is tortured by Guido to

Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside,  
 Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak  
 Of possible sunshine else would coin itself  
 And drop down one more gold piece in the path:...  
 (X.733-36)

Pompilia is imaged as a plant linked with sunlight and gold. Her spiritual value is not discerned by Guido, but is recognized by the Pope:

The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower  
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!  
 (X.1012-13)

The Pope realizes the worth of Pompilia's symbolic glory, beauty, and purity, and he is thankful to God that he has lived to see a soul like hers:

Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground  
 I till, --this earth my sweat and blood manure  
 All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:  
 At least one blossom makes me proud at eve  
 Born 'mid the briars of my enclosure! . . .  
 (X.1025-29)

see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed,  
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot

Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,  
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire  
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves  
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,  
 My rose, I gather for the breast of God, ...  
 (X.1035-41)

In the seven years of his term of office as Pope, Innocent has toiled for the souls of his flock. In Pompilia he envisions his final reward, seeing a pure and saintly soul existing in his realm and making his burdens lighter. From her low origins, Pompilia has sprung up as a glorious flower, all her desires and longings projected through her great faith to her God. The Pope signifies that she alone in the tragedy is pure enough to adorn heaven. The Pope seems to gather Pompilia lovingly as a gift to God.

The Pope sees Caponsacchi as the "thorn" that "Comes to the aid of and completes the rose" (X.683-84), as her protector and champion. The soldier-priest is a "good rose in its degree", an "unsuspected flower that hoards and hides/Immensity of sweetness" (X.1172-73). Although Caponsacchi is judged to have faults in his part in the tragedy, placing himself in a position to be misunderstood, the Pope forgives him his minor errors, and unhesitatingly groups him with the rose-Pompilia, for without the priest the final truth of Pompilia's glory would not have become evident.

The pure Pompilia-flower receives reiteration in the colour imagery applied to the "martyr-maid." She is "perfect in whiteness" (X.1000), the redeeming factor of the tragedy:

Here the blot is blanced  
 By God's gift of a purity of soul  
 That will not take pollution, ermine-like  
 Armed with dishonor by its own soft snow.  
 Such was this gift of God who showed for once

How he would have the world go white:...  
(X.674-79)

Caponsacchi, the rose's thorn, is "white-cinct because in white walks sanctity" (X.1167). Again, in terms of colour imagery, the Pope links the two as inseparable components of saintliness.

Guido, however, is a "midmost blotch of black" (X.864) who, like the rest of his family, is "colored, all descried akin/By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred/At the centre" (X.872-74). Guido possesses the ability to stain those who come within his reach; his hired murderers were "Colorless natures counted clean" until they met the Count (X.773). The Pope links Guido's blackness to the perverse "truth" he has tried to present to the world:

For I find this black mark impinge the man,  
That he believes in just the vile of life.  
Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth?  
(X.509-11)

Light imagery usually appears in Book X in the form of white light and the light/darkness contrast seen in earlier Books. Opposition of light and the obscuration of light frequently embody a philosophical distinction. For example, the following figure presents the sun as faith, pure and unhesitating, and the clouds, the "soft streaks" that obscure the light of the sun, as doubt or obstacles to belief:

I must outlive a thing ere know it dead:  
When I outlive the faith there is a sun,  
When I lie, ashes to the very soul, --  
Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,  
"He died in dark whence never morn arose."  
While I see day succeed the deepest night--  
How can I speak but as I know? --my speech  
Must be, throughout the darkness, "It will end;  
'The light that did burn, will burn!" Clouds obscure--  
But for which obscuration all were bright?

Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffused,  
 A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,--  
 Better the very clarity of heaven:  
 The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.  
 What but the weakness in faith supplies  
 The incentive to humanity, no strength  
 Absolute, irresistible, comports?

(X.1628-44)

The Pope voices the philosophy that doubt gives vitality to religious faith. When the clouds of doubt are parted by a soul like Pompilia's to reveal the reality of pure truth, faith in God and his divine intervention provide incentive for man to pursue the ways of God.

Another of the Pope's light images introduces a contrast between white light and yellow light, presenting an opposition between the truth of God and the truth of man, a distinction which is more difficult to perceive than that between light and darkness:

Was this too easy for our after-stage?  
 Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,  
 Only allowed initiate, set man's step  
 In the true way of the great glow?  
 A way wherein it is ordained he walk,  
 Bearing to see the light from heaven still more  
 And more encroached on by the light of earth,  
 Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven,  
 Earthly incitements that mankind serve God  
 For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's.  
 Till at last, who distinguished the sun  
 From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?  
 More praise to him who with his suitable prism  
 Shall decompose both beams and name the true.  
 In such sense, who is last proves first indeed;  
 For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth  
 Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now,  
 Who untwists heaven's pure white from the yellow flare  
 O' the world's gross torch, without a foil that helped  
 Produce the Christian act, so possible  
 When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,--

(X.1806-26)

Within the interrelationship of light, fire and color, white light suggests a higher order of truth than yellow light. But the primary



purpose of the image is not to make a qualitative statement about these different forms of truth, but a statement concerning man's search for truth. In this manner, the Pope refers to Caponsacchi almost entirely in terms of light or star imagery. He praises the priest: "Well done!/Be glad thou hast let light into the world,/ Through that irregular breach o' the boundary" (X.1198-1200).

The Pope recognizes that men would never "suspect/[A] veritable star [to swim] out of cloud" (X.1143-44) as Caponsacchi did in his gallant recue of Pompilia, but thanks God that he did: "the brave starry birth/Conciliating earth with all that cloud,/Thank heaven as I do!" (X.1148-50). The light from the Caponsacchi-star illuminates the cloud of doubt and allows man to see the true sun of God. The Pope associates the light of Caponsacchi with the light of Pompilia, reiterating the previous images of the pair as stars destined to meet for a spiritual purpose:

as if the stars  
Fought in their courses for a fate to be  
Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,  
I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there.  
(X.660-63)

Fire imagery in the Pope's monologue finalizes all the images that have gone before. When the Pope speaks of Rome's gossip he says, "Two names now snap and flash from mouth to mouth--/(Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope" (X.289-90). The Pope characterizes himself as a

grey ultimate decrepitude,--  
Yet sensible of fires that more and more  
Visit a soul, in passage to the sky,  
Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new--  
(X.388-91)

The Pope is referring to the earthly fires of tribulation and the fires

of truth as he intuitively in his wisdom and experience the final vision of truth in the murder case.

