THE SATIRICAL EDGE OF TRUTH IN THE RING AND THE BOOK

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THE SATIRICAL EDGE OF TRUTH

IN THE RING AND THE BOOK

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ABSTRACT

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by Natalie Nesbitt Woodland

The main emphasis of "The Satirical Edge of Truth in The Ring and the Book" is on Browning's use of satire in his search for truth in his masterwork. The purpose of this study is to show that Browning's poem contains much satire and that he utilizes traditional techniques of satire. The basic techniques are reduction and magnification, and, to a lesser degree, confusion, based upon a structure of polarities, or contrast. Rhetoric, irony, and the grotesque are effective tools in Browning's rendering of satire.

When one considers broad definitions of satire (those proposed by authorities on satire such as Northrop Frye, Alvin Kernan, Robert Elliott, Leonard Feinberg, and David Worcester) and does a comparative analysis of traditional techniques which have historical acceptance, it becomes evident that The Ring and the Book contains fragmentary satire and that the poet was motivated to expose corruption in the seventeenth century applicable to Victorian England and to the world.

Chapter I notes devices of satire that are apparent in The Ring and the Book. An examination of plot, setting, and characters reveals that The Ring and the Book closely follows characteristic satire in these respects. The plot is circular; the time is historically remote from England. The action frequently takes place on a crowded city street. The characters Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid, Archangelis, and Bottinius are skillfully drawn caricatures who distort truth through prejudice, sentimentality, or a desire for self-aggrandizement.

Chapter II reviews three recent dissertations that deal mainly with satire in Browning's shorter poems. Curtis Leon Dornberg bases his study (1965) upon a myth from Plato's Symposium. J. V. McCrory (1968) pursues the idea of Browning's personal involvement as the motivating thrust for his writing satire. Mary Ann Kelso Davis (1972) contends that Browning wrote a sympathetic satire, based upon Balaustion's (Browning's) definition in "Aristophanes' Apology."

Chapter III deals with structure and style in The Ring and the Book. Key words in the explanation of structure by various critics are "experience," "transformation," "relativity," and the term "structuralism" itself. Through the juxtaposition of monologues, the experience of one individual is tested continuously against the experience of other individuals; the "truth" of one often contradicts the

truth of another. Therefore, the method of arriving at a moral judgment is empirical and involves the active participation of the reader.

Chapter IV satirizes the citizenry of the world, as represented by Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid. Half-Rome distorts his testimony through personal prejudice; the Other Half-Rome is undependable because of his sentimentality and bias. Tertium Quid's testimony is less trustworthy than the others because of his middle-of-the-road attitude and his favoritism toward Guido, who is a member of the nobility that he represents.

Chapter V presents the most vivid examples of satire in The Ring and the Book. The climax of the attack against the law occurs in this chapter, and the richest, most obvious satire reaches a climax in the comic travesty of the trial. Linked with the satire on law is a combination of complex strands of satire that run the gamut of the poem.

Chapter VI, the conclusion, summarizes briefly the content of previous chapters. Specific attention is directed toward criticism of natural law, natural theology, Higher Criticism, and rationality. Browning also has satirized many abstract qualities through the humanizing of his caricatures. The crux of the study is that the acid of satire in the alloy of the poet's imagination frees truth from falsehood, and through the artistry of the poet makes

truth discernible as nearly as possible to the finite mind of man.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to reveal Robert Browning as a literary satirist in his masterwork, The Ring and the Book. The method will be that of accepting the broad definitions of satire and of establishing the presence of satire in The Ring and the Book through a comparative analysis of traditional techniques which have historical acceptance.

Browning's central concern in The Ring and the Book is the discovery of truth. In much of his poetry, he seeks to fathom the elusive nature of truth. Man's use, misuse, and limited understanding of truth are the very essence of Browning's satire in The Ring and the Book. "Truth" and the adjective "true" together occur some three hundred and seventeen times in the poem; however, the word "truth" suffers such abuse and distortion that it becomes the most degraded word in the poem. Although the Pope, a character in The Ring and the Book, restores "truth" to some of its pristine quality, the originally strong word has been weakened successively by abuse and contradiction.[1] "Truth"

[1]Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 121.

becomes "the poem's sorriest semantic casualty."[2] It endures the greatest degradation by those soliloquists representing the viewpoints of the citizenry of the world, by the lawyers, and by Guido, particularly in his first dramatic monologue.

Browning diminishes "truth" through the structure of polarities. The opposite poles of truth and falsehood (lying) become so intermingled that falsehood is the vehicle for truth, and truth is the vehicle for falsehood. Confusion, another medium associated with satire, creates "truth, . . . stopping midway short of truth, . . . and resting on a lie. . . ."[3] Thus chaos, disorder, and puzzlement accompany the gradations of the term "truth" as it is misunderstood and vilified in a continuum swinging from an exaltation of the term to its basest connotation. The reader is struck by the devaluation of the word.

Through a preliminary examination of the central word "truth," several methods of satire become apparent. The satire enriches as the spectrum broadens to include not only semantics but also rhetoric with its implications of distortion through figurative language and linguistic devices. Thus through the partial examination of the word

[2]Ibid.

[3]Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, ed. Wylie Sypher (New York: W. W. Norton Co., Inc., 1961), I.11.736-737. All subsequent references are to this edition.

"truth," one can visualize the power of rhetoric as Browning manipulates it through methods of satire. The poet commands the rhetorical power to produce any or all genres of literature, including satire. According to Worcester, "Satire is the most rhetorical of all the kinds of literature."[4]

Understanding his satire contributes to a deeper insight into Browning's artistry. His famous metaphor in which he combined the ring, made by Castellani and presented to Elizabeth Barrett Browning by Isabella Blagden,[5] and the Old Yellow Book, stands for the alloy of Browning's imagination. He states clearly in the initial monologue of The Ring and the Book that he plans to temper fact (the "pure crude fact" of the book) with the alloy of imagination. Familiar with the process of metallurgy, Browning metaphorically tempers the gold with an acid in the alloy to strengthen the form of the ring and to produce a solidifying crust, or edge, on the ring. The acid is the vitriolic acid of satire that burns away the dross and gives substance to the pure gold of truth. That the alloy contains satire as a major ingredient increases the symbolic value of Browning's metaphor in conjunction with the book.

[4]David Worcester, The Art of Satire (1940; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), p. 8.

[5]Edward C. McAleer, ed., Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 55.

Through the medium of satire, Browning cuts and probes deeply, exposing ambiguity, rationalization, falsification, and gross distortion of truth. The composite picture of distortion leads the reader to a clearer perception of truth. That the nearest avenue to the apprehension of truth lies through ambiguity and misconception is very satiric in implication. Much of the satire lies in comparison and contradiction and disparity. It is the satire that produces most noticeably the individual flashes of truth.

Kernan, in The Plot of Satire, Elliott, in The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art, and Worcester, in The Art of Satire, agree on the broad latitudes of satire. "So great is the range of satire"[6] that it is difficult to enclose satire in a standard definition. Perhaps the most widely accepted current definition of satire is that of Northrop Frye: "Two things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack."[7] Browning's artistry conforms to Frye's requirements in both essentials. Chesterton recognizes Browning to be "a particularly perfect artist in the use of the

[6]Alvin B. Kernan, The Plot of Satire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 21.

[7]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 224.

grotesque."[8] That Browning has an object of attack--the elusive nature of truth--is evident throughout The Ring and the Book.

A further examination of individual definitions of satire and of observations on the nature of satire supplies convincing evidence that Browning employes satire in The Ring and the Book. On the surface the satire does not attract immediate and compelling attention. Weaver calls for a closer study of satire in Browning's poetry when he states that "Something needs to be said about Browning's satire. It does not need to be 'scholarly'; but it does need to be exact, in order that students may see what is there and give it merited attention."[9] He is concerned that there is a tendency to read Browning not from his page but from tradition. One part of tradition would deny him the role of a satirist. It is that part of tradition that sees Browning as the optimist singing with Pippa, "God's in his Heaven-- / All's right with the world."[10] The student of satire sees that Pippa passes by a great deal that is wrong with the world. In a dramatic form, which Aristophanes demonstrated as a sufficient vehicle

[8]G. K. Chesterton, Robert Browning (1903; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 153.

[9]Bennett Weaver, "A Primer Study in Browning's Satire," College English, 14 (1952), 76.

[10]Quoted by Weaver, p. 76.

for satire, Browning graphically portrays a need for correction in a corrupt world.[11]

Kernan in his introduction to The Cankered Muse points out the problem of defining satire. He states that "Despite the long and distinguished history of satire in the West, we have not a comprehensive treatment of it. . . ."[12] Elliott also is concerned with the elusive nature of satire. Although he traces the history of satire back to common practices of magic and ritual in countries as diverse as Greece, Arabia, and Ireland, Elliott agrees that it is difficult to confine satire to limited boundaries. This is especially true of Roman verse satire, which is very much akin to the form of Browning's monologues.[13] Elliott reiterates that "the latitude of the satirist is almost boundless."[14] Feinberg arrives at a similar conclusion: "The more one studies satire the more likely he is to permit the widest possible latitude in defining terms."[15]

[11]Ibid.

[12]Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse (1959; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. vii.

[13]Robert Elliott, The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 111.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Leonard Feinberg, Introduction to Satire (Ames, Ia.: Iowa State University Press, 1967), pp. 18-19.

Agreeing with Kernan, Elliott, and Feinberg about the wide latitude of satire, Worcester calls it the Proteus of literature. He states that since 1509, when the word "satire" entered the English language, "its significations have steadily multiplied."[16] He reinforces his statement by calling attention to four kinds of satire that have been pointed out by writers on the subject who have different conceptions as to the boundaries of satire:

> Among writers of the twentieth century, some use the word "satire" to signify the particular kind of verse known as formal satire; some allow it to embrace any type of verse written with satiric intent; some would have it that satire is a formal genre of literature, one, that, including prose as well as verse, yet possesses uniform characteristics; some, finally convinced that any formal theory must involve contradictions and anomalies, identify a work of literature as satire by its motive and spirit alone.[17]

The loose understanding of the meaning of the term "satire" is indicated also in Ellen Leyburn's statement concerning allegory and satire: "Everyone uses the words 'allegory' and 'satire' and thinks he knows what he means by them, but he often fails to communicate his meaning to a hearer who understands them quite differently."[18]

Further extending the view of satire, Worcester quotes Bergson's statement that humor and irony "both are

[16]Worcester, p. 3.

[17]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[18]Ellen Douglas Leyburn, Satiric Allegory: Mirror of Man (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 2.

forms of satire."[19] Irony prevails in much of Browning's poetry. Not only does Browning make use of various structural devices, such as the mock encomium, the mock epic, and the beast fable[20] (as will be demonstrated later) within the dramatic monologues to communicate irony, but he also deliberately cultivates a "purposeful intellectual communion" with the reader[21] to jar him to a realization of cosmic conditions. Kernan reinforces Bergson's definition by acknowledging that "The claim has been made that all irony is satire."[22] If all irony is satire, Browning belongs unmistakably in the camp of the satirist.

Worcester's conclusion that "irony, humor, and satire . . . are of the same stuff and belong to one family,"[23] if we may apply it to Browning's masterwork, allows for a broad view of the extent of satire in The Ring and the Book. Although his view is broad, Worcester distinguishes between the laughter of comedy and the laughter of satire by calling attention to the relative purposelessness of comedy and the purposeful ends of satire. Satire demands intellectual perception in the unraveling of

[19]Worcester, p. 127.

[20]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 82.

[21]Worcester, p. 168.

[22]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 81.

[23]Worcester, p. 34.

meaning.[24] Browning's appeal is to the intellect; the lazy reader will shun Browning's poetry. The apprehension of the satire in Browning requires what Worcester has called the "time lag." The "time lag" is "the interval between the perception of the printed or spoken word and the full comprehension of the message."[25]

Among the terse, individual definitions of satire are two broad definitions. The first is Feinberg's definition: "Satire is a playfully critical distortion of the familiar."[26] The second is that of Worcester: "Satire is the engine of anger, rather than the direct expression of anger."[27] Browning's playful, critical distortion of the familiar runs through the soliloquies; his detachment, achieved through the dramatic monologue, makes his works an indirect, controlled instrument for the expression of anger, an engine of satire.

Much attention has been directed to the difficulty of defining satire and to the confining of satire within narrow boundaries. Feinberg makes a summary statement:

> Satire is such an amorphous genre that no two scholars define it in the same words. No less an authority than Professor Robert C. Elliott comes to

[24]Ibid., p. 38.

[25]Ibid., p. 29.

[26]Feinberg, p. 19.

[27]Worcester, p. 18.

> the reluctant conclusion that no satisfactory definition is possible. The best we can do, he suggests, is to link a number of works traditionally accepted as satires and compare the new work with these examples. If the work we are considering has a reasonable number of resemblances to accepted satire, we are justified in calling it a satiric work. But we should never demand conformity to a particular type, and we should accept numerous deviations from familiar practice.[28]

Because of the loose boundaries of satire and the broad definitions of satire, The Ring and the Book emerges as a satire that meets the standards of traditionally accepted satire. In addition to the broad definitions of satire that contribute to the perception of satire in the poem, the etymology of the word "satire" suggests a charming notion concerning the nature of satire:

> In the attempt to define satire, etymology is of little help, though there is charm in the notion of the lanx satura, the dish of mixed fruit offered to the gods, as well as in the fancy dear to the Elizabethans of the criticism of human folly presented through satyrs. Satura does convey the idea of variety which is characteristic of satire.[29]

Satura suggests a medley, or hash, wherein satire mingles with other literary genres. This idea is very important in understanding the presence of satire in The Ring and the Book. Hodgart points out that "Some of the best satire in literature occurs episodically or fragmentarily in works which are not intended to be wholly satirical."[30] For

[28]Feinberg, p. 18. [29]Leyburn, p. 6.

[30]Matthew Hodgart, Satire (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1969), p. 13.

example, the satire in the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Lucretius is subordinated to tragic and epic poetry.[31] Contemporary with Browning is satire in the Victorian novel. The antagonistic attitude of Dickens toward much in Victorian society and institutions plays a dominant role in his fiction. Thackeray also finds an outlet for satire in the novel. Browning is close to certain Victorian novelists in the interspersing of humor and criticism in the midst of his realistic fiction and psychological probing. Langbaum contends that "If Browning is in The Ring and the Book working toward the novel, he is working toward George Eliot's kind of novel rather than Dickens's."[32] Like Browning's, Eliot's satire may escape the unobservant.

Although many critics assign to satire a secondary rank among the genres of literature,[33] Northrop Frye has added status to satire by including it as one of the four genres he discusses, calling irony and satire "The Mythos of Winter" in his Anatomy of Criticism.[34] In this way he has helped to reestablish the position of satire as a definite kind of literary art, an idea held by the ancient Romans.

[31]Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 3.

[32]Robert Langbaum, ed., The Victorian Age (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 224.

[33]Feinberg, p. 17.

[34]Frye, p. 223.

Browning's approach to satire is indirect and fulfills Kernan's requirement that the satirist approach satire as an art, "not a direct report of the poet's feelings . . . , but a construct of symbols, situations, scenes, characters, language--put together to express some particular vision of the world."[35] Browning's vision included the oblique way of art:

> Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
> 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.837-840)

Fighting under the banner of truth, satirists have attacked the guilty for over two thousand years, claiming that their mission is a moral, purifying one.[36] A compulsive desire to expose corruption and to reveal truth drives them.

Browning is a creative artist whose work is not limited to satire but includes satire. Modern psychologists, as well as the ancients, have defined creativity in various ways. Jung views the creative artist as a "collective man," carrying within him archetypal experiences, derived from ages past.[37] His definition of art seems to explain

[35]Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p. 4.

[36]Elliott, p. 107.

[37]David Krech and Richard S. Crutchfield, Elements of Psychology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 715.

the energy that empowered Browning: "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own end, but one who allows art to realize its purpose through him."[38] Browning feels the "Hand," pushing him into the crowded market place, predestinating him to creative production of The Ring and the Book. "(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand, / Always above my shoulder pushed me once" (I.39-40).

Browning's belief in intuitive flashes of the revelation of truth accords with Freud's understanding of the creative process. Freud's analysis of the process of creativity is especially applicable to satire, as may be seen in his use of the term tendentious wit as a synonym for satire: he speaks of "involuntary inspiration" or "a sudden flash of thought" and "the creating of tendentious wit--that is, wit at the expense of somebody or something. That, of course, is what satire is."[39] Browning's creativity embraces far more than the art of satire, but satire is a powerful force in the central search for truth that permeates The Ring and the Book.

For some, it may be difficult to associate Browning's personality with the personality of traditional

[38]Quoted by Leonard Feinberg, The Satirist (Ames, Ia.: Iowa State University Press, 1963), p. 4.

[39]Ibid.

satirists. Can he fit into the same category with Dryden, Swift, Pope, or Voltaire, satirists whose pessimistic view of life might seem to predispose them to write satire? According to Highet, Browning's basically happy view of life does not preclude his writing satire. He identifies Browning as belonging to a class of satirists who are "happy men of overflowing energy and vitality" in opposition to another class who, bitterly disappointed early in life, "see the world as a permanent structure of injustice."[40] Browning's satire is more akin to Horace's gentle, smiling, and sympathetic satire than to Juvenal's satire of bitter denunciation.

Feinberg quotes John Strand on the optimism of the satirist:

> . . . the satirist is optimistic and believes in the potential goodness of man, otherwise he would not be angered at our deviations from his ideal, nor would he attempt to improve us; our weaknesses and wickedness are exposed by the satirist not to show us that we are bad, but to make us better; and the satirist keeps his ideals and his faith in humanity intact.[41]

One of Browning's key personality traits is optimism. Mary Ann Kelso Davis in her unpublished dissertation, "The Satire of Sympathy: Satiric Elements in the Poetry of Robert Browning," has made a strong case for the sympathetic nature of Browning's satire in her comparison

[40]Highet, p. 241.

[41]Feinberg, The Satirist, p. 21.

of Browning to Euripides. Davis bases her argument for the sympathetic satire of Browning on his definition of satire in "Aristophanes' Apology."[42] Her views are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II of this study.

From the above discussions of definitions of satire, of the creative artistry of satire, and of the personality of the satirist, it seems reasonable to accept Browning as a writer of satire.

Another very important aspect of Browning's satire is his use of monologues. The structure of The Ring and the Book includes ten dramatic monologues as well as a prologue and an epilogue. Verse monologue was an early type of satire. According to Highet:

> Far back among the earliest beginnings of verse satire, we find one important subspecies. This is the monologue which is delivered, not by the satirist in his own person, but by the satirist's victim. The poet makes a man whom he despises and hates stand up and speak his shameful faults, glory in his outrageous vices.[43]

This type of satiric exposure describes Browning's art. Highet concedes that Browning is a master of this self-convicting satire. In addition, he says that Browning combines the qualities of a skillful poet and a subtle psychologist necessary for this type of difficult

[42]Mary Ann Kelso Davis, "The Satire of Sympathy: Satiric Elements in the Poetry of Robert Browning," Diss. University of Rochester, 1972, p. 25.

[43]Highet, p. 52.

self-exposure.[44] Through the monologue, the soliloquists in The Ring and the Book express conflicting viewpoints. Kernan has called attention to the fact "that in great satire there is more than one point of view."[45]

Weaver calls attention to the dramatic form of much of Browning's satire. Aristophanes demonstrates the power of satire in drama; Browning demonstrates the power of satire in the dramatic monologue. The dramatic form "both limits and liberates what is said and how it is said. Artistically it affects the intent and even the spirit of the satirist, binding or enlarging the intent, restricting or freeing the spirit."[46] In The Ring and the Book satire frees the spirit of truth and binds falsehood.

In addition, the monologues, although based on the facts of the Old Yellow Book, are actually fictional. In many instances, Browning swerves from actual fact. His characters depart from the originals. Mack believes that "all good satire . . . exhibits an appreciable degree of fictionality."[47] Furthermore, he affirms, the contours of formal verse satire are part of a fiction.[48] Earlier in

[44]Ibid., pp. 53-54.