The Pope presents Guido's motives for the murders as those of a calculating man who goads his wife in order that she may be forced to act in a way that will destroy her and the Comparini. He presents the plan in terms of a burning thatched hut (X.614-27) and continues:

So did his cruelty burn life about,  
 And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulness,  
 Try the persistency of torment so  
 O' the wife, that, at extremity,  
 Some crisis brought about by fire and flame,  
 The patient frenzy--stung must needs break loose,  
 Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,  
 Even in the arms of who should front her first,  
 No monster but a man--while nature shrieked  
 "Or thus escape, or die!"

(X.628-37)

The Pope describes the Franceschini villa as a cave in which there burns a "pitchy furnace stirred/At the centre" (X.877-78) around which hover the Franceschini. The passage concludes with the lines:

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round  
 And heat the furnace sevenfold: time indeed  
 A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,  
 Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame,  
 The main offender, sear and brand the rest  
 Hurrying each miscreant to his hole: then flood  
 And purify the scene with outside day--  
 Which yet, in the absolute drench of dark,  
 Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam  
 To the despair of hell.

(X.989-998)

These fires of torture describing Pompilia's suffering at Arezzo echo the obscene ring image of Book I and all others dealing with Guido's cruelty to his wife. The close similarity of the Pope's image with that of Browning's in Book I gives the pontiff's special authenticity in keeping with the concept of Book X as the ultimate judgment.

The fire images which associate Guido with hell re-echo, preceding images referring to the actual crime. The Pope speaks of how Guido hired his accomplices:

Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price,--  
 Just breathes on what- suffused with all himself,  
 Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now  
 I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break  
 And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's Birthright-eve!  
 (X.779-83)

The association recurs in the Pope's comment that if the murderers had not been caught, Guido himself would have been slain by his accomplices, "Gone further and fared worse . . ./Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath!" (X.854-55) Commenting on Guido's respite granted by the law after the incident at the inn, the Pope expresses the wish that it had been otherwise, that Guido could have known

The mercy of a minute's fiery purge!  
 The furnace-coals alike of public scorn,  
 Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head,  
 What if, --the force and guile, the ore's alloy,  
 Eliminate, his baser soul refined--  
 The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire?  
 (X.705-10)

This concept of purgation by fire echoes Pompilia's concept of salvation "so as by fire."

The passage dealing with the Pope's judgment of Pompilia contains one fire image within a larger flower image. The Pope speaks of Pompilia as a

cleft-nursed seed,  
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot  
 Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,  
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire  
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves  
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs!...  
 (X.1035-40)

The lines refer to Pompilia's bold and resolute action at the inn. The

fire image relates to truth and service to God presented in preceding Books. Furthermore, the Pope's image of the term "desire" in close juxtaposition with "blaze", referring to Pompilia, surprisingly echoes Bottinius' image of the "tint and hint of flame,--desire." But where the lawyer suggests carnal desire, the Pope's image is a clear association of the saintly Pompilia with God, the Sun.

When the Pope judges Caponsacchi, fire images occur twice, and the suggestion in each is a spiritual one. The first occurs when Caponsacchi is seen to have acted as a soldier-saint.

According to the Pope,

He who made  
 The comely terror, He shall make the sword  
 To match that piece of netherstone his heart,  
 Ay, nor miss praise thereby; who else shut fire  
 I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke,  
 In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry  
 That dares the right and disregards alike  
 The yea and nay o' the world?...

(X.1103-10)

With its association with the fire of God, the image recalls others that refer to Caponsacchi's chivalric rescue of Pompilia, and to her story of the Paynims who, pursuing the virgin, cried, "Wrath of God, assert His love/Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!" (VII. 1382-83) The second image is also suggestive of a previous one. The Pope says of Caponsacchi:

In thought, word and deed,  
 How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,  
 I find it easy to believe: and if  
 At any fateful moment of the strange  
 Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,  
 Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much,--  
 As when a thundrous midnight, with black air  
 That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell,  
 Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed  
 Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides

Immensity of sweetness, --so, perchance,  
 Might the surprise and fear release too much  
 The perfect beauty of the body and soul,  
 Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,  
 He who is Pity....

(X.1163-77)

The concept that the fires of passionate adventure, normally destructive, become a means towards renewal when used in some noble endeavour is reiterated in the passage. The trials of life are a kind of moral exercise, strengthening or releasing man's spiritual potential.

The Pope's repetition of earlier images confirms finally the truth; and the nature of the images bestows upon Pompilia and Caponsacchi a spiritual significance that gives them an almost allegorical dimension. Those associated with Guido give him a dimension of the opposite significance. The remainder of the fire images in the Pope's monologue are associated with what C. Willard Smith calls the "grand image of light that represents universal truth, and the light of Heaven."<sup>9</sup> The first occurs in the words of a voice which instructs the Pope to

Leave pavement and mount roof,  
 Look round thee for the light of the upper sky  
 The fire which lit thy fire which finds default  
 In Guido Franceschini to his cost!

(X.1269-72)

The image implies the concept of an omnipotent Maker who has the power to absolve the evils of earth. The fires of hell which have imaged Guido and his actions are of his own making. He has "defaulted" the

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<sup>9</sup> C. Willard Smith, Browning's Star Imagery, p. 210.

fires given to him by God.

When the voice skeptically asks what would happen if the Pope fails to find guidance in "the domain of light" (X.1273), the Pope replies,

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun;  
Thither I sent the great looks which compel  
Light from its fount: all that I do and am  
Come from the truth,...

(X.1279-82)

The spark-of-truth image echoes Caponsacchi's "let me in heaven's name, use the very snuff/0' the taper in one last spark shall show truth" and "The spark of truth was struck from out our souls." Later, the Pope employs the image of the fires of truth in reference to himself as one "within whose circle of experience burns/The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,--God" (X.1626-27). The pattern of fire and truth and the association with Goodness and Love recall the many fire images in reference to Pompilia whose "truth" is the very attribute of her own purity and innocence. The characters and actions of Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope are concrete manifestations of these attributes, which in their sum constitute God.

The fire images in the two passages gives significance to the profusion of images and their distribution in the poem. A distinction is made between the two kinds of fire which may be classified as the fires of heaven and the fires of earth, or the fires of the spiritual and the fires of the material. The distinction characterizes the two kinds of fires found in the imagery of all the Books of the poem. Of the fires of earth or materialism, the imagery dealing with Guido and his lust, rage, cruelty, and vengeance is the most dominant, its evil nature suggested by the frequent association with hell-fire.

The fires of heaven, hope, peace, faith, sacrifice and truth are associated with the Pope, Caponsacchi and Pompilia.

The Pope, in his use of various fire images, praises the individual who can make the distinction between the two fires and confirms the appropriateness of the distribution of fire images among the various speakers of the poem. The imagery of the fires of heaven does not appear in the monologues of the "negative" and "unsympathetic" speakers, and its absence may be taken as a sign of their inability to see the truth. In contrast, there is a profusion of the fires-of-heaven images in the monologues of Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope. Compared to these, the "sympathetic" monologue of Other Half-Rome contains images barely realized. Bottinius' monologue supposedly a defence of Pompilia, presents images that are totally inadequate and inappropriate.

In the final section of the Pope's monologue, he recalls a dark night in Naples when suddenly "the night's black was burst through by blaze" (X.1212). He voices the hope that "So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,/And Guido see, one instant, and be saved" (X.2129-30). Finally, he presents his vision of the ultimate truth, a literal matter of seeing through the dim fog of facts to the glowing blaze of the fire of truth:

dark, difficult enough  
The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,  
I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,  
As mere may may, with no special touch  
O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb:...

(X.1235-39)

While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world,  
For this life recognize and arbitrate,  
Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,

Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"  
 Candle in hand that helps me and to spare,--  
 What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry!"  
 Brighten each nook with thine intelligence!"  
 (X.1254-60)

The candle of faith and truth which the Pope uses to illuminate his path through the maze of the murder case is part of the last section of the poem, which is devoted to a theological discussion, much of it in the form of a hypothetical conversation with Euripedes, concerning the necessity of the Christian revelation, the importance of doubt in sustaining faith, and the Age of Reason, which the Pope anticipates and deplures.

He presents himself in a theatre image as a man appointed to represent God on earth:

I it is who have been appointed here  
 To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,  
 Just as, if new philosophy know aught,  
 This one earth, out of all the multitude  
 Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed,--  
 Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,  
 For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act  
 Beside which even the creation fades  
 Into a puny exercise of power.  
 (X.1327-35)

There is a change in poetic emphasis in the Pope's theatre image. He implies an analogy between the particular drama of the poem and the greater drama of Christ, which he sees as evidence of God's love and therefore the perfection of an omnipotent God.<sup>10</sup> The Pope visualizes an age of doubt which will replace his age:

Do not we end, the century and I?  
 The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe

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<sup>10</sup> Cook, Commentary, p. 227.



O' the very masque's self it will mock, --on me,  
 Last lingering personage, the impatient mime  
 Pushes already, --will I block the way?  
 Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space  
 For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet?  
 (X.1906-12)

The masque-antimasque contrast recalls the tragedy-comedy antithesis in previous Books. Caponsacchi is seen as "the first experimentalist" (X.1913) who does not take "inspiration from the Church" (X.1915).

Instead, he has "danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main/The right step in the maze we bade him foot" (X.1919-20). Guido's part (X.1946) is revealed as one of "greed, ambition, lust, revenge" (X.1947). The Pope goes on to express his own role in the drama:

Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close  
 On the exit: and my last act, as my first,  
 I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus  
 With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite  
 With my whole strength once more, ere end my part.  
 (X.1958-62)

The Pope's last words are that he may die that very night, "And how should I dare die, this man [Guido] let live?" (X.2135-36).

The Pope realizes that the evil of the Count would only flourish and multiply in the world if his life was spared. His judgment of Guido, the final sentence of death, is presented as a result of a dispassionate evaluation of the facts of the tragedy in the light of their effect on society as a whole.

The Pope's judgments are fortified by the power of his great learning and by the wisdom of magnificent devotion to the ways of God. His vision of the whole truth is a conception of the goodness that fills the hours before his death with serenity within a framework of a larger vision of truth and justice in the world. The Pope's monologue expresses his entire approach to life and treats the whole

task as a part of all tasks ever faced and all choices ever made, affecting his own life and the lives of those he judges. In its entirety, the monologue of Pope Innocent XII is a revelation of the nature of God, the mystery of good and evil, and the purpose of individual life within human history. But most importantly, it is filled with the knowledge of God's love and a vision of divine truth in the world of men. It remains only for the Pope's visionary insight and judgment to be validated by Guido's second monologue, presented in Book XI.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

#### Book XI - "Guido"

When Browning gave Book V the title "Count Guido Franceschini" and Book XI the title simply "Guido," he was indicating a difference in purpose. The change reflects the difference in spirit and the discarding of the trappings of social rank. In his first monologue, Guido depends upon his ability to convince the court that his actions were synonymous with the conduct of a Roman gentleman. The imagery of Book V demonstrated Guido's claim to the privileges of rank as a part of the social framework in which truth is prevented from being easily known or expressed.

In the monologue of Book XI, Guido abandons his social role to reveal his true nature. He is no longer presenting a statement designed to influence the court's decision, for his appeal has been denied. Instead, he appears as a despairing, defiant man, attempting to justify his actions, and in the process, presenting an honest portrait of himself lacking in his previous monologue. But even in Book XI, Guido unconsciously attempts to play the role of the man he believes himself to be, not the man he really is.

A great deal of the change in tone and emphasis is the result of Guido's dropping of images associated with business transactions used in Book V, the introduction of new images suited to his immediate situation, and the use of shifting and amplified images which have been little used or used with different effect in his first monologue. Book XI illustrates most effectively the concept of

dynamic and accretive imagery in the series of recurring images. Guido's figures underscore his basic sadistic cruelty, which emphasizes his pleasure in inflicting or observing suffering. Although he does not refer to corporal punishment associated with Pompilia, he does explain his concept of a husband's control over his wife:

God  
Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm  
And ball of first--woman the beardless cheek  
And proper place to suffer in the side:...  
(XI.1398-1401)

This is the true premise for his plea of honoris causa. Guido is not so much concerned with the basic concept of honour as he is with his perception of the roles of husband and wife. Pompilia has run counter to his conception, and has suffered for it.

Therefore, in contrast to the auditory "ring" of truth, there is an opposite connotation presented in Guido's second monologue. Guido attempts to justify his crime to his listeners:

There's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly swing,  
Only a man in earnest, you'll so praise  
And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring!  
(XI.653-55)

The second instance of the false "ring" recalls Bottinius' image of "ring the changes on this precept":

Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,--  
Wallow in what is now a wolfishness  
Coerced too much by the humanity  
That's half of me as well! Grow out of man,  
Glut the wolf-nature, --what remains but grow  
Into the man again, be man indeed  
And all man? Do I ring the changes right?  
Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed!  
(XI.2059-66)

Guido also uses "ring" in an anatomical sense as he refers to Pompilia:

the serpent writhe her rings,  
 Grafted into the common stock for tail,  
 And name the brute, Chimaera, which I slew!  
 (XI.1122-24)

And again to the murder of the Comparini and Pompilia:

So, I had my way,  
 Did my deed: so, unbrokenly lay bare  
 Each taenia that had sucked me dry of juice,  
 At last outside me, not an inch of ring  
 Left now to writhe about and root itself  
 I' the heart all powerless for revenge!...  
 (XI.1599-1604)

The anatomical "rings" serve to identify further Guido's attitude towards Pompilia. Although they occur within the category of animal images, they are also related to the circle images of the poem to measure Guido's failure to perceive the truth. In reiterating the "obscene ring" images of Book I, Guido applies the demonic connotations to the Comparini family rather than to his own.