[45]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 12.

[46]Weaver, p. 76.

[47]Maynard Mack, "The Muse of Satire," Yale Review, 41 (1951), 84.

[48]Ibid.

this century, Frances Russell observed that "fiction can do without satire much better than satire can do without fiction."[49] Browning was keenly aware of his use of fiction when he asked: "Is fiction what makes fact alive, fact too?" (I.699).

Browning's The Ring and the Book follows the circular course of a plot in satire. The ring metaphor suggests a circular form. In such a structure there is neither beginning, middle, nor end. The Aristotelian concept of plot as having "a beginning, a middle, and an end"[50] and moving through a tightly constructed chain of cause and effect to an inevitable conclusion will not fit satire. The plot of satire follows a different pattern. Kernan takes the position that "any work that has any kind of physical or psychic movement has a plot."[51] The plot in satire resembles a newsreel; "the satirist stands before some scene, usually a bustling city street, and comments to the world at large or to some specific adversarius. . . ."[52] This fits the roles of Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid, and the lawyers. To the satirist, the plot is rarely very important. His purpose is to comment rather

[49]Quoted by Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 229.

[50]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 95.

[51]Ibid., p. 98.

[52]Ibid., p. 97.

than to narrate. Comments change swiftly. The order of events is rarely important to the plot.[53] "Instead we get collections of loosely related scenes and busyness which curls back on itself. . . ."[54] The plot of The Ring and the Book has many characteristics common to the plot of satire.

Those characters in The Ring and the Book that have been drawn with the greatest satire are caricatures. These include Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid, Archangelis, Bottinius, and the grotesque caricature of Guido. Kernan goes so far as to say that we never find character in satire, only caricatures.[55] Satirists often create caricatures instead of characters in order to emphasize weaknesses disproportionately.[56] Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid are comic caricatures whose function is to represent objectionable qualities, epitomized in one individual, for the purpose of attributing these objectionable qualities to a group. The same is true of the caricatures of the lawyers. Feinberg defends caricature by stating that it is a more accurate representation of the victim than he actually appears. He

[53]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 226.

[54]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 100.

[55]Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p. 231.

[56]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 25.

quotes Ernst Kris's words: "The caricature is truer than reality itself," for it provides "a likeness more true than mere imitation could be."[57] For Browning, the discovery of truth could best come through caricature.

Browning early became known among his schoolmates for his ability as a caricaturist. He shared the talent for caricature with his father, Robert Browning, Senior, who drew scores of sketches, illustrative of public and private topics.[58] In a standard biography of Browning by Griffin and Minchen, first published in 1910, regret is expressed that so few of Browning's father's cartoons were made public. That lack has now been remedied by Jack Herring, who published for Beta Phi Mu in 1972 Browning's Old Schoolfellow, which is a collection of caricatures done by Robert Browning's father.[59]

Count Guido, the chief villain in The Ring and the Book, has a prototype in the elder Browning's caricature of Dangerfield. He is a typically evil, Browning character, portrayed grotesquely and accompanied with lines in the grotesque manner. Robert Browning wrote to Elizabeth Barrett in a letter (January 19, 1846) of the pleasure that his

[57]Ibid., p. 117.

[58]W. Hall Griffin and Harry Christopher Minchin, eds., Life of Robert Browning (1910; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 12.

[59]Jack Herring, Browning's Old Schoolfellow (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Beta Phi Mu, 1972), p. v.

father derived from sketching caricatures to fit the passions of the characters in his son's poetry. The father in caricature, as the son in portraiture of poetry, valued "the face as an index to the inner man. . . ."[60] He particularly liked to catch "a momentary glimpse of crystallized life"[61] in the intensity of self-revelation.

The grotesque is a form of caricature which works by contrast.[62] It is a deviation from the normal. The abnormal held a great fascination for Browning. His taste for ugly reality led him to caricature through grotesque art. Walter Bagehot, an able critic contemporary with Browning, prefers "pure" art, the art of utter simplicity to that of "ornate" art, the art of disguises and unreal enhancements. He likes even less grotesque art, the art of incongruity; nevertheless, he concedes that Browning, a master of the grotesque, was able through "an exceptional monstrosity of horrid ugliness . . . to recall the perfection, the beauty from which it is a deviation."[63] The grotesque is a form of satire because of its nature of

[60]Ibid., p. 19.

[61]Ibid., p. 21.

[62]Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry," The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot, ed. Norman St. John Stavas (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 353.

[63]Ibid., p. 360.

distortion. Guido is the best example of grotesque caricature in The Ring and the Book. A distinctive grotesque style, in line with personality, is characteristic of each soliloquy that is satiric. By what Bagehot calls "glaring art,"[64] the truth of the original is more vividly shown.

Setting, as well as plot and character, follows the pattern of fictional satire. The setting of The Ring and the Book is often the mob scene. Kernan points out that the scene of satire is "always disorderly and crowded, packed to the very point of profusion."[65] It was "Across a square in Florence, crammed with booths" (I.43) that Browning found in the midst of utter confusion and the chaos of debris the Old Yellow Book. Predominant scenes in The Ring and the Book are played on city streets and in the middle of a jumble of men, pushing and crowding to view the bodies of mutilated corpses. The comic element is always present in the mob. Humanity suffers degradation; the mob only halfway listens and halfway comprehends. Browning's mob is described grotesquely. "When grotesque art or comic realist art shows a seething mass . . . dignity is impossible."[66]

[64]Ibid., p. 365.

[65]Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p. 7.

[66]Hodgart, p. 129.

The crowd at Arezzo and Rome views the Franceschini affair as a holiday spectacle--a domestic comedy.[67] The stark tragedy and the spiritual significance escape the stupid mob. In addition, the fickleness of the mob which changes from Guido's side to Pompilia's side, as seen at Castelnuovo, further distorts the evolvement of truth from such sources. The mob, which thinks in conjunction and which has no true identity as distinct individuals with distinct experiences, is a picture of satire.

The time of The Ring and the Book is the last days of the seventeenth century. It is historically remote by two hundred years from Browning's England, and the scene is Italy. The facts of the Roman murder case are hidden in oblivion; no one, except Browning, cares to rake up the ashes to rediscover truth. Browning's choice of a historical event serves as a necessary tool for the satirist; he may detach himself from the scene and treat it objectively. Whatever the combination of genres utilized and whatever the combination of motivations for writing The Ring and the Book may have been, the entire poem may be viewed in different ways. Like all good satire, the surface story stands alone, replete in artistry. However, layers of meaning lie beneath the surface. Browning has a great deal to say about the England

[67]Altick and Loucks, p. 302.

of his day on a variety of subjects. According to Feinberg, "a favorite device [of the satirists] is to state repeatedly that the actions they are describing are those of a far-distant or long-gone people, and that the issues under discussion have long ceased to be timely."[68] The antithesis, however, is true. What Browning has to say has a universal timeliness, which is characteristic of satire that continues to be significant and relevant[69] long after the time it was written.

Browning's satire "ranges over the entire field of human activities and relies on standards which may be metaphysical or social or moral."[70] Throughout the ages, satirists have avowed that they are truth seekers. Browning is no exception. This is the fundamental reason for The Ring and the Book. Browning's satire, like the best satire, is concerned with the nature of reality. His art is dedicated to the emphasis that "what seems to be real . . . is not."[71] Like a true scientist, he "ridicules man's naive acceptance of individuals and institutions at face value."[72] He achieves this exposition of reality versus

[68]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 179.

[69]Ibid., p. 8.

[70]Ibid., p. 12.

[71]Ibid., p. 3.

[72]Ibid.

appearance through satire. Kernan has said that "Distortion of literal reality is necessary in order to get at the truth."[73]

In the chapters to follow, there will be an attempt to examine the different perspectives of the selected soliloquists, who in the medley of satura make a hash of truth. Each soliloquist represents symbolically a color or strand of truth. In the words of Browning: "Red, green and blue that whirl into a white, / The variance now, the eventual unity, / Which make the miracle" (I.1354-1356). From the diverse colors, the shades will blend to produce a whiteness of truth--the composite "eventual unity." But "since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth" (XII.603), this study will be concerned with a mixture of satiric distortion, "truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him [man] now, / Not strong meat he may get to bear some day" (I. 823-824).

Chapter II presents a review of three recent dissertations, the works of McCrory, Dornberg, and Davis, who present strong cases for satire in selected poetry of Browning. Although Dornberg emphasizes satire in short poems of Browning, he deals with satire in The Ring and the Book in several chapters of his dissertation.

[73]Kernan, The Satirist, p. 23.

Chapter III deals more specifically with structure and style in The Ring and the Book. Interwoven into Browning's concern with characterization, psychological probing, philosophic tenets, and religious beliefs is fragmentary satire. In order to understand the role of satire in The Ring and the Book, it is necessary to visualize the complex structure upon which the motivations for writing the entire poem rests. Browning, in many ways, bridged a gap between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. An analysis of structure becomes clearer with an understanding of the key word "experience." The literary genre that records experience is the dramatic monologue. Through the monologues, the reader participates in the testing of experience through empirical, scientific methods, as one monologue is juxtaposed with another. In addition, Browning's use of historical sources, his use of fact and fiction, and his reliance on fact in the depiction of character are considerations to be explored in a structural analysis.

Chapter IV deals with the satire derived from portraying differing perspectives of the citizenry of the world. Half-Rome, the champion of Guido, and the Other Half-Rome, the advocate for Pompilia, clash in their opposing views. The common man, represented by these caricatures, takes a definite stand on his view of truth, not recognizing any distortion. These two views, in a sense,

represent the mentality of the mob or people against which the mentality of the snobbish aristocrat is epitomized in the caricature of Tertium Quid. Tertium Quid's view of truth is distorted mainly by his middle-of-the-road attitude and his willingness to espouse either side, although he definitely leans toward Guido and away from Pompilia.[74] Browning demonstrates even grosser distortion in the quest for truth by his depiction of Tertium Quid.

Chapter V involves satire in the counterattacks of the lawyers, Archangelis, who speaks for Guido, and Bottinius, who pleads the case for Pompilia. Archangelis and Bottinius are violent caricatures who "reduce the institutions of law to absurdity and lawyers to hypocrites or impercipient buffoons."[75] Browning's parody of the legal proceedings reduces the role of the lawyers of the Old Yellow Book to a low burlesque. Their travesty of the court system produces a comic effect in their sorry efforts to produce truth.

Chapter VI is the conclusion of the study. A summary of the results of the research is concisely stated. Browning's use of satire in discovering the nature of truth is emphasized. An attempt is made to pinpoint not only the

[74]Altick and Loucks, p. 45.

[75]William Irvine and Park Honan, The Book, the Ring, and the Poet (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974), p. 434.

more obvious targets of attack in The Ring and the Book but also to see the message to Victorian England in such areas as natural law, higher criticism, and religious doubt. An attempt is made "to find the symbolic transcendent meaning behind the deeds."[76]

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, one of Browning's most effective tools of satire is rhetoric. No doubt he is aware of the "strange relationship between rhetoric and satire."[77] Although the satirist presents himself as a plain speaker who uses none of the deliberate tricks of rhetoric, this is not true. Kernan explains the matter:

> This ironic modesty fools no one, and it has long been clear that satire is the most consistently and obviously rhetorical of all the major genres. Every reader is aware that the satirist cunningly manipulates feelings, deliberately slants, simplifies, and exaggerates reality to his material. Critics learned in rhetoric have been able to name and classify the rhetorical strategies and figures used by satirists, and in recent years they have regularly employed rhetoric to explain the art of satire.[78]

[76]Altick and Loucks, p. 361.

[77]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 24.

[78]Ibid., p. 25.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

During the past two decades, there has been an increased interest in the poetry of Robert Browning and an increased awareness of the presence of satire in his work. Three recent dissertations have examined representative works of Browning to disclose the satirical content and to explore the changing nature of satire in the nineteenth century. The writers of these dissertations perhaps take their cue from Frances Theresa Russell, who in 1923, in an article entitled "A Pungent Poet" recognized the pungency of Browning to be the result of native endowments of the writer of satire. Russell states that Browning followed satire because of "a quick and knowing eye and a saucy tongue, a mind critical in spots, a lively imagination, and a temper at once exuberant and irascible. Because of these qualities he has not only mixed the blend of humor and criticism that is satire but has brewed copious drafts of each ingredient, jovial humor and serious criticism."[1] She maintains that almost half of Browning's voluminous

[1]Frances Theresa Russell, "A Pungent Poet," University of California Chronicle, 25, No. 4 (1923), 449.

writing contains "a more or less pronounced satiric flavor."[2]

Many factors have contributed to the relegation of Browning's satire to negligible consideration. The three writers of recent dissertations, referred to above, have attempted to focus attention on the "casual but permeating satiric streak" in Browning and to agree with Russell's idea of the permanency of satire: "So long as our mortal race enjoys its prerogative to make game of its own frail mortality, it will indulge in a steady assault against its own flimsy but resilient barricade,"[3] and to echo Aristophanes' statement in Browning's "Aristophanes' Apology": "Then satire,--oh a plain necessity!"[4]

The earliest (1965) of the three dissertations was Curtis Leon Dornberg's "Genial Humor, Comic Irony, and Satire in the Poetry of Robert Browning." Of the three writers, he is the only one who discusses at length satire in The Ring and the Book. Dornberg has devoted fourteen chapters to his subject. Four chapters, ten through

[2]Ibid., p. 440.

[3]Ibid., p. 450.

[4]Robert Browning, "Aristophanes' Apology," in The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, ed. Horace E. Scudder (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895), p. 638. All quotations from Browning's poems with the exception of The Ring and the Book refer to this edition.

thirteen, deal with The Ring and the Book; however, major emphasis is on the satire in Browning's shorter poems.

Dornberg's unique approach to comedy and the associated paradigms of comedy--genial humor, comic irony, and satire--is based upon Plato's Symposium. He contends that this Greek classic undergirds several of the underlying premises of Browning's poetry. The differing perspectives of the range of comedy perhaps were suggested by the differing perspectives of love expressed by friends celebrating Agathon's victory as a playwright. Among the speeches at the symposium in praise of love was that of Aristophanes, who explained Man's search for his lost complete identity as a search for love. To understand the structure of Dornberg's dissertation, it is necessary to review Aristophanes' myth of man's fall and his punishment. In the mythic beginning there were three sexes: male, female, and the union of the two. Man, originally shaped like a ball, had four arms, four legs, two faces, two hearts, and other dual organs. Possessed of terrible strength, man waged war upon the gods in an attempt to overthrow heaven. In the celestial council, the final decision was against the destruction of man with thunderbolts, as this would end sacrifice to the gods and worship of the gods. Because of the effrontery of man, Zeus split the individual in two halves to diminish his strength and to increase the number

for servitude.[5] Ever since the sundering of the individual, man has sought his lost half. Love is the desire for and the pursuit of the lost half.[6]

Man's search for his lost half results in many individual perspectives and the belief that above the many perspectives is the perspective of the One, which is ideal. The ideal symbolically becomes the lost half. Man in his search for his other half lives in the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. Browning, according to Dornberg, sees a comic perspective in man's efforts to reconcile his psyche to his circumstances. The comic point of view exploits man's divided nature. "The focus is essentially astigmatic; the image of the world as it ought to be is seen distorted by the presence of the image of the world as it is."[7]

This distorted image provides four points of view of the comic, which Dornberg ranges along a continuum with genial humor at one extreme and satire at the other extreme and with wit and comic irony in between. Dornberg defines each member of his paradigm of comedy. In Browning's poetry he sees examples of each category of

[5]Ronald B. Levinson, ed., A Plato Reader (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967), p. 126.

[6]Ibid., p. 128.

[7]Curtis Leon Dornberg, "Genial Humor, Comic Irony, and Satire in the Poetry of Robert Browning," Diss. University of Iowa, 1965, p. 7.

comedy and examples of the intermingling of the categories. In genial humor the two worlds can exist harmoniously side by side. The spectator pretends that he can embrace both worlds. The humor lies in confusing the spectator's assumption that he knows whether he is seeing the world as it is or the world as it ought to be. In wit or irony, the acceptance of the two worlds is achieved under tension, which reaches a breaking point in satire. Dornberg dispenses with wit because the nature of wit precludes satire. Through wit, man intellectually accepts one viewpoint but affectionately accepts other viewpoints as well. "So instead of rejecting one attitude, he keeps both of them in association and congratulates himself on his own superior ability to do so."[8]

Browning's poetry strongly focuses on irony. Unlike the peaceful coexistence of various forms of genial humor, irony is analogous to "cold war." Dornberg sees irony as showing "the spectator two attitudes both of which he believes have separate but equal claims on his critical acceptance. He pretends that he is supposed to accept one and to reject the other, but that he really does not wish to because he sees that there is something to be said for each attitude."[9] In satire tension reaches the breaking

[8]Ibid., p. 12.

[9]Ibid.

point. Peaceful relation demands attacking and defeating one of the two attitudes. "The spectator is critically and sensibly driven to reject one of the two attitudes. A new attitude has usurped the rightful one, and so the satirist must work furiously to expel the usurper. All his troubles, he believes, would be solved if the usurper were deposed."[10] The comic aspect is dependent upon the perception of the fantasy in each component of the continuum.

Basing his argument upon the mythological concept of man's plight and his rather elaborate definitions of the paradigms of comedy as he sees them in relationship to the poetry of Browning, Dornberg structures the chapters of his dissertation to coincide with a critical examination of each classification and the merger of classifications. Dornberg first analyzes those poems which are relatively "pure" expressions of genial humor, comic irony, and satire. Then he examines those poems in which relations are established between two of these manifestations.

Dornberg's choice of poems is based upon three criteria. First, his choice includes some of those most widely reprinted and presumably characteristic of Browning's work. Second, the poems reveal interdependence of style and content. Third, the poems reflect the pure

[10]Ibid., p. 13.

aspect of genial humor, comic irony, and satire, or the combinative blend. In each chapter, II through IX, Dornberg analyzes two poems of Browning to illustrate his contention that Browning utilizes genial humor, comic irony, and satire as techniques of central importance, not as incidental ornamentation.

In The Ring and the Book, Dornberg sees a mixture of genial humor, comic irony, and satire. Although he makes distinctions between genial humor, comic irony, and satire, the fact that he sees all three aspects in The Ring and the Book confirms, in his view, the undeniable presence of satire in Browning's masterpiece. Particularly does Dornberg see satire directed against the institutions of the law and the church. He sees every speaker who attempts to judge in a manner foreign or counter to the Pope as subjected to satire. Dornberg recognizes satire as a medium of distortion by which truth ultimately may be recognized. The use of humor, irony, and satire enables Browning to exploit comic possibilities, which are inherent in his material but which he could not have resolved readily with a serious viewpoint. For example, the comic component of satire leads the reader to accept Caponsacchi as a new St. George rather than as a wife stealer. Dornberg has laid a foundation for the continued study of satire in Browning.

In his dissertation, "A Study of Browning's Representative Personal Satires" (1968), J. V. McCrory has

pursued the idea of Robert Browning's personal involvement as the motivating thrust for his writing of satires. It is McCrory's contention that Browning's best satires derive from some kind of personal concern. For this reason, McCrory's choice of poems to examine critically is based upon their possession of certain characteristic satire rather than upon their popularity. He sees fewer of Browning's poems that may be definitely classed as satire in contrast to Russell's aforementioned statement that "slightly more than half" of Browning's poems have a "pronounced satiric flavor." McCrory relies basically upon the uniformity of the opinions of Northrop Frye, Alvin Kernan, Robert C. Elliott, and Leonard Feinberg for the definitive scope of satire.

McCrory divides his dissertation into two main chapters. The first chapter deals with decidedly personal satires; the second chapter deals with moderately personal satires. The conclusion offers a synthesis of the satiric poems and an evaluation of the satire. His study attempts to evaluate the quality and methods of the poems of Browning which have a predominantly satiric tone. McCrory places emphasis on tone, as tone is the deciding factor enveloping material to produce a manner of satire not dependent on a precise form.