Theatre imagery occurs twice in Book XI as Guido appears stripped of his rank and title completely to reveal himself. The exposure does not begin until after Guido has once more attempted to persuade his audience of his innocence. Early in his second monologue, he resorts again to the plea of honoris causa:

All honest Rome approved my part;  
 Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter, --nay,  
 Mistress, --had any shadow of any right  
 That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,  
 Held it with tooth and nail, --these manly men  
 Approved!...

(XI.40-45)

Guido cannot hide the hate which Pompilia has said was "the truth of him." According to the Pope, Guido's "part" was one of "greed, ambition, lust, revenge", not one of injured honour. The Pope's insight is further strengthened by another passage:

I hooked my cause on to the Clergy's, --plea  
Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,  
Revealed my priestly tonsure, saved me so.  
(XI.52-54)

Guido also uses an image of the masque in Book XI:

So, the living truth  
Revealed to strike Pan dead, ducks low at last,  
Prays leave to hold its own and live good days  
Provided it go masque grotesquely, called  
Christian not Pagan?...

(XI.1979-83)

Guido's criticism of the churchmen reflects the Pope's, but it also substantiates the Pope's judgment of Guido, for in the Count's words to the clergy he implies the criticism applicable to himself: "I spare you, Cardinal, --but though you wince,/You know me, I know you, and both know that!" (XI.1963-64).

As the time for his execution draws near, Guido tries desperately to persuade his listeners to save him. He admits that his argument is rhetorical: "All's but a flourish, figure of rhetoric!/ One must try each expedient to save life" (XI.848-49). He uses the honoris causa plea, and resorts to the theatre image he used in Book V:

I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight  
Tell them my story--"plausible, but false!  
False, to be sure! What else can story be  
That runs--a young wife tired of an old spouse,  
Found a priest whom she fled away with, --both  
Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,...  
(XI.869-74)

Jealousy! I have known a score of plays,  
Were listened to and laughed at in my time  
As like the every-day life on all sides,  
Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare,  
Suspected all the world contrived his shame;  
What did the wife? The wife kissed both eyes blind,  
Explained away ambiguous circumstance,  
And while she held him captive by the hand,  
Crowned his head --you know what's the mockery,--  
By half her body behind the curtain....  
(XI.894-903)

In Book V Guido pleaded honoris causa before the judges and insisted that the farce analogy was true. Here, he admits that his "story" was "false, to be sure", though he craftily sticks to the jealous husband theme.

In Book XI, Guido is more prone to use comparisons from the wild animal world than he was in Book V. In his first monologue, Guido referred to himself in terms of a guardian shepherd or a lion's victim. He also used images of estate-life familiar to members of the court: donkeys, the apiary, the fowlyard, and gardening. In Book XI he employs images of predatory creatures, serpents and vermin. He refers to himself as a swine (XI.759), a lynx (XI.914), a hound (XI.1330), and a fly (XI.1809), as well as a snake: "I'm a warning, as I writhe" (XI.117). Animal images such as these are negative in connotation, and Guido is obviously using them unconsciously, but appropriately, Book XI serves to illuminate the true nature of the Count's character.

Guido describes Pompilia in terms similar to the ones he has employed in Book V, including the heifer (XI.975), the horse (XI.1359), the snake (XI.1363), the partridge (XI.1537), the scorpion (XI.1591), and the tiger cat (XI.1713). In a bird image, Guido figures his wife as a pullet, to illustrate their marital relationship:

All women cannot give men love, forsooth!  
 No, not all pullets lay the henwife eggs--  
 Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,  
 Brood on chalk-ball: soon the nest is stocked--  
 Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit!  
 (XI.1419-23)

Pompilia was Guido's "slave" (XI.1415). Therefore, he saw her role as being totally obedient to his wishes. He asks, "Why blame me if I

take the life?" (XI.1418):

Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly  
Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face?  
You blotted it from being at a blow:...

(XI.2250-52)

Guido feels no remorse for the murder of Pompilia because she was no more than a mere possession to him, and because he feels that a husband rules a wife in all ways, the taking of her life being his privilege.

Guido equates Pompilia with a hare as he attempts to illustrate his resignation to her "unwifely" behavior after her parents fled from Arezzo to Rome:

Before, the parents' presence lent her life:  
She could play off her sex's armory,  
Entreat, reproach, be female to my male,  
Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,  
Go clamor to the Commissary, bid  
The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,  
And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change,  
The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!  
Since that day when she learned she was no child  
Of those she thought her parents, --that their trick  
Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late,--  
Why, I suppose she said within herself  
"Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake!  
And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"  
But is there no third party to the pact?  
What of her husband's relish or dislike  
For this new game of giving up the game,  
The worse offence of not offending more?  
I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,  
Set her on to conceive and execute  
The preferable plague: how sure they probe,--  
These jades, the sensitivist soft of man!

(XI.1323-44)

The passage increases sympathy for Pompilia, but it also serves as one of the examples of Browning's proliferation of figures. Besides such comparatively simple images as "sex's armory," "preferable plague," "These jades," and "sensitivist soft" and the comparison



to the hare, there are references to a business contract, a game, and medical procedures--all of which have been encountered in previous variant forms. One image within the longer figure suggests the helpless terror-stricken Pompilia. The phrase "the shrieking doubles of the hare" evokes the concept of the fear-maddened animal attempting to elude the ferret in the underground maze of burrows, while the hunter waits at the exit for his victim.

Guido uses other comparisons with animals to express the effect of Pompilia's passivity. Like a horse, Pompilia is schooled to reject the response to fear:

Just as bid, she bears herself,  
Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent, --goes:  
So have I brought my horse, by word and blow,  
To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads.  
(XI.1040-43)

A different picture of obedience presents Guido's resentment of Pompilia's impulse to avoid him:

she obeys,  
Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart,"  
As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.  
(XI.1317-19)

The series of wolf-lamb-shepherd images in the poem have been important to the insight into Guido's feral nature. In Book XI, Guido's first wolf image is a complaint that the Pope, in his role of Shepherd, has dealt with him as a wolf rather than as an endangered member of the flock. A few lines later, Guido accepts the wolf-role: "There, let my sheepskin grab, a curse on't, go--/Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag!" (XI.440-41). He amplifies this statement, saying that the Pope "forced me to choose, indulge/Or else renounce my instincts " (XI.817-18).

But you as good as bade me wear sheep's-wool  
 Over wolf's-skin, suck blood and hide the noise  
 By mimicry of something like a bleat,--  
 (XI.821-23)

Oh, were it only open yet to choose--  
 One little time the more--whether I'd be free  
 Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth!  
 Should not you get a growl through the white fangs  
 In answer to your beckoning!...  
 (XI.828-32)

Still later, Guido returns to the wolf figure:

Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,--  
 Wallow in what is now a wolfishness  
 Coerced too much by the humanity  
 That's half of me as well! Grow out of man,  
 Glut the wolf-nature, --what remains but grow  
 Into the man again, be man indeed  
 And all man?...

(XI.2059-65)

All these wolf images have been preparatory to a final outburst in which Guido proudly claims his kinship with the wolf, unable to surrender or abandon conflict even when defeat and death are imminent:

My lamblike wife would neither bark nor bite,  
 She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure  
 The village roused up, with pole and prong  
 To the rescue, and behold the wolf's at bay!  
 Shall he try bleating? --or take turn or two,  
 Since the wolf owns some kinship with the fox,  
 And, failing to escape the foe by craft,  
 Give up the attempt, die fighting quietly?  
 The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye  
 And on to brain, and so out, life and all,  
 How can it but be cheated of a pang  
 If, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy  
 One re-embrace in mid-backbone they break  
 After their weary work through the foe's flesh?  
 That's the wolf nature....

(XI.2307-2321)

Guido's portrait of himself gradually becomes more graphic and accurate. The cumulative effect of the repeated wolf images illuminates the Count's pretensions as a wolf-character. In reality, he is more nearly the hare or sheep he has scorned in his monologues, a poor creature who begs the

Pope to "Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence!" (XI.2013).

In his despair and realization of his imminent death, Guido represents himself as a fish who "hooked my cause to the Clergy" (XI.52) hoping that his membership in the minor orders would give him some preferential treatment. Instead, he finds himself caught by the Fisherman-Pope:

What is this fact I feel persuaded of--  
 This something like a foothold in the sea,  
 Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,  
 Leaves me to founder where it flung me first?  
 Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry!  
 (XI.2299-2303)

This image echoes others in the poem of Guido as the fish-victim. In Book XI, however, he is not so much the dupe of the Comparini as he is the catch of the Neapolitan Pope. Guido can only see himself as a hapless victim, not as a man responsible for murder.

In Book V, Guido portrayed himself as a patient long-suffering beast of burden discharging the obligations of his rank, directed by his aristocratic birth and a "preordained" course of action. In Book XI, the path Guido follows is the road to which the noble is born, a route determined by the aristocrat's privileges and responsibilities. Guido denounces the court that has condemned him for nothing more than following the course laid out by his ancestors. He demands,

Were we not put into a beaten path,  
 Bid pace the world, we noblas born and bred,  
 We body of friends with each his 'scutcheon full  
 Of old achievement and impunity,--  
 (XI.91-94)

I see my grandsire's hoofprints, --point the spot  
 Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave  
 For daring throw jibe--much less, stone--from pale:  
 Then back, and on, and up with the cavalcade.  
 Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,

Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,  
 Something of a sudden jerks at somebody--  
 A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust,  
 Because I play some prank my grandsire played,  
 And here I sprawl: where is the company? Gone!  
 A-trot and a-trample!...

(XI.103-13)

Later, the path image recurs:

At the worse, I stood in doubt  
 On cross-road, took one path of many paths:  
 It leads to the red thing, we all see now,  
 But nobody saw at first; one primrose patch  
 In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,  
 Had warned me from such warfare: let me prove!  
 Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh!  
 Advise me when I take the first false step!

(XI.951-58)

Guido even finds the path image an appropriate answer to the problem of his May-December relationship with Pompilia. He should not have expected any of the usual delights of the bridegroom, but instead should have resigned himself to an avuncular relationship:

But why an I to miss the daisied mile  
 The course begins with, why obtain the dust  
 Of the end precisely at the starting-point?

(XI.1074-76)

In Book V, the path images were based upon the contention that Guido had done only what his station in life and convention demanded, providing a clever, rational and logical argument for the Count's defence. In Book XI, the image is used to demonstrate the "evil" fate that has caused his misfortune--thereby relieving him of all responsibility. In this context, Guido uses images of gambling to emphasize the "game of chance" in which he has been involved: "When destiny intends you cards like these/What good of skill and preconcerted play?" (XI.1697-98). Guido contends that "so the cards are packed/Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away" (XI.1750-51). He even blames Fate for

the death of the Comparini, since normally he could not have expected to find Pompilia and her parents alone together:

The impossible was effected: I called king,  
Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came  
All three, three only!...

(XI.1597-99)

The three murders constitute the "red thing" (XI.1453) of Guido's life and suggest the rose (XI.1989) that is Pompilia. This "furze-sprig of a wife" (XI.2182) could not enter body and soul into a relationship with Guido:

plant elm by ash in file;  
Both unexceptional trees enough,  
They ought to overlean each other, pair  
At top, and arch across the avenue  
The whole path to the pleasaunce: do they so--  
Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each?

(XI.1435-40)

As a tree, Guido grows

one gorge  
To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale  
Poison my hasty hunger took for food.  
A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,  
No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,  
But sustinence at root, a bucketful.

(XI.2406-11)

The path of matrimony has been unsuccessful for Guido: instead of finding a mutually sharing relationship with Pompilia, became his inherent cruelty, which he cannot perceive, he transfers all guilt to his wife, who has led him finally " 'twixt crosses leading to a skull,/ Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms/From the entry to the end" (XI.1766-68).

In Book V, the references to colour were limited to the use of white as a symbol for innocence, and black for guilt. In Book XI, there is an abundant use of colour imagery. White is used

not only to denote innocence, but also to illustrate Guido's disgust with Pompilia's passivity and lack of passion: "I see the same stone strength of white despair" (XI.1321) and "cold and pale and pure as stone,/Strong as stone also" (XI.1309-10). In a later reference to Pompilia's failure to meet his desires, Guido expresses his disgust:

Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud  
Rainbowed about with riches,...

(XI.2129-30)

Let her bleach unmolested in the midst,  
Chill that selected solitary spot  
Of quietude she pleased to think was life.  
Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt  
When there's the costly bordure to unthread  
And make again an ingot; but what's grace  
When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire?