In order to see clearly what McCrory means by personal involvement, some statements about the satiric

content in some of the poems will be pointed out. Heading the list of personal satires is "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium.'" Personal involvement here is evident in the animosity Browning felt for D. D. Home, the American representative of the spiritualistic movement. Browning openly expressed hostility for Home. His antagonism toward Home and this movement gained momentum as his wife's belief in spiritualism became more deeply entrenched.

Another example of decidedly personal involvement may be seen in the Pacchiarotto volume of poems, published in 1876. In these poems, Browning lampoons the critics, chief of whom was Alfred Austin, later the laureate, whom he despised probably more than any other living person. After a delay of forty years, during which their criticism had fermented in his mind, Browning explodes in doggerel verse. The Pacchiarotto volume is seldom spoken of as satire by the critics, perhaps because it is a castigation of them.[11] Underlying the poem "Of Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper" is seeming simplicity. Browning stoops to Hudibrastic verse as a method of enlightening the critics who have long seen his work as shrouded in obscurity. Equating their mentality with the limited mentality of "noisy fowl," he ridicules the imperceptive critics.

[11]William Clyde DeVane, A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), p. 393.

Another very personal poem is "Parleying with Francis Furini." Browning had an opportunity to see most of Furini's painting in Florence. His information concerning the life of the painter apparently came from Filippo Baldinucci's life of Furini in his Notizie de' Professori del Disegno, first published in 1681-1728 in twenty volumes.[12] Browning parleys with Baldinucci as much as with Furini, for he rejects Baldinucci's "interpretation of the painter's character."[13] Browning's defense of Francis Furini's propensity to paint nudes is a cover-up for Robert Weidemann Barrett Browning, the son of the poet, who also liked to paint nudes. Browning actually was striking through Baldinucci at John Callcot Horsley, who had been very critical of his son's painting the female nude.[14] According to Browning's theory, the artist should not be bound by convention. He sees Baldinucci as repressing his own innate lasciviousness. He is, in Browning's words, "a satyr masked as a matron."[15]

The ambivalent attitude of Browning toward Thomas Carlyle becomes apparent in the portrait of Carlyle as the misunderstood poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary." The

[12]Ibid., p. 513.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Browning, "Parleying with Francis Furini," p. 966.

unfair and uncomprehending attitude of the public toward the poet's personal life is the target of satire. To the villagers, the poet is a spy, a chief inquisitor, revealing the life of the village to a tyrannical ruler, rather than the simple compassionate soul of far-reaching vision that he in reality is.[16] The portrait is also a portrait of Browning. With "Flush," his wife's dog, following at his heels, the poet is one of "God's spies,"[17] as he makes his way through the streets of Florence. Basically, the underlying satire is directed against the inability of common intelligence to perceive the function of the poet. He is God's "recording chief-inquisitor."[18]

Chief among the moderately personal satires, as seen by McCrory, are "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Caliban Upon Setebos," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb," and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister." All of these poems are attacks on intellectual religionists. According to McCrory, the greatest personal stimulus Browning had for writing "Bishop Blougram" was that of satirizing an unsatisfactory religious point of view, which he thought was being

[16]Edward Berdoe, The Browning Cyclopaedia (1891; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), p. 211.

[17]E. K. Brown and J. O. Bailey, eds., Victorian Poetry (1942; rpt. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1962), p. 785.

[18]DeVane, p. 238.

nurtured by the Catholic revival in Victorian England.[19] A mask technique hides the true character of both Blougram and Gigadibs. "Browning allows his satiric persona [Blougram] to appear blameless while presenting an extremely clever apology for a materialistic viewpoint--a viewpoint which is wrong for a clergyman at any time but ironically plausible for Blougram, the sly representative of Catholicism which was then taking a strong hold in Victorian England."[20] There is ambiguity in Blougram's beliefs, and it is left to the individual reader to use his own judgment about the "true things" he says; nevertheless, both Blougram and Gigadibs are exposed as deceivers. The submergence of doubt and the declaration of faith for advancement in the world were personally very repugnant to Browning. He could not reconcile intuitive faith with a rational, casuistic viewpoint.[21]

"Caliban Upon Setebos" also shows the extremes to which rational faith may lead. As Browning attacks religious hypocrisy through his characterization of Blougram, a representative of Catholicism, so he attacks the hypocrisy of natural theology in the British Isles through

[19]J. V. McCrory, "A Study of Robert Browning's Representative Personal Satires," Diss. University of Tennessee, 1968, p. 103.

[20]Ibid., p. 93.

[21]Ibid., p. 87.

the characterization of Caliban. Misguided clergymen search blindly for God through their intellects. Grotesque in humor, the satire succeeds because of its ambiguity. It could be a groping search for God as He is perceived by a primitive creature. It could be an attack on anthropomorphism, Calvinism, Darwinism, or natural theology. Lawrence Perrine contends that Browning is not satirizing Caliban but "the survival of Caliban's cruder ideas into a more civilized age."[22]

Contradiction is a basic pattern in the satire in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church." There is satire in the tension between appearance and reality.[23] The Bishop espouses the outward forms of religion while ignoring its intrinsic worth.[24] The materialistic viewpoint is so deeply entrenched in him that the nearness of death cannot erase it from the Bishop's mind. Contradiction is also apparent in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," in which an unflattering portrayal of a monk becomes the medium of satire. Like Blougram and the Bishop of Saint Praxed, the soliloquist has substituted the outward forms of religion for its intrinsic

[22]Ibid., p. 135.

[23]Ibid., pp. 119-120.

[24]Ibid., p. 124.

value.[25] The monk uses dogma maliciously. So filled is he with hatred that he considers selling his own soul to insure eternal damnation to his apparently blameless colleague. "The compound of extreme ritualism and exaggerated intellectualism is the complete antithesis of Browning's notion of true religion."[26]

Contrasting with Browning's satire directed against the rationalization of intellectual religionists is his criticism of the autocratic, non-rational religionists. Two examples of the latter may be seen in "Holy-Cross Day" and "The Heretic's Tragedy." These companion poems reveal Browning's personal sympathy for Jews and his grotesque humor in the horror he felt for the burning at the stake of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, who was the last Grand Master of the Knights of Templars,[27] under the auspices of religion.

Browning, motivated by moderate personal antagonism, exposes through various other poems containing satire his reactions to indecisiveness in love, to pedantry, and to social and political tyranny. He exposes his reactions to indecisiveness in love in "The Statue and the Bust" and "Dis Aliter Visum: Or, Le Byron De Nos Jours." His

[25]Ibid., p. 135.

[26]Ibid., p. 133.

[27]DeVane, p. 268.

attitude toward pedantry is evident in "A Grammarian's Funeral" and "Sibrandius Schafnaburgensis." Browning's favorable attitude toward the Grammarian (though it should be noted that not every critic considers Browning's attitude favorable) makes "A Grammarian's Funeral" elegiac, while the opening lines of "Sibrandius" are very disrespectful and mocking. "Sibrandius" is a satiric poem. A poem that illustrates the poet's moderately personal antagonism to social and political tyranny is "The Glove." In Browning's portrayal of court life, he creates a little world of social tyranny where evil apparently controls, but only apparently.[28] "My Last Duchess" is an indictment of a social order in which villains like the Duke of Ferrara thrive.[29]

According to McCrory, the purpose of Browning's satires is "to reveal an upsidedown world in which fools have gotten out of hand."[30] In his presentation of substantial evidence to prove that Browning often had strongly personal motives for his satire, he has shown those "fools" as being graphically portrayed and thereby has resolved some of the uncertainties about the satiric intentions of Robert Browning.

[28]McCrory, p. 154.

[29]Ibid., p. 156.

[30]Ibid., p. 11.

A major concern of Mary Ann Kelso Davis in her dissertation, "The Satire of Sympathy: Satiric Elements in the Poetry of Robert Browning" (1972), is to prove that Browning is a writer of satire. In addition to Browning's role as a philosophic and religious teacher and one of the finest psychologists in literature, Davis contends that "he is a satirist as well, and a good satirist."[31] In her dissertation, a primary emphasis is on Browning's definition of sympathetic satire. For Browning's definition of satire, Davis goes to Browning's "Aristophanes' Apology," written in London in 1875 as a sequel to "Balaustion's Adventure." She contends that the debate on literature which takes place between Aristophanes and Balaustion is essential to understanding Browning's concept of satire and the sympathetic nature of satire. She argues that "Aristophanes' Apology" is not merely a simple debate about the merits of comedy, presented by Balaustion, the spokesman for Euripides. On the contrary, the clash of conflicting ideas exposes the differing nature of two brands of satire. Balaustion's speech is less a defense of tragedy and more an analysis of the inadequacies of Aristophanes' brand of satire.[32] Aristophanes propounds the historical, conservative satire, a satire pessimistic

[31]Davis, p. 244.

[32]Ibid., p. 24.

and Juvenalian in content. Euripides (Balaustion) propounds a liberal, sympathetic satire, optimistic and Horatian in content. "The pessimistic satirist such as Juvenal assumes that evil is so deeply embedded in the human race that it cannot be cured, and he writes primarily to punish humanity for its sins. But the optimistic satirist writes to heal, and though he often finds men acting in blind and foolish ways, he basically loves mankind."[33]

Davis's theory of sympathetic satire is based on the belief that Balaustion voices for Browning his own personal definition of satire and the core requirements of sympathetic satire:

> Good genius! Glory of the poet, glow
> O' the humourist who castigates his kind,
> Suave summer-lightning which plays as
> Stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
> Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
> After a moment's laying black earth bare,
> Splendor of wit that springs a
> thunderbolt
> Satire-to burn and purify the world,
> True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly
> strikes
> Injustice,-right, as rightly quells the
> wrong;
> Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards'
> armory
> The tricky tinselled place fire flashes
> through
> No damage else. . . .[34]

For Davis, Balaustion becomes the persona of Browning, espousing the liberal and sympathetic nature of

[33]Quoted by Highet, The Anatomy of Satire, p. 235.

[34]Browning, "Aristophanes' Apology," p. 635.

Euripides' tragedies in opposition to the conservative nature of Aristophanes' comedies. Both Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning were familiar with the works of Aristophanes and Euripides. Euripides was a favorite of the Brownings, especially of Elizabeth. DeVane states that Browning identified with the Greek dramatist Euripides because he saw in Euripides his own characteristics "as a thinker, a psychologist, and an innovator."[35]

Throughout the debate, the characteristics of liberal (sympathetic) satire stand out in stark contrast to conservative (aristocratic) satire. Although both satirists agree that satire is a purge and a corrective, the methods of achieving the corrective differ widely. Aristophanes' techniques are vicious. This comic poet satirizes any change in the established order; his comic art upholds the cherished past. The essence of his teaching may be summed up as follows: "Accept the old, contest the strange, misdoubt every man whose work is yet to do, acknowledge the work already done."[36]

Aristophanes has no compunction about the method of his attack upon the innovator of a new order. He considers lies and hatred rather than wit to be his weapons. He extends the range of his attack beyond the folly or crime

[35]DeVane, p. 378.

[36]Berdoe, p. 32.

of which his victim is guilty and maliciously attacks the victim himself. Balaustion finds Aristophanes' licentiousness, his lies, and his mudslinging repulsive devices. Aristophanes defends his strategy with the contention that lies are necessary to make his satire comprehensible to the mob. The new doctrines of Euripides were unacceptable to him. Euripides opposed most of the traditional philosophies of his time; he questioned traditional interpretations of the gods. He displayed the utmost contempt for the government of wealthy Athenians. Radically, he accepted the notion of the ability of women to match men in thinking; "the very slave he recognized as man's mate."[37]

Although not the exact counterpart of Browning, Euripides illustrates the main characteristics of Browning's liberal (sympathetic) satire, as Davis sees it. Fair play is intrinsic to sympathetic satire. Satire must strike out at obvious injustice and expose hidden vice and folly, but the satirist must direct his criticism only to that vice. He must be fair. Honesty of the satirist requires that he attack only failings of an individual and not undermine his strength. Balaustion argues that folly and evil will not be purged by more doses of folly and evil. Attacking lies

[37]Ibid.

with lies and hatred can obscure the real object of satire and defeat its purpose. The indirection of sympathetic satire counteracts the risk of alienating the audience, a risk inherent in the direct attack of conservative satire. Just fairness and "just wit" are methods toward the discovery of truth. Balaustion rejects Aristophanes' satire because it cannot adequately purge the false from the true. Just satire does not lie but exposes and pursues the truth to better mankind.[38]

In Chapter I, Davis examines the arguments that Browning could not have written satire because he was too much the poet of humanity. In Chapter II, she questions the assumption that Browning could not have written satire because he wrote dramatic monologues. In Chapter III, she deals with the techniques of "just wit," a synonymous term for satire, taken from "Aristophanes' Apology." In Chapter IV, she presents analyses of selected poems which illustrate the sympathetic treatment of satiric elements in Browning's poetry. The targets of satire range from distortions of art, love, and pedantry to the institutions of the church and law.

From Browning's late narrative poems, now seldom read, Davis chooses as examples some poems which are satiric and which have been neglected by critics. "The

[38]Davis, p. 36.

Two Poets of Croisic" is an example of such neglected satire. Davis sees in Browning's poem more than one level of satire. Artistic and critical mediocrity in general is attacked. The poets, Renè Gentilhomme and Paul Desforge Maillard, are historical and real persons; their ludicrous stories are told in miniature mock epics in bouncy ottava rima stanzas. La Roque and Voltaire, contemporaries of Maillard, have praised the poems of Maillard unwittingly when they have been printed by his sister under the name of Malcrais. Earlier, Maillard's poems have been rejected by these same critics. When Maillard proves he wrote the poems, Voltaire destroys the poet's reputation, not because of Maillard's mediocrity but because he cannot tolerate being gulled.[39]

The satire in "The Two Poets of Croisic" illustrates the hollowness of fame. The bitter satire is seen to approach cosmic frustration when one realizes the rancor is not directed at either poet individually but rather at the limitations of all men. They are "representatives of the pride and gullibility which lead man to magnify his mediocrity."[40] Laurels often descend on those who do not deserve them, and an ignorant public may heap undeserved honor on mediocrity. "The stories of the two poets

[39]Berdoe, p. 556.

[40]Davis, p. 162.

illustrate the uselessness of man's quest for fame and the ironic discrepancy between the belief that only worthy men gain fame and the reality of fame's capriciousness."[41]

Davis has made a significant contribution to understanding the changing nature of satire in the nineteenth century. Browning's more sympathetic treatment of satire fits his Victorian audience. It is far more subtle, complex, and indirect than traditional satire. The object of attack must be understood. As a general rule, attitudes which cause weakness are attacked rather than individuals. The cause of the folly is the satiric target. The satire is liberal and optimistic, more Horatian in spirit than Juvenalian. Because of its kinship to Euripidian satire, the satire of Browning is more corrective than conservative, traditional satire.

Davis's study justifies her claim that Browning wrote much more satire than is generally recognized. One of her aims, "to show that Browning the satirist and Browning the psychologist are not incompatible entities,"[42] has been realized. Finally, Davis believes that the man who kept two geese, named Edinburgh and Quarterly, knew when he was writing satire and understood the nature of "satura."

[41]Ibid., p. 164.

[42]Ibid., p. 243.

This review of relevant research focuses attention on the undeniable fact that Browning wrote satire. It also focuses attention on the fact that much of the satire in his work has been glossed over and neglected. Davis, as well as Dornberg, uses Browning's depiction of Archangelis and Bottinius in The Ring and the Book as examples of his satire on law. Both Davis and Dornberg concur as to poems containing satire. Representative selections of the three writers often coincide, although individual assessment about the nature of the satire may differ. Each of the writers recognizes that the traditional techniques for dealing with satire have not changed since the time of Juvenal, but each is aware of the evolutionary change in the nature of satire. Satire of the nineteenth century makes a historical accommodation to change.

The studies by Dornberg, McCrory, and Davis open up possibilities for further and more penetrative studies of satire in Browning's poetry. The Ring and the Book offers a challenge to explore the rich ore of Browning's satire at greater depth. Thus far, no dissertation has concentrated wholly on the study of satire in Browning's masterpiece. Since The Ring and the Book represents the maturity and complexity of basic tenets of Browning's philosophic beliefs and his awareness of the sordid conditions of life, it is fertile soil for a concentrated study of satire. It has been established that Browning was motivated by a deep

interest in criminology, an interest shared by his father. The Ring and the Book is a combination of individual studies in psychology and includes psychopathology and criminology. Browning's success with the dramatic monologue creates a stage for psychological probing. On this stage the internal drama of the mind supersedes external actions. The attention of the reader is captured by the depiction of personalities, particularly the grotesquely abnormal. This interest often dominates to such an extent that it obscures the fundamental groping for truth that seems to pervade all of Browning's poetry.

To a great extent, the gross distortion of truth comes to light in The Ring and the Book through the medium of satire. To strive to plumb the depths of that satire is a challenge. Truth in The Ring and the Book is presented in a pattern of departure from truth. The inability to perceive truth in the "white light," as Browning expresses it, means that it is necessary to perceive it in the shade. The various shades of distorted truth expose a world in need of reform. For Browning, the elimination of corruption may await another world, but the need for reform is omnipresent. His is the true mission of the satirist--to reveal graphically the need for reform.

Browning's treatment of the seventeenth century murder case, the subject of The Ring and the Book, exposes the need for reform and correction in many aspects of

contemporary nineteenth century English life, and it also contains universal significance for all times and all ages. To probe into that satirical edge of truth requires an attempt to follow the sage injunction of the paradoxical Andrea del Sarto, who said, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?"[43]

[43]Browning, "Andrea del Sarto," p. 346.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE AND STYLE IN THE RING AND THE BOOK

A knowledge of its structure is important in understanding The Ring and the Book. The structure of the poem may not always appear to be clearly related to satire in it, but the relationship is there, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. Since satire is a subtle device of imagination, structure may appear to be a more important concern as a framework of the stage on which Browning enacts his more immediate and compelling concerns of characterization, psychological probing, philosophic tenets, and religious beliefs, and structure does encompass all of the motivations that prompted Browning to write The Ring and the Book; however, in many ingenious ways, satire plays a part in characterization and in the structuring of his ideas.

The structure of the poem has been influenced by science, history, and culture. Key words in the explanation of structure are "experience," "transformation," "relativity," and the term "structuralism" itself. The terms frequently overlap and are interrelated in Browning's use of fact and fiction. The literary genre which records experience in The Ring and the Book is the dramatic

monologue. Piaget has defined "structure" as a "system of transformations."[1] The Ring and the Book is composed of a system in which a variety of transformations evolve. Structuralism has its origin in physical and social science, but it is applicable to literary analysis.[2]

In the structural approach to the various monologues that comprise differing accounts of the same occurrence, experience is aligned with scientific, empirical methods. It is perhaps ironic that Browning, who like Carlyle mourned the ugly aftermath of the Industrial Revolution and scientific materialism, used empirical, scientific methods in the exposure of corrupt conditions. It is equally ironic that "Post-Enlightenment romanticism is historically unique . . . to the extent that it uses for its reconstructive purpose the same scientific or empirical method which is itself unique to the modern world. Like the scientist's hypothesis, the romanticist's formulation is evolved out of experience and is continually tested against experience."[3] In The Ring and the Book, the experience of one individual is tested continuously against the experience of other individuals. As one monologue is

[1]Isaiah Smithson, "Structuralism as a Method of Literary Criticism," College English, 37, No. 3 (October, 1975), 145.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1957), p. 22.

juxtaposed with another, the "truth" of one is often in almost complete contradiction to the "truth" of the other.

Langbaum believes that "Browning starts with Goethe's condition that the poem is not to derive meaning from any external standard of judgment, but is to be the empiric ground giving rise to its own standard of judgment."[4] The poem itself is an account of experience, and empirically the meaning is to be derived from the experience of reading the poem. In Walter Pater's words, "The reader of fiction should enjoy not 'the fruit of experience,' the author's express meaning, but 'experience itself,' leaving him to make his own construction of the facts and views before him."[5] In the modern sense, there is no simple formula of right and wrong, as Browning's major characters work out the "brutal force" of life in The Ring and the Book.[6] The reader enters into the conflict and personally encounters the structure of experiences "as a fluid, unfinished process,"[7] which forces the reader to create meaning as he reads.