(XI.2135-41)

Guido negates the preceding images of Pompilia as the centre of a pure white ring of truth. Related to the gold-and-alloy image of Book I is the description of Pompilia as pale piece of lawn; Guido can only see worth in the gold border of the material, not the pure whiteness of the fabric itself so essential to the purity of the total piece. In this context, it is important to note that Guido's delight in richness and colour reinforces the concept of the sensuous side of his nature. Yet his appreciation is limited. Purity of line or motive is beyond his comprehension:

some prefer the pure design:  
Give me my gorge of color, glut of gold  
In a glory round the Virgin made for me!  
Titian's the man, not Monk Angelico  
Who traces you some timid chalky ghost  
That turns the church into a charnel: ay,  
Just such a pencil might depict my wife!

(XI.2121-27)

The passage negates previous descriptions of Pompilia which associate her with portraits or statues of the Virgin. Guido has no use for

the whiteness or purity of the Virgin-Pompilia; his nature demands raucous colour and content. His preference for colour rather than form is related to his obvious preference for images dealing with motion and action rather than with static beauty, and this is one of the traits of his nature that caused the Pope to "find this black mark impinge the man/That believes in just the vile of life."

The profusion of fire imagery in the monologue serves as a device for the confirmation of Guido's true nature. In preceding monologues, the images of fire in reference to Guido have repeatedly associated him with hell in order to stress his essentially evil nature. The association is continued in Book XI by Guido's own references to the fate that awaits him. He voices his bitter hate for the Pope who was refused his appeal, and uses oaths of hell to express himself: "fifty thousand devils in deepest hell!" (XI.58) and "Devils of the deep!" (XI.257). He sees the Pope as the man who "execrates my crime . . . sees hell yawn/One inch from the red plank's end which I press" (XI.335-36) and who thrusts him "Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes!" (XI.403). He claims that he should have been warned that a life such as his "begins in death and ends in hell!" (XI.805), positioned "On the incline, earth's edge that's next to hell" (XI.2088). Guido speaks of Pompilia's forgiveness:

There was no touch in her of hate:  
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!  
To know I suffered, would still sadden her,  
Do what the angels might to make amends!  
Therefore there's either no such place as hell,  
Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,  
And thereby undergo three hells, not one--  
I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,

Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe  
 To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot  
 Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else!

(XI.2092-2102)

Guido's hate is so all-absorbing that, even if escape from hell to heaven were offered him, he would hesitate if it meant also the escape of Pompilia. In a final hell image, Guido presents himself as the Devil:

Don't fidget, Cardinal!  
 Abate, cross your breast and count your beads  
 And exorcise the devil, for here he stands  
 And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,  
 Daring you drive him hence!...

(XI.550-54)

The hell-fire image is more explicit in Guido's image of himself as a "bunch of withered weed" whose death "Would brighten hell and streat smoke with flame!" (XI.143-49); in his complaint that he should have been warned to "go stop the devil's feast,/Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire!" (XI.675-76); in his question as to why, "in the very gripe/O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull" should he laugh "To make the devil bread from out my grist,/Laps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy?" (XI.1032-37); and in the reference to himself as the "half the burning bridegroom, I shall be" (XI.2223). A touch of irony is found in Guido's outburst that

Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing;  
 The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze  
 The indignant soul, and I'm combustion-ripe.

(XI.462-64)

In spite of his position, Guido still hopes to persuade his listeners to save him somehow. He relies once more on the plea of honoris causa and maddening provocation. Referring to himself as "the unlucky husband," he pleads:



Jealousy maddens people, why not him?  
 Say, he was maddened, so, forgiveable!  
 Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,  
 The priest true, and the pair of liars true,  
 They might seem false to one man in the world!  
 A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting,  
 And many sly soft stimulants to wrath  
 Compose a formidable wrong at last, ...  
 (XI.882-89)

Later, Guido refers to the Comparini as "two ambitious insects" that "circled me, buzzed me deaf, and stung me blind" until he "stopped the nuisance" (XI.1259-67). These pleas are in marked contrast to the confident and vigorous defence he made in his first monologue wherein the fires of provocation appear repeatedly. In his second monologue, there is a lack of fire in his defence; Guido recognizes the earlier failure of the imagery to be persuasive.

The revelatory nature of Book XI may be seen even more clearly in Guido's reference to his vengeance, in which he states that "virtue" restrained him from murdering sooner:

it was virtue stood  
 Unarmed and awed me, --on my brow there burned  
 Crime out so plainly, intolerably red,  
 That I was fain to cry--"Down to the dust  
 'With me, and bury there brow, brand and all!"  
 (XI.498-502)

The revelation is not in Guido's admission of his crime, but in the image he uses. The "crime" that burns on Guido's brow is the provocative action of the Comparini, yet it echoes an image which is a truer portrait of the Count. Previously, Caponsacchi had imaged Pompilia as a burning martyr by whose flame one could read "On head and front of Franceschini there, / Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print!" *— location*

The fire images which are most revealing of the true Guido are those which he applies to his relationship with Pompilia. He

complains of the frustrations he met when his wife refused his advances (XI.1008-23) and insists upon his virility, condemning Pompilia for her coldness:

I am the rock man worth ten times the crude,--  
 Would woman see what this declines to see,  
 Declines to say, "I see," --the officious word  
 That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot  
 New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh!  
 Therefore, 't is she begins with wronging me,  
 Who cannot but begin with hating her.  
 (XI.1024-30)

Fire-as-lust discloses that Guido's hate had its source in sexual frustration. Almost immediately after this image he figures Pompilia as a horse that "by word and blow" is trained "To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads" (XI.1043). Later, the sexual connotation appears again when Guido complains that Pompilia's purity and grace were unaccompanied by wealth: "what's grace/When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire?" (XI.2140-41).

In several passages Guido likens his vengeance to the outbreak of suppressed fire. Criticizing the law and the Church for advising and preaching restraint, he says,

Balk fulness of revenge here, --blame yourselves  
 For this eruption of pent-up soul  
 You prisoned first and played with afterward!  
 "Deny myself" meant simply pleasure you, ...  
 (XI.1490-93)

Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust  
 I had to wink at or help gratify,--  
 While the same passions, --dared they perk in me,  
 Me, the immeasurably marked, by God,  
 Master of the whole world of such as you,--  
 I, boast such passions? 'Twas 'Suppress them straight!  
 Or stay, we'll pick and choose before destroy  
 Here's wrath in you, a serviceable sword,--  
 Beat it into a ploughshare! What's this long  
 Lance-like ambition? Forge a pruning-hook,  
 May be of service when our vines grow tall!

But--sword used swordwise, spear thrust out as spear?  
 Anathema! Suppression is the word!"  
 My nature, when the outrage was too gross,  
 Widened itself an outlet over-wide  
 By way of answer, sought its own relief  
 With more of fire and brimstone than you wished.  
 All your own doing: preachers, blame yourselves!  
 (XI.1497-1514)

The image of the murders as an erupting hell-fire echoes many earlier images in the poem. The image did not, however, appear in Book V, when Guido saw his act as a quenching of the hell-fires of his victims. Here he reveals the true enormity of his deed by his "fire and brimstone" image. Guido also reveals the nature of those erupting fires, his true motives being the gratification of lust, wrath, and ambition.

In a fire image related to the one above, Guido sees death as an agent by which the repressed "wolfishness" of man is finally glutted and man is transformed into "all man":

The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,  
 Let surge by death into a visible flow  
 Of rapture: as the strangled thread of flame  
 Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed,  
 Malignant and malign, through stone and ore,  
 Till earth exclude the stranger: vented once,  
 It finds full play, is recognized atop  
 Some mountain as no such abnormal birth.  
 Fire for the mount, the streamlet for the vale!  
 (XI.2067-75)

The image of the "malignant" subterranean flame applied by Guido to his "honest instinct" of "wolfishness" is an admission of his evil nature. In the dichotomy of the fires of heaven and earth presented by the Pope, Guido is unmistakably associated with evil and malignancy.

Occasionally in Book XI Guido has profound glimpses of truth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, An Introduction to the Study of Browning (London: Cassell and Co., 1886), p. 167, and Cook, Commentary, p. 235.

He speaks of God's "eye" as an "apparitional dread orb" that has the power of omnipotent perception of man's heart (XI.920-26):

I fancy it go filling up the void  
 Above my more-self it devours, or what  
 Proves wrath immensity please wreak on nothingness.  
 Just how I felt once, couching through the dark,  
 Hard by Vittiano; young I was, and gay,  
 And wanting to trap fieldfares: first a spark  
 Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might  
 Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadows, --this  
 Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.  
 What do I want with proverbs, percepts here?  
 Away with man! What shall I say to God?  
 (XI.922-32)

This image of God's fire is the only instance of its appearance in any of the pro-Guido monologues, and recalls similar figures used by Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope in their association of fire with God's truth, retribution, and goodness. These glimpses of truth suggest that Guido may, as the Pope hoped, "see~~ed~~ in one instant, and be saved," as "the truth is flashed out by one blow." Guido even echoes the Pope to the effect that his soul "Wants but a fiery washing to emerge/In clarity!" (XI.1776-77).

Book XI exposes Guido for what he really is as he finally reveals the truth of the murder case and reinforces the Pope's judgment. His monologue is the speech of an evil nature shot through with contradictions and self-betrayals which reveal the extent of his duplicity. Guido illustrates his philosophy of life in which materialism and self-interest play a vital part. The basis of his guilt lies in the concept that his hatred of Pompilia's goodness has no cause or purpose beyond itself. When her purity and innocence thwart his scheme for revenge and monetary gain, he murders her.

Guido speaks his second monologue during the last night of

his life, addressing the two churchmen who have come to obtain his confession and accompany him to the scaffold. Hoping for a last-minute reprieve, Guido speaks with the desperation of the damned, mixing rhetoric and personal revelation. Book XI serves to confirm the truth of the murders of the Comparini and Pompilia. As Browning stated in Book I, from "the same man, another voice" "the true words come at last."

-II-

Book XII - "The Book and the Ring"

Eleanor Cook has called Book XII "a measured and controlled ending" to the poem, containing "some of Browning's deepest thought and finest verse."<sup>2</sup> C. Willard Smith has stated that the last Book is "a final summary in which the many themes of the poem have been drawn together into a finished whole."<sup>3</sup> In the final Book, Browning returns to centre stage to introduce four speakers who tie up the loose ends of the narrative. Their words are in the form of letters, the first from a Venetian visitor to Rome; the second from Archangelis to Francesco Cencini, a friend of Guido's; the third from Bottinius boasting of his success; the fourth containing a sermon preached by Fra Celestino, Pompilia's Augustinian confessor.

The letters reinforce the basic concept which underlies the poem's structure by demonstrating human inability to see the whole

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<sup>2</sup> Cook, Commentary, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Browning's Star Imagery, p. 190.

truth. The words of these four characters are a post-mortem of the drama which has gripped the Roman populace for weeks. The unmistakable result of the trial is that for all the controversy and excitement surrounding the case, the climax has left the hearts and minds of men untouched. The visitor from Venice parallels the stance of Tertium Quid as an uncommitted outsider who finds nothing in the fate of a fellow nobelman but a brief source of gossip and momentary titillation. Archangelis' letter to Cencini apologizes for the failure to gain a reprieve for Guido, and contains his plans for the handling of a new, profitable legal case coupled with a callous indifference for the executed Count. Bottinius' letter is similar; Pompilia's life and death are insignificant to her lawyer, and he is preparing to have her estate transferred to the Convertite nuns to whom she was banished after being found guilty of adultery on the basis that she was a whore and therefore unfit to receive her inheritance. Fra Celestino's sermon is troubled and weary as the Augustinian wrestles with the ineptitude of the law and the judgment of Pope Innocent XII.

The final lines of the poem return to the ring image and the concept of the poem's circularity outlined in Book I:

And save the soul! If this intent save mine,--  
 If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,  
 Render all duty which good ring should do,  
 And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,--  
 Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,  
 Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)  
 Linking our England to this Italy!

(XII.864-70)

The ring preserves the truth hidden away in the "rough ore", but it also performs another office of a ring, that of a "guard-ring" or "keeper" outside a wedding-ring. Browning would have his poem-ring

lie outside Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "gold ring of verse."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the ring becomes not only a symbol of the poem, but also a symbol of guardianship and love negated by the relationship between Pompilia and Guido, though finally affirmed in the Pope's faith in Pompilia's purity and goodness. The universality of the truth of the murder case, represented by the gold-ring and the keeper-ring, link the events of seventeenth-century Italy to all time and all men.

In Book XII a contrast appears that was predominant throughout the preceding Books of the poem. Of the five persons presented--the Venetian, Archangelis, Bottinius, Fra Celestino, and Browning himself--only the two "sympathetic" speakers, Celestino and Browning, view the story as a serious and significant tragedy. The other three do not see the truth. The Venetian, for example, refers to the events as a Carnival:

"Here are we at our end of Carnival;  
Prodigious gayety and monstrous mirth,  
And Constant shift of entertaining show:..."  
(XII.31-33)

In the introductory lines of the Book there is a suggestion that the story is seen as a drama performed "Over men's upturned faces" (XII.7), the last Book being the final "act" (XII.13). In the closing passages of the poem, Browning alludes to the "Star Wormwood":

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So  
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall  
Frighten awhile the waters and be lost.  
So did this old woe fade from memory:..."  
(XII.823-26)

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<sup>4</sup> Cook, Commentary, p. 273.