[4]Ibid., pp. 131-132.

[5]John Killham, "Browning's 'Modernity': The Ring and the Book, and Relativism," in The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 153.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Isobel Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style," in The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 97.

According to Langbaum, the dramatic monologue is logically incomplete and in a state of "disequilibrium." He asserts that poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is constructed upon the deliberate disequilibrium between experience and idea. It is a poetry which makes its statement not as an idea but as an experience.[8] Langbaum explains that "the essential idea [of romanticism] is the doctrine that the imaginative apprehension gained through experience is primary and certain whereas the analytic reflection that follows is secondary and problematical."[9] The disequilibrium in conjunction with Browning's syntax and style forces the reader to enter into the experience of the unfinished process to supply omissions and ultimately to render moral judgment. Perhaps the difficulties gave rise to Lewis's Biblical injunction: "In the sweat of the brow thou shalt read The Ring and the Book."[10]

Langbaum also asserts that Coleridge describes perfectly the disequilibrium of the poetry of experience by the analogy of "the mind to a living plant in that, absorbing into itself the atmosphere to which its own respiration has contributed, it grows out into its

[8]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 35.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Edward Lewis, "The Making of The Ring and the Book," Methodist Review, 103 (March, 1920), 247.

perception."[11] This idea supports the empirical, scientific method; disequilibrium suggests satire since it presents an unequal balance, a distortion between experience and idea. In addition, Coleridge's description of the function of imagination adumbrates the major method of Browning's use of polarities or contrasts in The Ring and the Book. In his organic theory, Coleridge maintains that a poem does not derive unity from its own elements but from the poet's imagination which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities."[12]

Langbaum quotes M. W. MacCallum's assertion that the dramatic monologue "must be a poem of experience"[13] in order "to give facts from within."[14] In a Warton Lecture of 1925, MacCallum explained the necessity of sympathy in an interpretation of "facts from within" the dramatic monologue. Through the enactment of experience Browning compels the reader to enter sympathetically into the motivation that causes the character to act as he acts. "Browning's characteristic approach to an ethical problem is to dramatize it within the experience of a single character,

[11]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 233.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., p. 73.

[14]Ibid., p. 78.

emphasizing the internal nature of the moral impulse by presenting the poem in the form of a monologue."[15] His special skill in the area of presenting experience is not only in the resuscitation and revitalizing of that experience but also in supplying material for the judgment of that experience.[16] The experience requires a constant sifting and readjustment of values. An element of surprise in the unexpected behavior of some personalities and the ability of Browning to create sympathy for his satanic or psychopathic characters help to enhance the disequilibrium between idea and moral value. Although moral judgment is established ultimately, oftentimes the fascination for the devious methods of the speaker squeezes consideration for moral judgment into a relatively short space. The disequilibrium between sympathy and moral judgment is the crux of Langbaum's condition for the dramatic monologue. Sympathetic judgment is conditioned upon the subjective nature of individual experience. In other words, "values to defend must find their justification in the experience of the individual."[17]

[15]Phillip Drew, "Browning and Philosophy," in Robert Browning, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Athens, O.: Ohio University Press, 1975), p. 112.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 116.

Thus the dramatic monologue provides a vehicle for shared experience between the soliloquist and the reader, while the process of growth or discovery is done "by means of a spiral of repetition."[18] Browning's transformation of "dead truth" into "live truth" requires the active participation of the reader in the transformation. The imagination of Browning ignites the imagination of the reader to see, to experience, to enter actively into the transformation.

The multiform structure in The Ring and the Book consists of a series of monologues made out of a single event.[19] As Langbaum has demonstrated in The Poetry of Experience, the dramatic monologue, wherein there is a blend of the narrative, the lyrical, and the dramatic, is especially suited to the poetry of experience. However, Langbaum makes a distinction between the soliloquy and the dramatic monologue. He sees the speaker as undergoing self-analysis and internal debate in the soliloquy but not in the dramatic monologue. The soliloquist in his search for truth is seeking to find the right point of view.[20] For

[18]Isobel Armstrong, "The Ring and the Book: The Uses of Prolixity," in The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 179.

[19]Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style," p. 99.

[20]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 146.

this reason, the monologue of the Pope in The Ring and the Book is more of a soliloquy than a dramatic monologue. The Pope wrestles with truth. His monologue is introspective, and he is seeking right action.

On the other hand, "the speaker of the dramatic monologue starts with an established point of view, and is not concerned with its truth but with trying to impress it on the outside world."[21] Langbaum sees Browning as actually using nine dramatic monologues. The nine different speakers consciously image each other and in the process image themselves.[22] The disequilibrium between sympathy and judgment leads away from judgment in those monologues in which the speaker's point of view must be built up before it can be torn down.[23] In such cases, techniques of magnification and reduction are clearly shown. A general device of reduction in all the monologues is animal imagery; "it reduces man's purposeful actions, the ambitious aims of which he is proud and his lusts of which he is ashamed, all to the level of brute instinct; hog in sloth, fox in stealth."[24] Honan has noted that "Browning's poetry

[21]Ibid.

[22]Park Honan, Browning's Characters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 129.

[23]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 139.

[24]Hodgart, p. 119.

as a whole seems to be packed with references to more animals than probably exist in any city zoo."[25]

As previously stated, the dramatic monologue is the literary genre through which all of Browning's purposes for writing The Ring and the Book become manifest. In a broad, general sense of a one-person utterance, the monologue antedates Browning; however, the term "dramatic monologue" came into existence in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into greater usage in the early twentieth century. Ina Beth Session has defined the dramatic monologue concretely: "A perfect dramatic monologue is that literary form which has the definite characteristics of speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present."[26] A lack of an element or combination of elements results in modification in her classifications, which in descending order of requirements, she has called "Imperfect," "Formal," and "Approximate" types of the dramatic monologue. Honan objects to the arbitrary nature of Session's scheme,[27] and Langbaum does not believe the definition and classification cover all of Browning's dramatic monologues. The dramatic monologues

[25]Honan, p. 171.

[26]Ina Beth Session, "The Dramatic Monologue," PMLA, 62 (1947), 508.

[27]Honan, p. 114.

of The Ring and the Book do not fit Session's narrow scheme, and some of Browning's most famous monologues become mere approximations by her definition.[28]

Perhaps Philip Drew's definition is more apropos of The Ring and the Book. "When one side of the disputation is implied rather than expressed we have a dramatic monologue, a form which can not only be used for satiric ends but suggests a possible way of objectifying the internal individual experience and finally of making through the agency of art the crucial transition from personal to common morality."[29]

Repetition is a continuous process in The Ring and the Book. The structure contains an unbroken unity which emerges from a succession of reformulations that bind the monologues together.[30] However, the monologues do not render a veracious witness; "the monologues do not show witness in the ordinary sense. The whole point of the poem is that some of the speakers have various reasons, personal or professional, for quite deliberately juggling with the facts in decidedly interested fashion."[31] Satire is the means that permits the flow of distortion to enable

[28]Ibid.

[29]Drew, p. 118.

[30]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 196.

[31]Killham, p. 158.

the seeing of egocentric personalities more realistically and more truthfully.

For empirical reasons, "The Ring and the Book is arranged in convolutions of repetition so that the reader can 'learn' or discover the poem; it is like this so that something can be discovered as well about the processes of judgment itself, and the nature of judgment is one of the things the poem is about."[32] The poem is about itself "because it examines its own assumptions."[33]

Browning did not intend for the poem to be read primarily for the story. The fact that he violates traditional principles of narration by relating the same events over and over is indicative of his lack of interest in the story as story. The repetition renders the exploration of a new level of meaning as it is shaped by a new consciousness.[34] However, "the repetition is never exact because the meaning of the words is transformed."[35] Frequently the transformation comes about by means of satire.

Variety in the repetition lies in the skillful exposè of the personality who renders the account and in

[32]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 182.

[33]Ibid., p. 183.

[34]Roma A. King, The Bow and the Lyre (Ann Arbor: The University Press, 1957), p. 126.

[35]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 185.

the method which Browning uses to repeat the account--minimizing some details, expanding others, and omitting still other details that have become realities in the reader's mind. "Such a method can be justified only in the relativist assumption that truth cannot be apprehended in itself but must be 'induced' from particular points of view to make each repetition interesting and important as a psychological fact."[36] The juxtaposition of dramatic monologues creates a master context in which each monologue is to be read. The "Janus-faced" quality of the monologue actually turns the structure into dialogue. The total experience emerges as a general perspective and becomes a gauge against which each monologue must be weighed and evaluated.[37] Each fragment of truth, a strand of color, becomes a partial view of the totality. Repetition is an asset, not a liability. "The Ring and the Book sustains itself by virtue of repetition rather than in spite of it."[38]

A circular relationship is found in the structural form of the developing monologues.[39] They both interlap and are tangent in the circular relationship. They "are debased

[36]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 109.

[37]Ibid., p. 158.

[38]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 196.

[39]Ibid., p. 182.

or refined species of one another's revelation. . . ."[40] Satire is the main ingredient in the alloy to bring about debasement; the intuitive perception of truth brings about refinement. Once again the repetitive pattern of contrast may be identified.

Langbaum asserts that the structure of The Ring and the Book "achieves this meaning by meeting the conditions of modern psychological and historical relativism."[41] Already three conditions of relativity have been established. "The first sign of the poem's relativism is in Browning's use of dramatic monologues to tell his story."[42] Second, he follows Goethe's condition of relativity in that the poem is not to be judged externally, "but is to be the empiric ground giving rise to its own standard of judgment."[43] And third, "truth" is not to be found in any one argument but can be "induced" from the combination of points of view.[44]

Orr states that "Browning is inspired by one central doctrine: that while thought is absolute in itself, it is relative or personal to the mind that thinks it. . . ."[45]

[40]Ibid., p. 183.

[41]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 131.

[42]Ibid., p. 109.

[43]Ibid., p. 131.

[44]Ibid., p. 120.

[45]Sutherland Orr, A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), p. 4.

Fairchild comments on the dual personality of Browning in the paradox of a boyishly simple heart coupled with an ability to penetrate intellectual subtlety through "sinuous twistings and turnings and casuistical rationalizations."[46] This complexity enabled Browning to see truth in different perspectives. "On the one hand, the truth was many-sided, relative, shadowy; on the other, it was single, absolute, and plain as a pikestaff. Brain-truth was of man; heart-truth was of God."[47]

Relativity applies not to God but to "knowable reality."[48] It is in the area of "knowable reality" that Browning applies satire. He recognizes the inevitability of personal distortion; thus truth "depends upon the nature of the soul"[49] who speaks. In this respect, the truth of "knowable reality" is relative, and it is necessary to judge the speaker by what is understood of him as a person and by his motives. The repetition is necessary to the relativity in order that judgment may be made through what is being said and through who is speaking.[50]

[46]Hoxie N. Fairchild, "Browning the Simple-Hearted Casuist," University of Toronto Quarterly, 18 (April, 1949), 234.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 6.

[49]Ibid., p. 115.

[50]Ibid.

According to Langbaum, social and religious absolutes are not the means for understanding the moral truth of The Ring and the Book. Ideas of right and wrong are for the most part barriers to understanding. It is in the area of established right conduct that Pompilia is misled by constituted authorities, by "foolish parents," by "bad husband," and by official representatives of the church and state.[51] Not only is it true that judgments in The Ring and the Book are independent of official morality, but also they are frequently in conflict with established authority. The poem is relative in the sense that "Browning is not saying that all discontented wives are to be rescued from their husbands, but just this particular wife from her particular husband."[52] The relativity lies in understanding the particular situation.

This personal condition of relativity illustrates Walter Pater's relativism, which has its basis in science and probably owes much to Darwin. At the same time Browning was composing The Ring and the Book, Pater was defining the character of the times in terms of relativism. "Modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the 'relative' spirit in place of the 'absolute.'"[53] His

[51]Ibid.

[52]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 114.

[53]Killham, p. 154.

theory of relativism relates to individuals in opposition to society. Because of experiences peculiar to them, the right of society to make laws and to judge such individuals and to condemn them in accordance with such laws may seem questionable.[54] These ideas appear to be inherent in the structure of The Ring and the Book and to offer an opportunity for a wide scope of satirical treatment, but relativism in the poem is not absolute. The judgment of The Ring and the Book is not relative in the sense that no one is either good or bad but a combination of both. On the contrary, Pompilia is pictured as a saint and Guido as the incarnation of evil.[55]

Armstrong contends that The Ring and the Book does not present a relativist view. She does not see the poem "as an amorphous gathering of points of view and of endless moral possibilities."[56] To substantiate her viewpoint, she calls attention to the fact that Browning does not include monologues of Pietro, Violante, Guido's brother, Conti, and others. They apparently have a greater claim for inclusion than Tertium Quid. In addition, the procedure of stating the end at the beginning violates the

[54]Ibid., p. 157.

[55]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 110.

[56]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 178.

aims of relativist art.[57] Langbaum does not agree with Armstrong: "Far from being a flaw in the poem's relativism, the right judgments of Book I are . . . a stroke of genius. For by giving us the sort of God's eye view we never get in real life, Browning makes us understand how relative, on the one hand, are human institutions and judgments, and on the other, that the relative is our index to the absolute."[58]

That Browning chose the novel experience of different perspectives illustrates his awareness of a modern notion, later expressed by Ortega y Gasset, "that the contours of reality alter according to the angle from which they are seen."[59] However, Browning does not conceive of a full modern relativity, such as is found in Ortega's belief that truth alters according to perspective; rather, Browning believes the truth is genuinely there for those who, like Pompilia or the Pope, are capable of apprehending it.[60] The different perspectives provide for the bending of truth; bending produces distortion; distortion becomes vivid through satire.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, pp. 4-5.

[59]Wylie Sypher, ed., "Introduction" to Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. xvi.

[60]Ibid.

Mason considers ironical treatment to be Browning's crucial innovation in his use of the dramatic monologue. As has been stated, Kernan contends that all irony is satire. It is Browning's special gift to show the speaker revealing more than he is conscious of expressing. "The speaker betrays important aspects of his state of mind rather than articulating them."[61] A great deal of the satire is dependent upon the reader's imaginative supplying of facial expression, tone, and the impressions rendered by non-verbal communication. Irony is especially adapted to the multiple vision of the monologue form and to the treatment of conflict.[62] King states the poet's method of intensity in the following manner: "Browning is inevitably the poet of paradox and irony. The deceptiveness of appearances, the co-existence, even the dual nature, of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, man's proclivity for self-deception and his inability to disentangle and order the diversities produced by life's paradoxes make the poet an ironist on a cosmic scale."[63]

Another demand upon readers that ties satire to the structure is inherent in the grotesque style of Browning.

[61]Michael Mason, "Browning and the Dramatic Monologue," in Robert Browning, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Athens, O.: Ohio University Press, 1975), p. 234.

[62]King, p. 150.

[63]Ibid., p. 137.

The grotesque style provides for the "wrenching of metrical patterns," a heterogeneous compound of vocabulary composed of "aggressive colloquialisms and highly literary fragments of poetic diction."[64] Supplying omissions and reconstructing grammatical form force the reader into participation. Oftentimes the single word or the associational fragment becomes the unit of expression, making the unity imaginative rather than grammatical.[65] Omissions, particularly of function words, make many of his lines cryptic and elliptical.[66] The poem decidedly illustrates the corruption of language. Satire shows clearly "values which debase language and language which debases values."[67]

Armstrong believes Browning deliberately disowns order and refuses to structure language because of a belief that experience cannot be structured easily but requires subtlety. For this reason, he approximates through exaggeration and disjointed syntax a semblance of the experience which the reader must supply imaginatively to enter into the experience.[68]

[64]Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style," p. 93.

[65]King, p. 148. [66]Ibid., p. 147.

[67]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 185.

[68]Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style," p. 96.

Browning's grotesque style is a form of satire in that it produces distortion. His "barbarism," as Santayana called it, leads to impressionism, another trend toward modernism. Grotesque description tends to capture the revelation of the moment; it enhances tonal effects, the color and sound of a setting.[69] In essence, impressionism is emphasis on the revelation of the moment; it "is realism with a special emphasis."[70] These words might have been said of Browning: "He [the impressionist] speaks through a scene or character, but the scene and the character are made to pass through the temper of his own mind before we see them. While his ultimate concern is with truth, it is truth as it has appeared to him as artist."[71] Truth may be discerned by impressionism or by grotesque description, but language--"brutally direct phrases, taboo expressions, nauseating imagery, callous and crude slang--these are parts of the vocabulary of almost every satirist."[72] When the occasion demands, Browning uses brutal language, grotesque description, and impressionism.

Santayana was very critical of the structure and style of The Ring and the Book. In his opinion, the poem

[69]Addison Hibbard, ed., Writers of the Western World (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), p. 1241.

[70]Ibid., p. 1115.

[71]Ibid., p. 1117.

[72]Highet, p. 20.

had no structure--"for that name cannot be given to the singular mechanical divisions of The Ring and the Book."[73] He criticized Browning's style by stating: "we are in the presence of a barbaric genius, of a truncated imagination, of a thought and art inchoate and ill-digested, of a volcanic eruption that tosses itself quite blindly and ineffectually into the sky."[74] Ironically, Chesterton considered Santayana to be perhaps Browning's most valuable critic. The faults he sees in Browning are those that Chesterton sees as virtues. He defends the grotesque style as being "very suitable for the expression of his [Browning's] peculiar moral and metaphysical view."[75]

Sypher sees Browning's dramatic monologue as a forerunner of existentialism. It is existential in that it focuses on character; it is concerned with self-scrutiny and with the psychological analysis of motivation and self-actualization. He sees Guido, Caponsacchi, and Pompilia "all tinged with the immoralism of the free spirit who is able to meet the crisis of the great moment, and to transcend convention by doing so."[76]

[73]George Santayana, from "The Poetry of Barbarism," in Robert Browning, ed. Philip Drew (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966), p. 30.

[74]Ibid., p. 18.

[75]Chesterton, p. 140.

[76]Sypher, p. xiii.

Browning's poetry of experience has been compared to experiences depicted in the novels of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Gustav Flaubert.[77] He saw in the raw material of the Old Yellow Book the source for a novel, but he could not sell any of his contemporaries on writing a novel based on the Old Yellow Book; therefore, he wrote a novel in verse form. Browning reportedly offered the Old Yellow Book to W. C. Cartwright, to Miss Ogle, and to Anthony Trollope, and Mrs. Orr thought he also sent it to Tennyson.[78]

The structure of The Ring and the Book has a basis in history; however, the history that serves as a background for The Ring and the Book is not official history but "just the unmoralized and unhistoricized remains of life that goes on below the level of history with an old and forgotten scandal."[79] The ten monologues relate to a localized and transitory happening,[80] not the kind of historical source that has been drawn upon by other literary artists, such as Shakespeare. In fact, Chesterton has called The Ring and the Book "the great epic of the enormous importance of small things."[81] Ironically, Browning transforms the prosaic

[77]Killham, p. 153.

[78]Irvine and Honan, p. 409.

[79]Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p. 132.

[80]Honan, p. 131.

[81]Chesterton, p. 163.

documents of a murder trial and a court procedure into a philosophic commentary on life. From the seemingly repulsive springs forth beauty. "He takes the commonplace, and in the commonplace he finds the eternal. . . . What bade fair to be a triumph of all evil becomes an attestation to the indestructibility and the supremacy of good."[82]

Not only does Browning rely upon the history of murder depicted in the Old Yellow Book, but he also imposes and superimposes Biblical history and myth upon "the pure crude facts." Oftentimes distortions of both secular history and Biblical history are mediums of satire. His own personal myth of the chivalrous rescue of Elizabeth Barrett from a tyrannical father becomes the focal romantic plot of Caponsacchi and Pompilia. The myth blends the legend of St. George with that of Perseus and Andromeda.[83] In addition, Biblical history is used as analogy in the power of Browning to revive "dead facts" into "live facts." The religious reference to Elisha, who breathed life into a dead body and "the flesh waxed warm," gives credence to Browning's powers of resuscitation and a dignity to

[82]Lewis, p. 252.