The star is the Guido-rocket of lines 1-13, but more importantly, in conjunction with "the old woe," recalls "Let the old woe step on the stage again" of Book I. Both the Wormwood Star and the woe images are from Revelation 8:10--11 and 9:12: "And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, . . . and the name of the star is called wormwood"; "One woe is past, and, behold, there came two woes more hereafter." The images point to the profound extension of the Roman murder story into a drama of universal significance.

The most explicit occurrence of theatre imagery in Book XII is found in the sermon of Fra Celestino, which "recalls the idealism of the Pope":<sup>5</sup>

'Be otherwise instructed, you!  
 And preferably ponder, ere ye judge,  
 Each incident of this strange human play  
 Privily acted on a theatre,  
 That seemed secure from every gaze but God's,--  
 Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low  
 And let the world perceive wild work inside,  
 And how, in petrification of surprise,  
 The actors stood, --raised arm and planted foot,--  
 Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,  
 Despairing shriek, triumphant hate, --transfixed,  
 Both he who takes and she who yields the life.  
 "As ye become spectators of this scene--  
 Watch obscuration of a pearl-pure fame...  
 (XII.539-52)

Although Fra Celestino's theme is like the Pope's--universal truth--, the Pope attempts to find the significance of the case as he meditates in his chamber. His monologue is a probing into universal truth and

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Browning's Star Imagery, p. 220.



the relationship of the case to it. Fra Celestino sermonizes and attempts to convince his congregation that truth and justice are realities and that the life of man is under the power of God.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Pope's emphasis on God's "transcending act" of love, the preacher stresses God's justice and power.

Fra Celestino also presents a contrast between secular and divine law by employing the law-as-machine image which suggests the Pope as God's instrument on earth:

as ye watch, I say,  
Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse  
By --marvellous perversity of man!--  
The inadequacy and inaptitude  
Of that selfsame machine, that very law  
Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,  
Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,  
--Hear law, appointed to defend the just,...  
(XII.570-78)

Finally, when ye find, --after this touch  
Of man's protection which intends to mar  
The last pin-point of light and damn the disc,--  
One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds  
Bid vapor vanish, darkness flee away,  
And let the vexed star culminate in peace  
Approachable no more by earthly mist--  
What I call God's hand, --you perhaps, mere chance  
Of the true instinct of an old good man  
Who happens to hate darkness and love light,...  
(XII.582-92)

Fra Celestino's sermon containing the law-as-machine image serves to stress the mechanics of legalistic practice and secular law. In Book I, Browning first characterizes the law as machine-pump, and here the Augustinian criticizes the "inadequacy and inaptitude" of the machine.

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Ibid., p. 221.

The "elaborate display of pipe and wheel" that is the law in Book I attempts to pump the "facts" from the water. Fra Celestino recognizes that divine law, in opposition to secular law, attempts to "rescue the drowning orb from calumny." The friar condemns the inept machine of law, referring explicitly to Bottinius:

appointed to defend the just,  
Submit for best defence, that wickedness  
Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone,  
Borne by Pompilia's spirit for a space,  
And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief:...

(XII.577-81)

The criticism is directed not only toward Bottinius, but to the whole inept legal machinery and casuistry of the secular world which cannot see truth because of the secular world's human and therefore fallible basis. Celestino's conclusion is profoundly pessimistic. Unlike the Venetian, Archangelis, and Bottinius, he is a "true" man of the Church as the Pope is; but the reaction of the Roman populace to the climax of the case has not been positive--it has not helped them to see the whole truth because they are absorbed in self-interest. Celestino can only see the story of Guido and Pompilia as

one proof more that 'God is true  
And every man a liar' --that who trusts  
To human testimony for a fact  
Gets this sole fact--himself is proved a fool;...

(XII.597-600)

To Browning himself, the story of the murder case appears as resuscitated fire in Book XII:

Here were the end, had anything an end:  
Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared  
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,  
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,  
In brilliant usurpature: thus caught spark,  
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame  
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,

Our glaring Guido: now decline must be.  
 In its explosion, you have see/his act,  
 By my power--

(XII.1-10)

Browning has brought to life the documents of the Old Yellow Book and has rekindled the actions of Guido so that men's lives might be illuminated by the glare of his guilt. By "the explosion" of Guido, and by Browning's "power", the truth of the tale has been set forth. But now, the "act" is "over and ended, falls and fades":

What was once seen, grows what is now described,  
 Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less  
 In every fresh transmission; till it melts,  
 Trickles in silent orange or wan grey  
 Accross the memory, dies and leaves all dark,  
 And presently we find the stars again.

(XII.13-19)

The image of relumed fire is mingled with the imagery of the momentary colours of a sky-rocket. The brilliant colours of the murder case illuminate the sky until their climax passes and the colours melt into indistinguishable tints, leaving the sky bare but for the stars. So the Roman populace has watched the display of the trial until its end; then the return to daily life continues. The case makes no lasting imprint.

Browning has attempted to relume the fires of the case left untouched since the sixteenth century, to "find an ember yet unquenched, / And, breathing, blow the spark to flame" (XII.828-29). As he invokes the past events, his methods reflect the invocation and repetition of previously employed motifs of human prejudice, blindness, and distortion, not only in the Books of his poem, but throughout human history. Browning's two major themes are the untrustworthiness of human speech and the power of the creative process to open men's eyes to truth.

Repeating the friar's words that "God is true/And every man a liar"  
in different words, the poet states:

This lesson, that our human speech is nought,  
Our human testimony false, our fame  
And human estimation words and wind.  
(XII.834-36)

In answer to the question "Why take the artistic way to prove so much?"  
(XII.837), he restates the concept expressed in the ring metaphor of  
Book I:

Because, it is the glory and good of Art,  
That Art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.  
(XII.838-40)

Any attempt to speak truth to another man is doomed to failure because  
the words take on the appearance of falsehood when they are uttered by  
a particular, human, and limited perception:

But Art, --wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
Only to mankind, --Art may tell a truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.  
(XII.854-57)

The creative process does not involve a presentation of truth directly  
to man, but a gradual revelation illuminated indirectly by the artist  
working in the medium of other human voices. The poet's God-given  
gift of insight finally reveals spiritual and eternal value that will  
"Suffice the eye and save the soul beside" (XII.63) if each man explores  
what is set before him, using his imagination and the inspiration of  
God to arrive at the final truth.

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