[83]Roger Sharrock, "Browning and History," Robert Browning, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Athens, O.: Ohio University Press, 1975), p. 82.

the status of poet in his effort to recover truth.[84] Lewis visualizes Browning as taking the dry bones of the Old Yellow Book and making them live again with the breath of his genius.[85]

Browning's historical sources included "The Secondary Source" in addition to the Old Yellow Book. The Old Yellow Book, not a published volume, consisted of a lawyer's file of documents and pamphlets bearing on the Franceschini murder trial. Because letters were addressed to him, it is believed to be a collection of Francesco Cencini.[86] "The Secondary Source" was a contemporary account of the murder trial. In a letter to Isabella Blagden, Browning requested that she have Mrs. Baker, who had lent the contemporary account to Trollope, send it to him.[87] In addition, he had a little pen sketch of Guido, made shortly before his execution, and a water-color drawing of the Franceschini coat of arms. Evidently Browning found and used the description of the torture of the Vigil in Farinacci.[88]

[84]Ibid., p. 90.

[85]Lewis, p. 237.

[86]Charles W. Hodell, The Old Yellow Book, No. 89 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908), p. 239.

[87]McAleer, p. 134.

[88]Hodell, p. 243.

Historical settings were of secondary importance to Browning. Raymond points out that "the historical settings of his poems are means to an end, their function being to influence or illumine cruxes in the lives of men and women whose soul-development or soul-atrophy is his central theme."[89] In the case of The Ring and the Book, the setting is in the seventeenth century, but the poem suggests very closely major concerns of the nineteenth century.[90] The seventeenth century provides a stage for satirizing many current Victorian problems. "Perhaps it seems incongruous that these nineteenth century concerns should appear in the context of brooding chaotic violence. . . . But the pastiche [suggestive of satire] has its uses, partly because it sanctions a bold handling of sex, class, and religion, but more particularly because it creates a mood in which good and evil have a moral and metaphysical reality."[91]

A great deal of difference in opinion has arisen over Browning's use of facts and his adherence to fact in his depiction of character. According to Smalley, Cundiff believes Browning not only felt free on principle to alter

[89]William O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning (1950; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 201.

[90]Drew, p. 126.

[91]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 184.

the facts of the Old Yellow Book but also to ridicule the idea that factual knowledge is of any great value.[92] If it is true that Browning did indeed scorn factual knowledge in his depiction of character and in his search for truth, then a very subtle form of satire is therein involved. Furthermore, Smalley credits Cundiff with seeing both Book I and Book XII as being written by Browning with touches of light irony, grotesque description, and comedy to deride or to belittle the factual data of his source. In this connection, light irony merges into heavy irony, and a subtle brand of satire is born.[93]

Cundiff himself has pointed out two camps of thought on the poet's application of facts in The Ring and the Book. One group insists Browning faithfully reproduced the facts of the Old Yellow Book. The other group believes he used the material of the old book freely, never allowing it to hamper his creative powers in depicting characters.[94] Cundiff places himself in the second group, which does not believe Browning's "fancy" disappeared with the renovating wash of acid. Using the imagery of metallurgy, Cundiff insists that the alloy cannot be removed without reducing

[92]Donald Smalley, "Browning's View of Fact in The Ring and the Book," Victorian Newsletter, No. 16 (Fall, 1959), 2.

[93]Ibid., p. 4.

[94]Paul A. Cundiff, "The Clarity of Browning's Ring Metaphor," PMLA, 63 (1948), 1276.

the gold to softness again. The alloy, containing satire as a major imaginative device, then "remains hidden in the gold ring (his poem), but . . . gives the facts durability and a fixed shape."[95] Pure gold on the surface of the ring is a camouflage. Browning himself confirms this view when he tells his reader that "he will find the 'poet's fancy' beneath the surface of the poem, giving both form and substance to the ring."[96] The strength of satire cannot be overemphasized in considering the structure of The Ring and the Book.

Nevertheless, Browning affirms that he took the character of Pompilia straight from the pages of the Old Yellow Book and that he has invented nothing in The Ring and the Book. He answers Julia Wedgwood's criticism of sordid details in the poem in a letter written in 1868:

> . . . the business has been, AS I SPECIFY, to explain fact--and the fact is what you see and, worse, are to see. The question with me has never been "Could not one, by changing the factors work out the sum to better result?," but declare and prove the actual result, and there end. Before I die, I hope to purely invent something,--here my pride was concerned to invent nothing: THE MINUTEST CIRCUMSTANCE THAT DENOTES CHARACTER is true: the black is so much--the white, no more.[97] [Capitals by Smalley]

[95]Ibid., p. 1280.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Quoted by Smalley, pp. 5-6.

Perhaps the loophole in the statement of Browning that accounts for his deviation from the facts of the Old Yellow Book and his metamorphosis of character is inherent in his statement: "The minutest circumstance that denotes character is true." Smalley evidently capitalized these words to call attention to the possible interpretation that truth of character is more important than truth to facts. This comes very close to Cundiff's concept of the value of facts: "For him [Browning] the fictions of art, combined with the facts of nature, are a higher grade of truth than the facts themselves."[98]

There is also a loophole in the phrase "live fact deadened down." The "deadening of fact" provided for some altering of "live concrete fact." Evidently in the structuring of details and character, Browning believed himself to be rendering "a faithful interpretation of the essential truth of a personality."[99] He was dealing with ambiguity in The Ring and the Book, and Browning himself was noted for ambiguity. "[He] once warned John Ruskin against attempting to confine him to a single meaning."[100]

[98]Quoted by Paul A. Cundiff, Browning's Ring Metaphor and Truth (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972), p. 33.

[99]Smalley, p. 4.

[100]Ibid.

The presence of ambiguity and distortion of fact is necessary to the proof of Browning's use of satire. At the same time, Browning was painstaking in his search for data from the Old Yellow Book, which he read eight times, and in his search for geographical truth. His vast knowledge of Italy and of the Italian Renaissance added factual knowledge to the undertaking. DeVane credits Browning with "tremendous effort . . . to transcribe the truth of small details from his sources. . . ."[101] Hodell is equally certain that Browning stuck with great fidelity to the story. He realized that he must not distort fact "but must legitimately deduce his principles from facts."[102] While "his intellect grasped every fact of this history, his imagination had free sway."[103] No doubt Browning adhered to the Victorian requirement that novelists supply factual historical data and that imagination "should be rooted in the literal and the concrete."[104]

There is no real conflict between historical fact and poetical truth. J. E. Shaw has observed that "it cannot be denied that the personages in Browning's great poem are of the poet's own making, and he would be the first

[101]DeVane, p. 338.

[102]Hodell, p. 235.

[103]Ibid., p. 228.

[104]Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 136.

to acknowledge them as his own creation. My own belief is that it is a great misinterpretation, but at the same time the interpreter is sincere."[105] The additional raw material on the Roman murder case that Beatrice Corrigan has translated in Curious Annals (1956) provides interest because "the personages shaped by Browning's creative imagination are unchanging and eternal. . . . Their story was transmuted by Robert Browning from a sordid tale of greed and treachery into an epic of the human spirit."[106]

Ezra Pound commended Browning for not considering "verse writing apart from life, form, and language."[107] An attempt has been made to weave experience (life), structure, and language into a synthesis. Interwoven within the structure is fragmentary satire, poignantly significant at intervals. What Hodgart has said about the satirist seems significant in relation to Browning: "The satirist allows himself to be caught up in the ephemeral and transitory events of his day. The greatest satire not only fixes a moment of history in a frozen attitude . . . but it tells

[105]Cundiff, p. 39. Quoted from J. E. Shaw, "The Donna Angelicata in The Ring and the Book," PMLA, 41 (March, 1926), 55.

[106]Beatrice Corrigan, Curious Annals (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), p. 1.

[107]Quoted by King, p. 5.

the truth about the depths of human nature, which do not change."[108]

In structuring The Ring and the Book, Browning's major fascination appears to be with the unfolding character of Guido. "To Browning wickedness justifying itself seemed particularly characteristic of human behaviour."[109] His central interest of "exposing [such] wickedness through irony"[110] carries him through two long monologues in the evolution of Guido's satanic character. "'Our glaring Guido' departs this world 'as a soaring rocket, now deadening into oblivion.'"[111] This spectacular imagery suggests Browning's particular interest in what may be his major artistic creation.

Browning loved the character he created in Pompilia. "He [Browning] was as truly and as promptly Pompilia's lover as was Caponsacchi."[112] He chose to read the truth of her character in his memories of Elizabeth Barrett Browning[113] and in Fra Celestino's account of Pompilia's deathbed testimony.[114] Despite his idealized version of Pompilia,

[108]Hodgart, p. 248.

[109]Killham, p. 163.

[110]Ibid.

[111]Ibid., p. 162.

[112]Hodell, p. 249.

[113]Smalley, p. 5.

[114]John Marshall Gest, The Old Yellow Book (Boston: Chipman Law Publishing Co., 1925), p. 241.

"he made the Pope, not Pompilia, the spokesman of truth."[115] In a sense, Pompilia represented "the primitive child-philosopher" and Browning had greater power in treating the sophistication of "developing conflicts growing out of opposing intellectual and emotional forces" within the character of the Pope.[116]

There is a great deal of irony in the discrepancy between the documentary accounts of Pompilia and the Madonna-type character in The Ring and the Book. However, the only satire that Browning uses in the formulation of her character is situational. Pompilia's life illustrates many of the corruptions of the society in which she lived. For example, many marriage customs of the Renaissance still existed: "Marriage came early; twelve was not an uncommon age, thirteen usual, fifteen was getting late, and an unmarried girl of sixteen or seventeen was a catastrophe."[117] Girls were mere chattels; marriages were arranged for mercenary reasons, and husbands were frequently a generation older than their wives.[118] Pompilia is a pawn of these social conditions; her marriage was arranged for mercenary reasons in an atmosphere of deceit. Not only do historical conditions play a part in shaping character in

[115]King, p. 109. [116]Ibid.

[117]J. H. Plumb, The Renaissance (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1961), p. 349.

[118]Ibid.

The Ring and the Book but also the culture reflects corruption and a need for change.

There is much irony in Browning's portrayal of both church and state as they refuse to protect Pompilia and instead live up to the cultural expectations of the times. One cannot read of Pompilia's repeated visits to the church for protection without realizing "the hollowness of it, the hypocrisy of it, the opportunity it offered men for personal aggrandizement."[119] The depravity of Abate Paolo, Girolamo, and Count Guido is crystal clear. Out of fear for himself, the Roman friar at Arezzo fails to write to Pompilia's parents after promising to do so. Much irony is found in the action of the authorities of the House of the Convertites who praise Pompilia's virtue highly but who try to prove her a prostitute after her death in order to seize possession of her estate.[121] These are only a few of the indictments leveled against the church.

Although Pompilia may not be the finest example of Browning's artistry in characterization, nor as great a reflector of ultimate truth as the Pope, she is the focal point on which satire of other characters converges. In conjunction with Pompilia, the Comparini family are also

[119]Lewis, p. 250.

[120]Ibid., p. 249.

[121]Ibid., p. 250.

subject to vituperative attack from those who defile and debase the saintly heroine of The Ring and the Book. The particulars of satire in characterization and in multiple forms of attack upon specific and universal problems of society follow in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER IV

THE SATIRICAL EDGE OF TRUTH IN THE CITIZENRY OF ROME

Two anonymous pamphlets, Number 10 and Number 15, may have suggested Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome to Browning. The anonymous pamphlets were a part of the file of documents contained in the Old Yellow Book. Evidently they were written or printed either by the lawyers or someone in their employ. Hodell, who translated the Old Yellow Book in 1908, believes they were written by Archangelis and Bottinius themselves. The first of these, Notizie di Fatto e Ragione, attempted to stir sentiment in behalf of Guido while the excitement of the trial was at its height. Hodell believes this pamphlet was the inspiration for Browning's creation of Half-Rome. The rejoinder, the idea generated in Browning's mind to defend Pompilia, resulted in the creation of the Other Half-Rome. His purpose was to refute the attempt by Half-Rome "to insinuate a false impression into the dull heads of the crowd."[1]

Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome are symbolic of types of common humanity who appear on the crossroads of

[1]Hodell, The Old Yellow Book, p. 240.

Rome. Grotesquely, they represent the aggregate opinions of the "stinking multitude," the turbulent mob. It is easy to suspect that Half-Rome reflects a greater proportion of the populace's opinion, since he represents those who gravitate to the male sense of values in a male-dominated world. Altick and Loucks, who assert that Half-Rome represents the heavily dominant portion of public opinion,[2] seem to corroborate this view.

Browning's verbal energy creates a world of movement, of busyness, of activity. The scene accords with Kernan's description of the scene of satire as a fantastic jumble of men on a crowded canvas.[3] The streets of Rome are alive with a jostling crowd, moving without dignity, making a farce of tragedy, stupidly unable to comprehend more than a tangled jumble of facts. The world of Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome represents the human condition, which is the perennial topic of satire.[4] It is a world of torture and mutilation, greed, disguise and deception, and lust. These are the main ingredients of the world of satire, inhabited by vicious animals.[5] Metaphorically, men are

[2]Altick and Loucks, p. 41.

[3]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 68.

[4]Hodgart, p. 8.

[5]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 22

wolves, foxes, scorpions, snakes, and other beastly species in The Ring and the Book.

As types, rather than distinct characters, Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid qualify as caricatures. The representative, not the unique or eccentric, best serves the satirist's purpose. "The satirist tends to use types [caricatures] because he is usually concerned with Man rather than men, institutions rather than personalities, repeated behavior patterns."[6] In a sense a caricature only creates an illusion of identity. According to W. H. Auden, a human being should be unique, identical to no one else. A type portrays undifferentiated experience; therefore, satire is directed against the banal. All of the types assuming a personality are targets of satire against the stereotype.[7]

Although Half-Rome, the Other half-Rome, and Tertium Quid are apparently meant to be typical rather than individualized, the artistry of Browning creates an interesting personality within the representative class of each type. His skillful portrayal tends to create a larger social atmosphere surrounding the tragedy. In addition, the personalized types pave the way to the more

[6]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 229.

[7]Ibid., p. 218.

fully individualized portrayal of the central characters: Pompilia, Caponsacchi, Guido, and the Pope.[8]

The fact that Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid, as well as the lawyers, "are types of Man that the poet has attempted to show men"[9] is indicative of Browning's purpose to expose folly and corruption. Under the manipulation of deliberate slanting and distortion, the types may expose the group for which the type is a symbol as having disagreeable characteristics. In the portraiture of caricatures, Browning emphasizes disproportionately certain weaknesses.[10] Since the type represents a group, the satire is social satire and its targets are institutions, individuals, and ideas associated with the group.

The counterbalancing of Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome illustrates a method of achieving intensity which increases the vividness of the portraits and which illustrates another technique of satire.[11] Logically inconsistent but possible in a world of distortion and

[8]Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, "Introductory Essay" to Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, I (1898; rpt. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1926), xv.

[9]Willard Smith, Browning's Star Imagery (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), p. 192.

[10]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 15.

[11]King, p. 136.

rumor, in addition to the combination of the two halves of the citizenry of the world, appears a third caricature, Tertium Quid, "the Result of mixture of some two Things, which forms something very different from both."[12] He is an intermediary between two opposing factions, but vouchsafing lip service to neutrality. Tertium Quid's viewpoint enables the satire to work by comparison and contrast to a greater degree, thereby sharpening perception of the reader and eliminating false values.[13] It is essential to remember that great satire establishes more than one point of view.[14] The three monologues demonstrate the unreliable testimony of the world. The "swerving" from the truth of all three confirms Browning's statement concerning the "imperfect cognizance" of truth and the fact that in this world "truth with falsehood" is the "milk that feeds him [man] now. . . ." (I.819;823).

The drama of Half-Rome's "swerving" from the truth has a setting typical of satire. It is dusk on January 3, the day after the triple murder.[15] Throngs ceaselessly move in excited clatter, jostling, pushing, and trampling

[12]Oxford English Dictionary (1933), s. v. "Tertium Quid."

[13]Hodgart, p. 11.

[14]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 12.

[15]Mary Rose Sullivan, Browning's Voices in The Ring and the Book (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 22.

on one another to get a better view of the mutilated corpses that have lain exposed in the church, "Lorenzo in Lucina," since dawn "on the chancel two steps up, / Behind the little marble balustrade" (II.6;18,19).

Half-Rome spies a man, the cousin of the "jackanapes" who is too civil to his wife, and literally holds him by the buttonholes as he guides him to a more secluded spot across the street by the Palace Ruspoli, where they can carry on their conversation apart from but not separate from the mob scene. The corpses seem to possess a hypnotic fascination for Half-Rome, and he revels in the horrible spectacle of the gashed face of Violante and the mutilation of both bodies. The long row of candles delights him.[16] The tapers at the head and foot of the two old people, riddled with wounds, expose the grotesque dismemberment of their heads attached to their bodies only by a strip of skin.[17] The scene, horrible, sensational, and melodramatic, is an appropriate scene for the world of satire in that it sets a stage for the satirist, who ignores beauty and who "concentrates on other things which he sees in much greater

[16]R. W. Buchanan, Review of The Ring and the Book, by Robert Browning, The Athenaeum, 26 December 1868, pp. 875-876, in Browning: The Critical Heritage, ed. Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 295.

[17]Corrigan, p. xxxvii.

profusion--hypocrisy, selfishness, brutality, treachery, and stupidity."[18]

Browning has a strange antipathy for the mob. Satire against the testimony of the mob pervades the three monologues. His description of the crowd adds vividness:

> From dawn till now that it is growing
> dusk,
> A multitude has flocked and filled the
> church,
> Coming and going, coming back again,
> Till to count crazed one. . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . The organ-loft was crammed,
> Women were fainting, no few fights
> ensued.
>
> (II.87-90;95-96)

The milling of the crowd excites Half-Rome, and he tells the story with a suppressed inner excitement, for he identifies with Guido. His tension comes "from a passionate and deep-seated jealousy of his wife and a fear of betrayal by her which makes it impossible for him to see anything of the present case objectively."[19] His identification with Guido causes him to give vent to satire directed against womankind in general and against Pompilia and Violante specifically. His tirade includes an impassioned attack on the inadequacies of law and an irrational defense of violence for the sake of "honor."[20] The murder weapon has

[18]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 58.

[19]Sullivan, p. 27.

[20]Ibid.

a hideous attraction for him. He apparently enjoys a vicarious thrill in recalling and dwelling upon the murder and the murder weapon.[21]

Cuckoldry is his fear; he has no doubt that Guido has been cuckolded by his wife. Although he refers to "cousin" again and again ostensibly for the purpose of correcting a fact, his real purpose is a thinly veiled warning to this cousin who is paying too much attention to Half-Rome's wife. The man to whom he is speaking must convey this message to his cousin. With a swagger of self-confidence and a highly opinionated air, Half-Rome asserts the rightness of his convictions and the accuracy of his knowledge of the case.[22] Suspicious of all wives and cynical of women in general, the fear of "horns" adorning his own forehead is in every word of his vulgar, conceited, voluble, and suspicious conversation. Although raillery against women, sex, and the domestic relation is a front line of attack, he identifies with Guido in the latter's inordinate consciousness of money and the importance of man's "honour." These preoccupations are subjects for satire. All of his indictments are directed against the weakness of society. The cousin's attempt to lure away his wife is a symptom of a crumbling and blameworthy

[21]Ibid., p. 21.

[22]Ibid.

society. His suspicions become universalized to include all the husbands of Rome[23] as victims of the chicanery of immoral, scheming, and conniving wives.

The Other Half-Rome is a foil for Half-Rome, "not in name only but in his prejudices and sympathies."[24] Representative of Browning's indictment of another segment of the mob's "swerving" from truth, he, like Half-Rome, is an open-air, public speaker. This has been the familiar role of the satirist since the time of Juvenal. His manner has less self-assurance than that of Half-Rome. A bachelor, the Other Half-Rome lacks the assertiveness of the boasting, chattering, jealous husband, Half-Rome.[25]

The time is January 4, the day after Half-Rome's speech. The bright sun shines on the speaker and his audience, who stand in the market place near Bernini's fountain. The Other Half-Rome calls attention to "yon Triton's trump." The place is near "the long white lazar-house" of Santa Anna's which has been besieged by visitors for "these two days" since the murderous attack. Although her life is ebbing away, Pompilia, the girl wife, has been the victim of a mob of onlookers. The lawyers

[23]Ibid., p. 24.

[24]Altick and Loucks, p. 42.

[25]Louise Snitslaar, Sidelights on Robert Browning's The Ring and the Book (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 62.

came first, then the priests, later old Monna Baldi, who claimed a miraculous healing in her palsied limbs, and the painter Maretta.

> Too many by half,--complain the men of art,--
> . . . . . .
> . . . old friends,
> Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
> And go forth boasting of it and to boast.
>
> (III.41;48-50)

The Other Half-Rome's concern is not with the mutilated bodies of the Comparini but with the dying Pompilia. In his slow, meditative, dreamlike manner, he appears to be thinking aloud in his initial statement:

> Another day that finds her living yet,
> Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
> And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
> And, under the white hospital-array,
> A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise
> You'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
> Alive i' the ruins. 'Tis a miracle.
>
> (III.1-7)

That "the hushed, reverential tones of the opening betray a sentimentalist rather than a sensationalist (as in Half-Rome)" is the verdict of Whitla.[26] In contrast to Half-Rome's vicarious escape into the melodrama of the murders and his identification with Guido, the Other Half-Rome is less interested in histrionics, and his

[26]William Whitla, The Central Truth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 117.

vicarious escape is into the world of "fancy fit," into a "romance-book" wherein "a dashing hero" rescues a "dastardly villain."[27] The sentimentalist sees only what he wants to see and is oblivious to everything else. To satisfy his sentimentality, he conjures up a lover's triangle from the relations of the husband and wife and the priest.[28] His lack of assurance concerning the innocence of Pompilia is evident in his sensual view of the romance. Being earthly, he excuses the priest Caponsacchi of infidelity to his vows of abstinence by concluding:

> So, if the priest,
> Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty,
> gave
> Way to natural weakness. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Why, take men as they come,--an instance
> now,--
> Of all those who have simply gone to see
> Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
> Half at the least are, call it how you
> please,
> In love with her--I don't except the
> priests
> . . . . . .
> Men are men.
> (III.831-833;862-866;877)

In addition to satirizing sentimentality, these lines provide an example of the surfacing of Browning's "natural law." Ironically, he repudiates the rationalization that excuses on the basis of "natural law."

[27]Dornberg, p. 168.

[28]Ibid., p. 169.

The Other Half-Rome, with his "fancy-fit," tends to interpret scenes imaginatively. His partisanship for Pompilia weakens as he often admits to doubt about the true version of events.[29] Smith agrees with Dornberg that the Other Half-Rome's penchant for sentimentality robs him of reliable judgment of human behavior or social conduct. Since he is not fundamentally concerned with the search for truth,[30] his judgments are necessarily unreliable and are therefore subjects for satire. Feinberg says that the object of satire may be sentimentality.[31]

A very important target of Browning's attack is the "swerving" from truth. His attack is intricately bound up with the satire on facts. Any distortion or "swerving" from truth is indicative of the presence of satire. Browning warns in the epilogue that Half-Rome's monologue will not reveal the "vanished truth" except in a "swerving," distorted form:

> Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth;
> Honest enough, as the way is: all the same,
> Harboring 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,

[29]Sullivan, p. 53.

[30]Smith, p. 201.

[31]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 26.

> 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.839-850)

That Half-Rome will appear to be truthful but will veer continuously further away from the truth as his testimony becomes increasingly suspect is Browning's method with those monologuists he draws with the greatest amount of satire. In "Browning the Simple-Hearted Casuist," Fairchild is critical of Browning's failure to trust the speaker's unmasking of himself, feeling it necessary to add preliminary and closing passages "which tell the reader precisely what to think."[32] Be that as it may, Browning warns the reader to be on guard to discover "a hidden germ of failure" in Half-Rome's testimony. "Truth" lies "at the bottom," not captured by half the populace or more, represented by Half-Rome. For all his braggadocio, Half-Rome's version of facts will not meet the test of truth. Through the so-called factual testimony of the citizenry of Rome, only a fragmented and distorted version of truth appears. Browning's rejection of facts themselves without the intervention of oblique art, the interpretation of these facts by the artist, lends credence to the idea

[32]Fairchild, p. 234.

that Browning is mocking (satirizing) factual knowledge. Smalley sees Browning as lavishing "unnecessary derision" on facts in The Ring and the Book. He particularly sees fact in certain passages in Book I as "subjected to belittlement whenever it [fact] appears in the poem."[33]

Bagehot perceives Half-Rome as relating the tragedy in a "matter-of-fact way" unable to "comprehend the majesty of suffering." His jealous concern was an uppermost torment in his mind; therefore, the facts of the story tumbled out without much conscious thought, but they were colored by his emotional identification with Guido. Furthermore, Bagehot believes that "in describing Half-Rome, he [Browning] was describing the views and opinions directly opposed to his own, of a man or section of men whom he held in abhorrence or contempt."[34] It was natural that he, the satirist, should exaggerate.

In his idealistic and fanciful distortion, the Other Half-Rome is as far removed from the truth as Half-Rome. The truth that the Other Half-Rome uncovers is by "no skill but more luck."

> Next, from Rome's other half, the
> opposite feel

[33]Smalley, p. 2.

[34]Walter Bagehot, Review of The Ring and the Book, by Robert Browning, Tinsley's Magazine, January, 1869, pp. iii, 665-674, in Browning: The Critical Heritage, ed. Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 305.

> For truth with a like swerve, like
> unsuccess,--
> Or if success, by no skill but more luck.
> This time, through siding rather with the
> wife
> Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
> Than with the husband. One wears drab,
> one pink;
> Who wears pink, . . .
> . . . . . .
> "--Why, if I must choose, he with the
> pink scarf."
> (I.875-881;883)

Pink suggests romance. Stock responses to romance rob him of any ability to see the depth of the tragedy. "Pompilia is to him the tragic heroine pursued by a fiendish villain (Guido) but temporarily rescued by the romantic hero (Caponsacchi)."[35] An emotional interpretation supersedes a reasoned verdict; the "fancy fit" clouds the judgment with a rosy haze.

The Other Half-Rome differs from Half-Rome in his concern for the present. The wounded Pompilia, surrounded by curious onlookers who count her breaths, is the preoccupation of the Other Half-Rome. He is under the spell of the dying girl. Death is a sobering experience. His telling of the story is punctuated with pauses and introductory comments. Sullivan suggests a reason for his manner. "The allowance for alternate explanations and the tendency to start, not with a conclusion, but with an effort to work it out in his own mind as he considers the

[35]Dornberg, p. 148.

facts aloud make the Other Half-Rome seem less importunate and self-assured than the speaker before him, and gives the impression of one who responds intuitively rather than logically."[36] The Other Half-Rome, though he veers from the truth, is drawn with less satire than Half-Rome, perhaps because he is more sensitive, idealistic, intuitive, and imaginative, and therefore a less suitable subject for satire. However, "both Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome have a limited vision, and so they remain on the periphery of truth."[37]

Half-Rome's attitude toward women, as revealed in his treatment of Violante and Pompilia and his wife, is the main target of Browning's satire in his monologue. Using the symbolism of the Garden of Eden, he attempts to derogate womankind. Hodgart explains man's reaction to women in this way: "The fact that, unlike racial minorities or political regimes, women cannot be banished or abolished but are here forever is therefore a deeper source of irritation to the male satirist as well as a more persistent stimulus to writing than those produced by other subjects."[38] No doubt Half-Rome feels the need to insult, to criticize, and to disparage womankind. Women were mere chattels in his

[36]Sullivan, p. 55.

[37]Whitla, p. 115.

[38]Hodgart, p. 7.

day, and it seems surprising that men who enjoyed the advantages of physical strength, political power and wealth, legal status and education should have taken such unholy delight in satirizing women. The men did the writing; therefore they could throw upon the women the reproach of making the world miserable.[39]

The symbolic roles of Mary and Eve provided a familiar method for dramatizing man's ambivalent feelings about women around the polar antithesis of Eve and the Virgin Mary. Eve was responsible for sin and the loss of Eden. Through Mary, redemption became possible because a woman was God's mother on earth. "The more devotion was paid the sinless mother of God, the more execration was heaped on Eve, who became the symbol of everything wrong with women."[40] Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid all use the imagery of Eden to substantiate their particular views toward Violante and Pompilia and womankind in general. In conjunction with the Eve imagery, the traditional weapons of sex--deceit, weeping, and trickery--play a prominent role in the male derogation of womankind.[41] The suspicion of cuckoldry is the most damaging blow to Guido's honor and to the male ego. Played

[39]Ibid., p. 39.

[40]Ibid., p. 87.

[41]Ibid., p. 79.

on the stage as domestic satire, the battle of the sexes is a perennial topic for satire, being strongly comic. Feinberg notes that "references to sex have always been a prime source of entertainment, and many satirists utilize sex as an aid to sustaining narrative interest."[42]

As to be expected from the examination thus far, Half-Rome is Juvenalian in his denunciation of Violante and Pompilia. He pictures them with coarse brutality.[43] Blame falls on women as the direct cause of the tragedy:

> The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
> I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like,
> lured
> Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall.
> (II.166-168)

In the Eve figure, Pompilia is used as a lure to deceive the unsuspecting Guido. Lucifer, "I' the garden," is suggestive of satire, as the Devil appears often in the work of satirists.[44] Maxmilian Rudwin maintains that "the Devil's chief function is that of a satirist."[45] The nature of the Devil is to deceive. Satan's imprint on diabolical tendencies in man is in line with the "one legitimate object

[42]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 74.

[43]Henry Charles Duffin, Amphibian: A Reconsideration of Browning (London: Bowes and Bowes Publishers Limited, 1956), p. 121.

[44]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 72.

[45]Ibid.

of all satire . . . to deceive either consciously or unconsciously."[46]

Half-Rome also attacks Violante with the Eve imagery to emphasize the deception of Violante and the stupidity of Pietro in his fool's paradise, his home before the advent of Guido. Twelve years earlier, Violante had deceived her husband, Pietro, by feigning the birth from her own body of Pompilia. On the basis of the Cortona Codex and the Florentine archives, Beatrice Corrigan reconstructs the absurd comedy of the pretended birth. The infant and the afterbirth were brought to Violante's bedroom on the day following the actual birth of the child and after Pietro's departure for the day. The real mother was a widow, not the prostitute of Browning's account. Six witnesses attest to the falsification of pregnancy by Violante, to the bathing of the baby in a copper basin in Violante's bedroom, and to the reception of congratulations from female friends. An older sister of Pompilia was one of the witnesses.[47] Of course, Browning did not have access to this information, for it became available in 1940, nearly eighty years after his purchase of the Old Yellow Book.[48] However, this information does confirm the odious character of Violante

[46]Russell, p. 441.

[47]Corrigan, p. xxi.

[48]Ibid., p. xiii.

in her unashamed plot to obtain a child and financial security at the same time.[49] Without an heir, the Comparini would lose considerable money through the terms of a usufruct. According to the legal terms of the usufruct, they must have a child to enjoy the present advantages of the property and to keep the inheritance in the family.

Violante's deception and greed are ready targets for Half-Rome in his effort, by equating her with Eve, to derogate her character.

> She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
> She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
> Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
> Send vigor to the lie now somewhat spent
> By twelve years' service; lest Eve's rule decline
> Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
> Throve dubiously since turned fools'-paradise,
> Spite of a nightingale on every stump.
> Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day,
> While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
> Crawled all-fours with his baby pick-a-back,
> Sat a serene cats'-cradle with his child,
> Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
> Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old.
>
> (II.247-260)

[49]Ibid., p. xlv.

As a comic sidelight, the degradation of Pietro's Eden to a mundane "cabbage-plot" in comparison to the Biblical picture is striking contrast. The misrepresentation and distortion of Scripture provide "a wide-scale study of casual blasphemy" in The Ring and the Book.[50] One such mishandling of Biblical allusion is present in "lest Eve's rule decline." This is an ironic reversal of Genesis 3:16: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."[51]

An insinuating tone, a grimace of evil contortion, and a sly wink very possibly accompanied Half-Rome's vindictive report of Violante's treachery. The lines are filled with sarcasm, verbal irony, and understatement--all contributing to satire. No less a source of satire is the stupidity of Pietro, who foolishly plays with his beloved daughter while his estate dwindles. Cook confirms the extravagance of Pietro and his lack of responsible financial action in the year of Pompilia's birth.[52] Holding up to public view through ridicule and contempt the deception of Violante and the stupidity of Pietro is a

[50]Altick and Loucks, p. 184.

[51]Ibid., p. 199.

[52]A. J. Cook, A commentary upon Browning's The Ring and the Book (1920; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 78.

method of satire.[53] But the greater indictment is the indictment against a culture which permits the buying and selling of human flesh at birth and at marriage. Injury to the innocent aroused Browning's ire.

In contrast to Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome is Violante's best defender. "His nature has no distrust of the woman nature, but rather an instinctive attraction toward it."[54] Pompilia, like a tender plant, "had been transplanted" to the "little garden plot" of Pietro, the Eden of the Comparini.[55] In their paradise, Pietro and Violante enjoy an idyllic marriage, living together in harmony and tasting simple and innocent pleasures.

> Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
> I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there,
> 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,
> Patiently glorifies their solitude.
> (III.229-237)

[53]Hodgart, p. 7.

[54]Porter and Clarke, p. xvii.

[55]Snitslaar, p. 37.

The Other Half-Rome suggests mystical beauty through the analogy of Pompilia's emergence as a "sliver" from an "eye-figured Eden tree." This metaphor contrasts sharply with Half-Rome's earthy "cabbage-plot." The "filching" of Pompilia by "two exiles" becomes "an act of great kindness, for the preservation of the child."[56] The presence of the child "glorifies their exile." Extravagantly sentimental diction and phraseology describe the idealized Eden, resulting in an exaggerated and unrealistic picture of domestic bliss.

The greed of Violante and Pietro is minimized by the Other Half-Rome; "the wish for an heir to prevent their capital from reverting to a stranger after their deaths is the fatal germ lurking in their happy union."[57]

The Other Half-Rome is drawn with less satire than Half-Rome. However, being representative of a contrasting half of the world, he presents an indictment of those who see the world with a rosy hue that obscures sharp realities. Both men perceive Pompilia's earthly condition inaccurately.[58] To grasp her higher significance requires a person such as that of Caponsacchi or the Pope, whose vision has not been blurred by distortion.

[56]Ibid., p. 36. [57]Ibid., p. 35.

[58]George Wendell Thompson, "Browning's Theory of Perception in The Ring and the Book," Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1966, p. 72.

Directly related to the imagery of Eden is the imagery of the fish. As an angler, the scheming Eve figure of Violante is reinforced in order to reduce Pompilia to a minnow. Half-Rome throws all the blame for the marriage of Guido and Pompilia on Violante's clever casting.

> She who had caught one fish, could make
> that 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.268-275)

Violante waylays Guido, the nobleman with a palace, and throws her bait (Pompilia) to him. The poor bait is simply at the mercy of the "fish." He snaps, completely unaware of how he is being tricked. Quickly, before the poor fish has time to realize the circumstance, Violante clandestinely marries the child to him, deceiving Pietro in the bargain. And later, by woman's wiles, she brings Pietro to an acceptance of the marriage; "poor Guido is hooked by Violante before he is aware of it."[59] Sullivan considers the "angler" figure to be the most effective dehumanizing device that Half-Rome employs in his monologue.[60]

[59]Snitslaar, p. 39.

[60]Sullivan, p. 32.

Half-Rome's satire is viciously personalized in his attack against Violante and Pompilia because his own marriage is threatened. All women are a threat to Half-Rome. Violante's female dominance in her marriage is a threat to male dominance in all marriage. He sees marriage in authoritarian terms as an institution wherein male dominance must be preserved. In addition, Guido is a member of a feudal, aristocratic, privileged society, which he fears is being displaced by aspiring merchant people like Pietro and Violante.[61] The satirist is a conservative, resenting change and hoping to preserve the status quo.

In favoring the cause of Guido, Half-Rome "is . . . not particularly concerned with the discovery of truth, but rather with the expression of an argument that supports an opinion founded upon the popular prejudice that a husband's honor must be defended at all costs."[62] Browning's representation of his views illustrates the method of distortion explained by Feinberg: "The satirist exaggerates. He understates. He pulls things out of context. He attributes obviously false motives. He stacks the cards in every way he can."[63]

[61]Armstrong, "The Uses of Prolixity," p. 187.

[62]Smith, p. 200.

[63]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 90.

For the Other Half-Rome, Abate Paoli takes the same dominating role that Violante takes for Half-Rome. He becomes the principal actor in the plot to marry Guido to Pompilia. He, not the Comparini, makes the first move toward the alliance.[64]

> The Abate,--why, mere wolfishness looks well,
> Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
> Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
> Twice Guido [Paoli], all craft but no violence,
> This copier of the mien and gait and garb
> Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
> Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!
> Armed with religion, fortified by law,
> A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
> And turns the classic page--and all for craft,
> All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch!
>
> (X.876-886)

The lines are filled with grotesque description, with prongs of satire extending in every direction. Depicted as a wolf, "armed with religion" and "fortified by law," Abate Paoli practices craft under the guise of peace, "yet incur[s] no scratch." Over and over Browning employs animal imagery to reduce character. Color also is a tool of reduction. Yellow is associated with hypocrisy. In Paoli's case, "yellow that would pass for

[64]Sullivan, p. 42.

white" is a truer index to his contemptible character in that he is a hypocrite passing successfully under the guise of the purity of whiteness.[65] Here Browning makes a very deliberate stab at both religion and law in showing that a despicable character may invoke the protection of both to cover his evil endeavors.

In depicting other members of Guido's family, both satanic and animal imagery is used. Diabolical imagery is used grotesquely by the satirist. Half-Rome recognizes the "lady-mother Beatrice" as the "true novercal type [the wicked stepmother of legend], Dragon and devil" (II.486-487). She is "a gray mother with a monkey mien" (I.565). Guido's family are a band of wolves and satyrs. Their palace is a veritable hell:

> . . . a fissure in the honest earth
> Whence long ago had curled the vapor
> first,
> Blown big by nether fires to appal day.
> (I.443-555)

Guido is more and more seen as the devil incarnate, a devil who counterfeits the role of Christ. His family are creatures of hell, and he lives in an inferno. Pompilia, the child, has been "caught up thus in the cloud, and carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air [Satan]" (I.561).

[65]Honan, p. 197.

Tone, imagery both literal and figurative, and grammatical structure interrelate and defy complete separation in the analysis of satire. In addition, the satire is fragmentary, and all the mediums of composition serve other purposes of narration as well. A complete analysis of all the possibilities of satire inherent in tone, diction, imagery, and structure would require extensive examination; therefore, analysis will be limited to representative samples.

Much of the satire is inherent in the tone that may be suggested by a combination of rhetorical devices but must be supplemented by the imagination of the reader. Sullivan suggests that "Half-Rome's attitude, subconscious or otherwise, is revealed by the tone of his discourse."[66] Half-Rome makes unashamed use of colloquialisms and a variety of diction,[67] including copious use of the name-calling of the satirist. "The most characteristic elements of his diction are the use of colloquialisms and slang, and of epithets and undignified descriptive words, and the refusal to treat the Comparini seriously--devices which shrink [belittle] everything he touches on and at the same time contribute to the appearance of self-assured cleverness on his part."[68]

[66]Sullivan, p. 28.

[67]Honan, p. 207.

[68]Sullivan, p. 28.

According to Feinberg, "the satirist makes copious use of similes, analogies, and metaphors."[69] Browning's Half-Rome uses over thirty animal images to describe characters. Through animal imagery, the satirist makes his criticism indirectly by ascribing to animals human characteristics or vice versa.[70] "Pompilia becomes a snake, cat, minnow, puppy, snake again, chick, badger, lamb, and fly."[71] In Eden imagery, Pompilia is a snake who beguiles Caponsacchi: ". . . while the snake / Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires" (II.786-787). In the hospital, the snake image is resumed:

> . . . while the wife
> (Viper-like, very difficult to slay)
> Writhes still through every ring of her,
> poor wretch,
> At the Hospital hard by.
> (II.1435-1438)

The snake imagery is not reserved for Pompilia alone; it is also used to debase other characters. In fact, most of the animal imagery has varying connotations as applied by different speakers. In this process, the word itself loses original force and, therefore, becomes a part of the reductive scheme.

Since Half-Rome is the champion of Guido, his descriptions are basically complimentary but ironic to the

[69]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 130.

[70]Ibid., p. 178.

[71]Honan, p. 181.

reader. Half-Rome calls Guido "honest," "man of birth," and "man-like." He "holds his head aloft" in spite of savage thrusts at his honor. However, Half-Rome uses a mocking tone about Guido when he recounts Guido's failure to kill his wife on the spot at Castelnuovo. Continuously Guido suffers "poison." The "poison" is interlaced with the imagery of the snake, the scorpion, and the toad.[72] According to Juvenal, the great Latin satirist, "the toad provides adulterous wives with poison for their husbands."[73]

> Let a scorpion nip,
> And never mind till he contorts his tail!
> But there was sting i' the creature;
> thus it struck.
> . . . . . .
> Here's Guido poisoned to the bone, you
> say,
> . . . . . .
> The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's
> quintessence.
> (II.1296-1298;1365;1369)

Half-Rome uses the term "fox" to show his contempt for Caponsacchi and to describe his cowardice and his treachery: "The badger [Caponsacchi] shows his teeth: / The fox nor lies down sheep-like nor dares fight" (II.857-858). The badger imagery conveys the idea of an animal who comes out at night to prey carnivorously on his victim, while the fox imagery suggests "furtiveness and treachery." Guido as the victim is "the harassed and preyed on."[74]

[72]Sullivan, p. 30.

[73]Cook, p. 51.

[74]Sullivan, p. 32.

Most of the Other Half-Rome's animal imagery is associated with Pompilia and Guido.[75] His references to Pompilia are made in loving imagery, such as the comparison voiced by Maratta, the painter:

> "A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried
> he,
> "Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure
> as pearl,
> That hatches you anon a snow-white
> chick."
>
> (III.63-65)

This is scarcely satire; nor does Other Half-Rome use the lamb image, the martin, the sheep, or the dove disparagingly in reference to Pompilia. Nevertheless, in the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being, the animal world lies below the human. The Other Half-Rome viciously describes Guido as a cicala, lion, fox, worm, ferret, wildcat, dog, and hawk.[76] Color imagery is used in relationship both to moral and to immoral characteristics. Guido repeatedly is associated with black. Black, blue, and yellow are all linked with evil.[77]

Alliteration as a technique to debase character is common in The Ring and the Book. Half-Rome probably alliterates more frequently than any other speaker.[78] For

[75]Honan, p. 181.

[76]Ibid., p. 182.

[77]Irvine and Honan, p. 435.

[78]Honan, p. 258.

example, Violante is a "mock-mother," and Pompilia her "child-cheat" (II.60). Two of the most vivid lines describe Violante's and Pietro's life at Guido's palace in Arezzo as "Four months' probation of this purgatory, / Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast" (II.500-501). Onomatopoeia adds comic effect.

The Other Half-Rome uses less depreciating alliteration, but in his compassionate treatment of the Comparini, he describes their table fare in this manner: "Guido should at discretion deal them orts [scraps]" (III.514). After four months:

> Cruelty graduated, dose by dose
> . . . . . .
> The starved, stripped, beaten brace of
> stupid dupes
> Broke at last in their desperation loose,
> Fled away for their lives, and lucky so.
> (III.525;528-530)

Alliteration, assonance, and consonance combine to present an imagery that contributes to a sense of the loss of their dignity through all kinds of "humiliating cruelties."[79]

The standard device of the satirist is irony;[80] it is Browning's most characteristic and effective weapon.[81] Some of Half-Rome's exaggeration that debases takes the form of sarcasm or irony. For example, concerning the

[79]Snitslaar, p. 43.

[80]Hodgart, p. 130.

[81]King, p. 150.

merger of the Comparini and Franceschini families, he says: "Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet / And make each other happy" (II.459-460). Violante is "discreet" (II.370) in managing the marriage between Guido and Pompilia. She is "sage" by confessing her sin at the right time, the Jubilee; and the Comparini are the "kindly ones" (II.647) when they abandon Pompilia to leave her alone with Guido. The Other Half-Rome is equal to Half-Rome in ironic statement in a complimentary manner. For example, the Other Half-Rome remembers that Guido calls for protection from the law when Caponsacchi confronts him at the inn at Castelnuovo ready to fight. "Guido, the valorous, had met his match, / Was forced to demand help instead of fight" (III.1261-1262).

However, the use of insinuation achieves the most deadly effect in reducing or debasing a character. Half-Rome is a master in the art of insinuation. Pompilia is his victim. According to him, she is free to receive all kinds of lovers in the Comparini home. The priest Caponsacchi could easily go there.[82] When her parents left her alone with Guido and departed for Rome, naturally she tried to enliven the dullness of an old husband by flirting and by seeking gaiety and youth.[83] These charges are made or implied by Half-Rome.

[82]Snitslaar, p. 58. [83]Ibid., p. 48.

The most obvious satire in the poem is that directed against the church and the law. The Governor of Arezzo and the Archbishop both refuse to aid Pompilia.

> She bade the Governor do governance,
> Cried out on the Archbishop,--why, there now,
> Take him for sample! Three successive times
> Had he to reconduct her by main force
> From where she took her station opposite
> His shut door,--on the public steps thereto,
> Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
> And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot.
>
> (II.866-873)

Half-Rome presents Pompilia with Eve imagery, "wringing her hands" and "shrieking all her wrongs." The Other Half-Rome presents a softened version of the story:

> Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
> To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer
> At footstool of the Archbishop--fast the friend
> Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of yore!
> So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
> By the Governor, break custom more than he,
> Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,
> Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
> Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
> --His old friend should be master in his house,
> Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!
>
> (III.999-1009)

The satire here reveals the plight of women in a society in which the husband is always right, and there is no redress to the institutions which should champion the cause of the weak and downtrodden. In an earlier incident with the Comparini, when they went to the Governor of Arezzo, he promised chastisement to Violante and Pietro if they came prating lies about his friend, the nobleman Guido. After being dismissed by the Archbishop, Pompilia turns to a "simple friar of the city." He listens to her compassionately, promises to write to her parents, but reconsiders later and fails to give Pompilia any aid because of fear of the consequences to himself.[84] The discrepancy between the church as it is and as it should be often has been the grounds for satire.[85] Ironically, the government protects and favors the nobility and not the humble it professes concern for.

Half-Rome, near the end of his monologue, concludes that law dealing with erring wives is no good:

> Sir, what's the good of law
> In a case o' the kind? None, as she all
> but says.
> Call in law when a neighbor breaks
> your fence,
> Cribs from your field, tampers with rent
> or lease,
> Touches the purse or pocket,--but wooes
> your wife?

[84]Ibid., p. 52

[85]Hodgart, p. 41.

> No: take the old way trod when men were
> men!
>
> (II.1508-1513)

The old way "when men were men" is grotesquely described in an earlier passage. The husband's course is to wreak vengeance on an adulterous wife:

> That morning when he came up with the
> pair
> At the wayside inn,--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,
> . . . . . .
> But no!
> That were too plain, too straight, too
> simply just!
> He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help.
>
> (II.1480-1487;1493-1495)

"Supine law . . . whose veins run lukewarm milk" is like the lukewarm church in Revelation. The law follows the broad golden mean, a course despicable to Half-Rome.

Contrary to Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome apparently condones the middle course in court action: "Wherefore the court, its customary way, / Inclined to the middle course the sage affect" (III.669-670). The court's preference for the golden mean is later expressed:

> Then the court had to make its mind up,
> spoke.
> "It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
> Hard to believe, but not impossible:

> Who can be absolute for either side?
> A middle course is happily open yet.
> (III.1370-1374)

As does the court, the Other Half-Rome, after judiciously weighing evidence on both sides, chooses the safe middle course.[86] The golden mean is an object of satire because it represents the neutrality of those who do not dare to really take sides. The Other Half-Rome's middle course anticipates the greater satire of the golden mean as presented in the depiction of the personality of Tertium Quid.

In the final lines of his monologue, the Other Half-Rome reveals a deep-seated prejudice also. The circumstances are not clear, but the Other Half-Rome is nursing a long-standing grievance against the accused himself. He cannot forgive an insult by Guido, who was co-heir of an estate administered by the Other Half-Rome.[87] Thus prejudice in the form of jealousy blinds Half-Rome to truth, and insult (imaginary or real) clouds the judgment of the Other Half-Rome.

A number of different satiric intentions must converge in the caricature of Tertium Quid. He is entirely Browning's invention.[88] As a symbolic type for the

[86]Altick and Loucks, p. 42.

[87]Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[88]Ibid., p. 45.

aristocratic group he represents, he is the epitome of a class consciousness of superiority. His group abjures any connection with the thinking mob. The bombastic, opinionated Half-Rome and the romantic, sentimental Other Half-Rome are equally repulsive. Only the most skillful storyteller can hope to entertain the elect, since they are always bordering on ennui. Any expression of enthusiasm is constantly suppressed, as individuals wander from card table to the window to a group and back again. "They are careful, eternally on guard against each other. . . ."[89]

Among the social elite are a Cardinal and a Prince. It is these two representatives of church and state that Tertium Quid seeks to flatter to further his advancement in the upper echelons of Roman society.[90] There is a restless movement from the card tables to the secluded, upper-floor window where Tertium Quid holds his one-man debate on the facts of the Roman murder case. At one time he murmurs, "And here's the Marquis too!" (IV.57). The crowd who eavesdrop drift and listen inattentively.

The time is evening on January 5, the third day after the triple murder. The bodies of the Comparini still lie exposed to public view. From the vantage window of the brilliant drawing room, festooned with mirrors and

[89]Smith, p. 201.

[90]Sullivan, p. 58.

reflected candelabra, perhaps some view of the corpses by candlelight may be seen. A vague sense of the omnipresence of death and of threat to the nobility pervades the atmosphere. "Though they [the audience] may feel the tragedy in the fates of the Comparini and Pompilia, yet they will try to defend Guido, because he is a nobleman, one of their own class, standing much nearer them than the vulgar Comparini."[91] And Tertium Quid, a composite symbol of the biased group but with a personality all his own, will "swerve" to the side of Guido as the tale unfolds. At first, he seems impartially weighing the facts of one side against the other.

Browning, the satirist, uses Tertium Quid "to misrepresent things."[92] To the select, the Comparini are a symbol of the rising merchant class that are usurping wealth and daring even to marry into the nobility. They had best be exterminated.

Through Tertium Quid, Browning satirizes both the mob and the aristocrats. Tertium Quid is very vocal in his contempt for the mob. He understands his select audience, their frailties, and their viewpoint. His strategy is to use them for self-aggrandizement. One method is the verbal reduction of the mob; this in turn magnifies himself and

[91]Snitslaar, p. 63.

[92]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 198.

his present audience. He is a qualified person to "edge in an authoritative word / Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools / Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome" (IV.9-11).

In Browning's own words, the "elaborated product" is "tertium quid" (I.908), a third someone who is distinctly above the representatives of the masses. He is:

> The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
> And finer sense o' the city. Is this plain?
> You get a reasoned statement of the case,
> Eventual verdict of the curious few
> Who care to sift a business to the bran
> Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort.
> Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks;
> Here, clarity of candor, history's soul,
> The critical mind, in short: No gossip-guess.
>
> (I.910-918)

The sycophant, who condescends to look at "commonalty" and turns tragedy into a farce, is all bedecked in "lace-work and brocade, frills and ruffles, the powdered peruke, the cane, and a solitaire. These would imply that Tertium Quid is all surface."[93] Browning's rendering of his outward appearance and his inward sense of superiority also implies a satire on vanity. In turn, he reduces the mob to absurdity.

[93]Dornberg, p. 177.

Like the Other Half-Rome and Half-Rome before him, Tertium Quid's suave irony makes use of the Eve story too, but Pompilia is not so much Eve as the daughter of Eve.[94]

> 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 defence
> "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.845-853)

In his flippant manner, Tertium Quid seeks to amuse, to entertain his illustrious friends. With a callous and fashionable indifference, he heartlessly attempts to turn the grotesque murders into an amusing incident. Pompilia's downfall was the result of her husband's tolerance.[95] "Pompilia, not so much Eve as a daughter of Eve, is thus revealed to be splendidly sinful, not least is her talent for inventing alibis."[96] Although seemingly ignorant, Pompilia by emulating her mother Eve might have "the gift of literacy and so be capable of writing the love letters."[97] Tertium Quid smilingly implies that the

[94]Altick and Loucks, p. 200.

[95]Sullivan, p. 61.

[96]Altick and Loucks, p. 200.

[97]Ibid.

generations of Eve's daughters have learned much in deceit and charming blandishment.

It is in the intimate details of the story that Tertium Quid excels. The mob would never be able to clothe these details so brilliantly. If he wins the attention and approbation of his distinguished audience, then he may very well expect to be advanced through their favors.[98] And so he furnishes much interesting speculation on the romantic implications:

> We must not want all this elaborate work
> To solve the problem why young Fancy-
> and-flesh
> Slips from the dull side of a spouse in
> years,
> Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-
> bold
> Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all
> the town!
> (IV.892-896)

Priestly duty is satirized. Caponsacchi's lay dress as a disguise may serve several functions, but the satirist often deals in disguises or masks.

> Do you find it registered--the part of
> a priest
> Is--that to right wrongs from the church
> he skip,
> Go journeying with a woman that's a
> wife,
> And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured
> . . . how?
> In a lay-dress, playing the kind
> sentinel
> Where the wife sleeps (says he who best
> should know)

[98]Sullivan, p. 60.

> And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent
> the night!
> Could no one else be found to serve at
> need--
> No woman--or if man, no safer sort
> Than this not well-reputed turbulence?
> (IV.950-959)

The figure of Eve in the customary satire of cuckoldry combines with the playful attack on priestly duty. "References to sex have always been a prime source of entertainment and many satirists utilize sex as an aid to sustaining narrative interest."[99]

Interspersed throughout the monologue are attacks on the aristocrat, obviously not as open as attacks on the mob. Snitslaar observes that Tertium Quid, a clever, cynical fellow, gives his "venomous underhand thrusts" every now and then.[100] Several incidents reveal the minimizing tendency, the urge to reduce the nobility to the level of the "commonality." The wives of aristocrats are not above carrying on an extramarital affair, as demonstrated by the following innuendo:

> How could a married lady go astray?
> . . . . . .
> Look now,--last week, the lady we all
> love,--
> Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
> . . . . . .
> Mother o' the babes we all breathe
> blessings on,--

[99]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 74.

[100]Snitslaar, p. 66.

> Was caught in converse with a negro
> page.
> Hell thawed that icicle.
> (IV.861;866-867;869-871)

Tertium Quid is deliberately trying to be entertaining. At the same time, he is reducing the nobility to the level of the lower class because of his inward resentment at having to court their favor. Another example of reduction to the level of the Comparini is apparent in the following incident:

> 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.
> (IV.257-262)

The line "Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards,--" (IV. 1477) is another example of a sly humor that uncovers cheating and less than honorable behavior on the part of the aristocrat. But Tertium Quid's most belittling remark is his bitter side speech at the end of the monologue:

> (You'll see, I have not so advanced
> myself,
> After my teaching the two idiots here!)
> (IV.1629-1630)

The reduction of superior intellectuality to idiocy is a blast not only at his representative audience but at himself as a symbol of that group. Woolford notes the satirical aside as impinging "on the characteristic

manoeuvres of Browning's subtler casuists, comparably preoccupied with effect rather than truth."[101]

Tertium Quid is flattering the aristocrat and at the same time ridiculing him under his breath. The assembled nobility and ecclesiastics are targets of his contempt, "both as representatives of society and church." He is "walking a tight rope" as a sycophant while holding his audience in contempt.[102] It is necessary for him to present arguments ambiguously and to clothe those arguments in deceptive language.

One of Browning's continuous but less obvious targets of attack is facts. Although facts are slanted, distorted, and twisted according to prejudice, Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid never go beyond facts to arrive at truth. They are not truly truth seekers, since they seek to convince the listeners of the validity of a truth distorted to accord with their own distorted personalities. Words and actions are not in accord. As Sullivan points out, "He [Tertium Quid] vows to present his hearers with nothing but the facts unflavoured by human prejudices and emotions."[103] It is Tertium Quid's use of

[101]John Woolford, "Sources and Resources in Browning's Early Reading," in Robert Browning, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Athens, O.: Ohio University Press, 1975), p. 15.

[102]Altick and Loucks, p. 143.

[103]Sullivan, p. 60.

facts that calls forth Browning's satire.[104] Browning believes it is only the artist who can interpret facts and present the transcendent message beyond the facts. The citizenry of Rome are incapable of this greater apprehension because of their reliance on facts. Bickford Hornbrook in The Ring and the Book: An Interpretation (1909) saw Browning as possibly satirizing in Tertium Quid history based on facts: "It may be that Browning takes occasion in Tertium Quid to satirize the kind of history which depends more upon information [facts] painfully heaped up and compared in some external way, than upon the insight which through sympathy divines the real motives and characters of men and women."[105]

In conjunction with Browning's satire on facts is his satire on unintelligibility. It is ironic that Tertium Quid, as a representative of superior intelligence, should conduct a discourse bewildering to his audience and befuddling to their intellects. More than anyone in his audience he enjoys the confusion. His method "is a nightmare composite of an entire debating society which seldom if ever debates the issues and which never arrives at a decision."[106] Tertium Quid proposes to weigh

[104]Dornberg, p. 179.

[105]Quoted in Snitslaar, p. 64.

[106]Dornberg, p. 179.

judiciously all arguments and thus reveal the truth.[107] As a "neutral" debater, he relies upon logos, the intellectual and ratiocinative mode of Aristotle, to persuade his "blasé" aristocratic audience.[108] By his use of this method, the poet discredits logic. Feinberg states that through the satiric method of incongruity "reason . . . is used to create unreason; logic is used to create illogic."[109] This reversion of logic is a method that will also be admirably demonstrated by the lawyers. The satire of "a one-man debate in which pivotal points are developed by sophistry and casuistry"[110] is a favorite device of Browning's rogues. Running through all such self-exposure is the poet's war against rationality. The satire against rationalization and dependence on reason pervades much of the satire in which Browning "sought to bring rational processes into disrepute by representing them as sophistry and associating them with an unacceptable moral position."[111]

Sullivan explains Tertium Quid's technique as "belittling both sides of the argument and reducing the tragedy to an entertainment for the noisy, thoughtless

[107]Altick and Loucks, p. 78.

[108]Ibid., p. 79.

[109]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 4.

[110]Altick and Loucks, p. 45.

[111]Ibid.

crowd."[112] In his ostentatious impartiality, "he seems to be trying to be equally unfair to both sides. Strictly concerned with facts, he presents alternating sides without any analysis of motives or any probe for hidden feelings."[113] He deliberately muddies the water while insisting the case is quite clear. Through his rhetorical questioning and twisting of argument, the reader is lost in the maze of rhetoric and finds almost any conclusion impossible.[114]

Through Tertium Quid, Browning is satirizing Tertium Quid's method of debate through a burlesque of excessively complicated explanations,[115] which humorously disparage intellectualism.[116] His method erases any possibility of debating a way to moral truth without taking a moral stand. It is ironic that intellectualism diminishes intellectualism as a reliable means of arriving at truth.

Enjoying the bewilderment of his audience, Tertium Quid asks near the end of the argument: "In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached! / How is that?" (IV.1570-1571). Neither the Cardinal nor the Prince commits himself to any position. Nor has Tertium Quid revealed a clear stance.

[112]Sullivan, p. 67.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Donnberg, p. 225.

[115]Ibid., p. 148.

[116]Altick and Loucks, p. 78.

Through him the posture of intellect is reduced to a position of being less able to judge accurately than the other citizenry of Rome.

Both the aristocrats' and Tertium Quid's refusal to take a definite stand automatically establishes them as targets of satire of the middle way. The satire directed against the safe middle ground is an obvious and important aspect of Tertium Quid's monologue, and the satire probes in several directions. Snitslaar observes that "taking sides is beneath him [Tertium Quid]; he thinks it will spoil his exposition of truth."[117] The only way Tertium Quid can keep himself clear of entanglement is to steer a course through the broad, safe path of the golden mean. Therefore it is necessary to present arguments ambiguously and to clothe those arguments in deceptive language so that no definite commitment is discernible. Periodically he asks such questions as "You see so far i' the story, who was right, / Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?" (IV.314-315). Such questions prompt him "to leap to the other side, or to qualify (or abandon) any point, ostensibly in the interest of clarity and justice."[118] Although his defense of Guido is proof that he has forsaken the middle ground, he has the united backing of the

[117]Snitslaar, p. 64.

[118]Altick and Loucks, p. 139.

nobility in this one instance of his leaning more to one side than to the other. Browning had no use for middle-grounders like Tertium Quid because "the golden mean implies a leveling of good and evil, a meeting of angel and devil on common ground, a refusal to recognize absolutes."[119]

The satire against the law and the church runs like a thread through The Ring and the Book. Tertium Quid attacks the middle course taken by the law. The court at Rome takes a stand neither too harsh nor too lenient on the charge of adultery brought by Guido after he comes upon Pompilia and Caponsacchi at Castelnuovo. On circumstantial evidence the Roman court banishes Caponsacchi to Civita Vecchia,[120] while they send Pompilia to a nunnery, della Scalette; but later she is allowed to return to the Comparini for the birth of her child.

In addition, two civil suits and a third criminal suit are pending in the courts. Brother Paoli has been delegated power to act for Guido in his defense, but the courts have taken no action. Tertium Quid associates his disdain for the law with his disdain for the mob:[122]

[119]Ibid., p. 148.

[120]Hodell, p. 106.

[121]Ibid., p. 121.

[122]Dornberg, p. 177.

> They [the mob] brandish law 'gainst
> law;
> (IV.633)
> Which of the two here sinned most? A
> nice point!
> Which brownness is least black,--decide
> who can,
> Wager-by-battle-of-cheating!
> (IV.626-628)

The law prolongs action interminably. Tertium Quid is scornful of the mob, "reasonless, unreasoning Rome," who expect the law to bring forth truth, who after the first grievance heap grievance upon grievance without taking action.[123] The courts refuse to take a definite stand:

> The courts would nor condemn nor yet
> acquit
> This, that or the other, in so distinct
> a sense
> As end the strife to either's absolute
> loss.
> (IV.1210-1212)

Like Half-Rome, Tertium Quid is indignant with Guido for failing to take the law into his own hands at Castelnuovo. Scornfully, he ridicules Guido's appeal to the law: "Naught left you but a low appeal to law" (IV.1187). Pompilia's punishment is no more than "a fatherly pat o' the cheek" (IV.1254). Tertium Quid heaps abuse upon the courts. Their way is not "To miss the advantage of the golden mean" (IV.1270).

In addition, Tertium Quid couples his satiric attack on the law with an attack on religion. The cowardly

[123]Snitslaar, p. 64.

Guido is further derogated by name-calling. The "cur" kicked down, slinks both to the "church-door" and to the "court-porch."

> Still, the church-door lies wide to take
> him in,
> And the court-porch also: in he sneaks to
> each,--
> "Yes, I have lost my honor and my wife,
> And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
> I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
> Religion and Law lean forward from their
> chairs,
> "Well done, thou good and faithful
> servant!" Ay,
> Not only applaud him that he scorned the
> world,
> But punish should he dare do otherwise.
> (IV.1195-1203)

The satire on cowardice, indirectly a satire on the function of law and church in protecting the cowardly, is reinforced by the Biblical quotation "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"[124] This ironic reversal demonstrates a method of mishandling the Scriptures that becomes more perversive and calculated in the cases of Archangelis and Bottinius. Men twist and hide the truth by exploiting the Word of God to their own ends.[125] The use and misuse of Scripture are a key to character, but they are not prominently developed in the first four books of The Ring and the Book. The Adam and Eve imagery is supported

[124]Matthew 25:31.

[125]Altick and Loucks, p. 184.

by Biblical allusion basically as a mere domestic anecdote.[126]

Language plays an important role in Tertium Quid's deception of his audience and in his own self-deception. In his airy spinning of the tale and his light comic style, language distorts fact [truth] and "he presents the evidence in the way he thinks will impress his listeners and advance his social standing. The pursuit of truth is thus diminished to a parlor game."[127] No doubt Tertium Quid and the lawyers fictionalize quotations from historical, pagan, and Biblical sources and amend them to suit their own purposes. Misrepresentation is an effective medium of deception.[128] "Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove, / O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one" (I.1172-1173).

In the bargaining between Guido and the Comparini for Pompilia, language is the vehicle for deception, fraud, and greed. Language itself is satirized for its own unreliability:

> There came the blunder incident to words,
> And in the clumsy process, fair turned
> foul.
> The straight backbone--thought of the
> crooked speech
> . . . . . .

[126]Ibid., p. 198.

[127]Davis, p. 114.

[128]Altick and Loucks, p. 127.

> Hence was the need, on either side, of
> a lie
> To serve as decent wrappage:
> . . . . . .
> According to the words, each cheated
> each.
> (IV.510-512;520-521;525)

Tertium Quid's favorite beasts are associated with the life of the gentleman farmer and the sport of hunting.[129] "Humanity is itself a kind of reduction ad absurdum for Tertium Quid, whose use of animal imagery reveals his own character as one deprived of humanity through his attempts to dissociate himself from the commonalty and mingle and identify himself with the Roman upper classes. . . ."[130] He pictures the lawyers as dogs: "One barks, one bites" (IV.45). He imagines the court saying, "Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep / I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide" (IV.1214-1215). Among the epithets for Pompilia are a pet lamb, a dove, a butterfly, a crow, and a worm on a hook. His most devastating term for Pompilia, attributed by Tertium Quid to Guido, is "cur-cast mongrel" (IV.608). Guido is a fish, a fox, a swine, a cur, a hound, and a "furious bull."[131]

> ". . . Does the furious bull
> Pick out four help-mates from the
> grazing herd

[129]Honan, p. 182.

[130]Ibid., p. 183.

[131]Ibid., p. 182.

> And journey with them over hill and
> dale
> Till he find his enemy?
> (IV.1550-1553)

It becomes obvious that Tertium Quid is prejudiced in Guido's favor when he declares with some heat, "Do you blame a bull?" (IV.1569).

Tertium Quid describes Violante rather humorously as a "load of lace," when she attends church (IV.94), and as a "harmless household sheep" (IV.124). He, like the Other Half-Rome, is more tolerant of Violante than Half-Rome. He refers to Pompilia with tender pity, by comparing her to a helpless bird; he is never sarcastic toward her. "This shows how great Browning's tenderness for her must have been, that he cannot bear even his cynic to speak of her in an offensive way!"[132] On the other hand, Tertium Quid uses sarcasm in describing Guido; "he clipt / His top-hair and thus affected Christ" (IV.404-405). He sneers at Guido's inability to rise into a more important position in the church. Tertium Quid's representation of Guido as affecting Christ suggests blasphemy on the part of Guido and more than a little irreverence on the part of Tertium Quid himself. A result is a diminution of the majesty of God in Christ.

Although some critics might wish that Browning had eliminated or reduced the voice of the citizenry of the

[132]Snitslaar, p. 78.

world, as projected through Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome and Tertium Quid, Hodell attests to the importance of these first three monologues. He concludes Browning's "motive [to be] not merely to tell a story but to explore all its ramifying motives and effects, to reproduce the intricate cross-play of many minds in a story."[133] Among them, the three speakers represent the world view, but it is unacceptable because each presents a selfish motive and a prejudiced viewpoint. Tertium Quid, in spite of his superior endowments, is even more unacceptable than Half-Rome or the Other Half-Rome. The method of Tertium Quid is more insidious to truth than that of emotional prejudice. He demonstrates that cold reason "can be as crippling as conscious bias, at least when it is deliberately employed in self-advancement."[134]

As for satire, Tertium Quid reveals very distinctly a magnifying tendency, illustrating the principle that "inflation of self and the magnifying tendency lie at the basis of some of the standard techniques of satire."[135] He too has a personal bias in that he favors Guido. Browning reveals a society in need of reform in that equal justice cannot be expected from law, government, church, or society.

[133]Hodell, p. 253.

[134]Altick and Loucks, p. 46.

[135]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 37.

Browning is critical of the mob; for this reason, the satire directed against the judgment of the mob by all three representatives of the world view, if we may assume they reflect Browning's attitude, is vindictive. Russell attributes to Browning a "crop of patrician plants and snobbish weeds."[136] In a letter to Ledru Rollin, Elizabeth Barrett Browning calls attention to the "aristocratic" in Robert.[137] Perhaps totally unconscious of such an attitude, "he simply sees and satirizes the know-it-all stupidity as a trait of the mob, and regards it as a ludicrous phenomenon of humanity."[138] His ability to see the shortcomings of the world causes him to wage a battle for "the good, the beautiful, and the true" as zealously as any social reformer.[139] Satire is an effective medium for exposing the need for social reform.

[136]Russell, p. 442.

[137]A. Allen Brockington, Browning and the Twentieth Century (1932; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 238.

[138]Russell, p. 442.

[139]Dallas Kenmare, Ever a Fighter (London: James Barrie, 1952), p. 89.

CHAPTER V

SATIRE IN THE MONOLOGUES OF ARCHANGELIS AND BOTTINIUS

As did his father, Browning cultivated a taste for both satire and criminology. In a copy of an early eighteenth-century edition of Dryden's translation of the satires of Juvenal, Browning made the following note: "My father read the whole of the Dedicatory Preface aloud to me as we took a walk together up Nunhead Hill, Surrey, when I was a boy."[1] A boy who can enjoy a hundred pages of an "Essay on Satire" during a country walk has a precocious interest in the subject.

His appetite for satire and criminology is closely aligned with a characteristic of the satirist, who generally possesses "a certain fascination for what is usually thought vulgar, indecent, and downright filthy."[2] It is true that Browning loved beauty, but the ugly and the grotesque held an attraction for him. His love for the grotesque is reflected in the artistry of The Ring and the Book.[3]

[1]Griffin and Minchen, p. 25.

[2]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 54.

[3]Chesterton, p. 152.

In his father's library Browning became acquainted with sensational criminal cases. "Like his father he was minutely familiar with every cause célèbre within living memory."[4] The elder Browning accumulated accounts of bizarre court cases, often collected as rubbish from book stalls. Neither Browning nor his father was a sensationalist; rather they both had a keen interest in what today would be termed abnormal psychology. The motives that cause men to turn to evil prompted their exploration of the criminal mind. An absorption in the philosophic question of why good coexists with evil led to a probing into the question of "How can the all-powerful and all-loving Father permit his children to plunge into such an abyss of evil."[5]

As a poet, Browning's concern with violence and subtleties of criminal behavior might reveal for him a "lightning flash of revelation,"[6] wherein he might be enabled more forcibly "to portray action in character rather than character in action."[7] The poet could not ignore the facts of crime. Strongly fascinating was the exploration of the dark record of crime enacted by Guido Franceschini,

[4]J. M. Cohen, Robert Browning (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 12.

[5]Hodell, p. 247.

[6]Cohen, p. 122.

[7]King, p. 125.

"not for its sensational interest but for its profound spiritual meaning."[8] In a modern conception, satire, like tragedy, concerns itself with the bridge between man's spiritual potential and man as he really is. "But whereas tragedy attempts to bring the two together, satire measures the gulf between finding in such measurement material for mockery."[9]

In his role as a legislator or prophet, Browning also develops the characteristics of a satiric seer. "The immediate object of satire is, then, these self-induced enthusiasms or ecstatic visions which lead an individual to believe that he is in direct communication with some transcendental power which authorizes him to speak and act out some kind of wild truth."[10] Browning felt a "Hand" guiding him into action and into revelation. The term "wild truth" may appear incongruous with the mental stability of Browning, but the search for truth and his absorption with truth are omnipresent in the bulk of his writing. The "wild truth" uncovered in the search suggests the distortion of truth as well as the "wild" ecstasy of ultimate truth uncovered by the poet.

[8]Hodell, p. 247.

[9]Davis, p. 89.

[10]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 54.

Satire may also concern itself with central images of violence. Such images can suggest a truth about an evil action which is not apparent in an ordinary action.[11] "Violence attracted Browning both as a contrasting background and as a catalyst for the beauty he set out to record."[12] In his artistic treatment of the Roman murder case, Browning depicts one of the most significant villains in English poetry since the days of Shakespeare. Honan has described Guido as "a nightmarish plunge into an immense labyrinthine Inferno of the mind, Dantesque in ingenuity as well as vividness. . . ."[13] Groping for words to express the essence of Pompilia's intangible beauty, Buchanan describes "the face . . . with its changeful and moon-like beauty, its intensely human pain, its heavenly purity and glamour. It has something of Imogen, of Cordelia, of Juliet: it has something of Dante's Beatrice; but it is unlike all of those--not dearer but more startling, from the newness of its beauty."[14] There is irony in the suspicion that Browning is attached to both Guido's diabolism and to

[11]Davis, p. 115.

[12]Cohen, p. 122.

[13]Park Honan, "The Murder Poem for Elizabeth," Victorian Poetry 6 (1968), 222.

[14]R. W. Buchanan, Review of The Ring and the Book, by Robert Browning, The Athenaeum, 20 March 1869, pp. 399-400 in Browning: The Critical Heritage, ed. Boyd Litzinger and Donald Smalley (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 318.

Pompilia's saintliness.[15] It is Guido, not Pompilia, that has two lengthy monologues.

The violence that resulted from the union of Guido and Pompilia led to Guido's murdering Pompilia and her foster parents and to the court trial of the murderer. Violence sets a tragic stage for satire. On this stage it is easy to project hypocrisy, selfishness, brutality, treachery, and stupidity.[16] All these qualities are rich material for the satirist. In addition, the courtroom drama sets the stage for the exploration of reality. Feinberg asserts that "the best satire is concerned with the nature of reality. . . ."[17] Reality [truth] must emerge from contradiction. "In most cases brought to court, . . . lawyers prove two opposite conclusions to be true. The satirist is unkind enough to assume that at least one of the sides is deliberately lying."[18] In The Ring and the Book, both lawyers become tangled in a web of prevarication.

From the first publication of The Ring and the Book in 1868, there have been contradictory reactions among readers as to the merits and significance of the monologues of the lawyers in Book VIII and Book IX of the poem. An

[15]Irvine and Honan, p. 432.

[16]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 58.

[17]Ibid., p. 3.

[18]Ibid., p. 38.

early reaction approaching outrage at their inclusion in an otherwise almost perfect poem has given way to more acceptance of their value in recent times. For example, Wyant, in an article published in 1968, attempts to prove the legal episodes are, "structurally and thematically, significant and viable parts of Browning's larger design."[19] Recently, Drew has defended the inclusion of the lawyers' speeches on the basis that "they provide historical completeness or simply a sense of the prodigality of life."[20]

Judge Gest, who made another translation of the Old Yellow Book in 1925, seventeen years after that of Hodell in 1908, tells of his initial reaction to the monologues of the lawyers in the preface to his translation: "When I first read Book VIII and Book IX, I felt dazed. I wondered what it was all about, nor did a reperusal assist my understanding. These Books with their queer jumble of dog Latin, interspersed with heavy or silly attempts at humor, conveyed little meaning and produced little impression on my mind, beyond a feeling of tantalized curiosity."[21] However, motivated by "tantalized curiosity," Gest

[19]Jerome L. Wyant, "The Legal Episodes in The Ring and the Book," Victorian Poetry, 6 (1968), 309.

[20]Philip Drew, "A Note on the Lawyers," Victorian Poetry, 6 (1968), 297.

[21]Gest, pp. x-xi.

translated the Old Yellow Book in order to enable him to learn more about the law and the lawyers, to render the Old Yellow Book into a more logical arrangement, and to verify the original sources used as authorities by the two teams of lawyers.[22]

Gest's study of the Old Yellow Book, coupled with his bias as a judge, resulted in his severe criticism of Browning's satire of the lawyers. His recognition of the satire led him to condemn Browning for not portraying "the majesty of law, as the controlling force, the saviour of human society, ruling and overruling the passions of men and women."[23] Furthermore, he pronounced as inexcusable Browning's ignorance of the law contained in the Old Yellow Book. Gest condemned Browning for not turning to the fundamental texts of corpus juris, available in any library. He states: "Browning had no acquaintance with the law of the Old Yellow Book, and apparently no desire to acquire it. He does seem to have consulted Farinaccius to satisfy his curiosity as to the torture of the Vigil, but he certainly did not make any examination of the references made by the counsel to the legal authorities without which it is impossible to understand the Old Yellow Book."[24]

[22]Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

[23]William Lyon Phelps, "Notes on The Ring and the Book," Yale Review, 18 (September 1928), 115.

[24]Gest, p. 635.

That Gest thoroughly understood that Books VIII and IX are a burlesque of the actual court scene is evident by his further statement: "It is a dangerous thing for anyone, no matter how brilliant he may be, to meddle with what he does not understand, and it is a foolish thing to ridicule it. The consequences were that these books are not only false but silly, and many of his most ardent admirers consider them to be serious blemishes."[25] Gest's charges have not gone unchallenged; his ire as a judge had been aroused to the extent that his accusations confirm satire in the court trial, Browning's rendering of the lawyers, and his treatment of their cases. Birrell, a critic contemporary with Browning, agrees with those who have felt that Book VIII and IX are "serious blemishes." He believes that the speeches of the lawyers "Will scarcely be very interesting to the ordinary reader."[26] Carlyle's comment on the total poem was sarcastic; The Ring and the Book was a "wonderful book, all made out of an old Bailey story that might have been told in ten lines and only wants forgetting."[27]

On the other hand, Chesterton argues that "the introduction of the lawyers is one of the finest and most

[25]Ibid., p. 266.

[26]Drew, p. 297.

[27]Gest, p. 626.

artistic strokes in The Ring and the Book."[28] Cook recognizes "brilliant wit" and "keen analysis" in the lawyers' monologues, and he would no more do away with their speeches than he would skip the Falstaff scenes in Henry IV.[29] The "delicious irony" found in the defense and "the brilliancy of caricature," to use Cook's wording, add support to identifying the presence of satire. DeVane argues that Books VIII and IX provide the reader with necessary comic relief after the serious and searching monologues of Caponsacchi and Pompilia.[30] The humor in Browning is not always as obvious as in his depiction of the lawyers. Both wit and humor, which Northrop Frye considers essentials of satire, are present in their speeches; their words and actions make the object of attack--the law--vulnerable.

Hodell, the first translator of the Old Yellow Book, is kinder to Browning's treatment of Archangelis and Bottinius. He sees the actual lawyers in a somewhat different light than Gest. He lays the foundation for a claim that Browning's treatment of the lawyers is satirical, although he in no way acknowledges Browning as a satirist. Rather he emphasizes the prejudiced arguments of the

[28]Quoted in Drew, p. 297.

[29]Cook, p. 161.

[30]Wyant, p. 309.

lawyers, shrewdly sophisticated but untrue, filtering through the mind of the poet to transcend their reality and to become the caricatures of Browning's imagination. He excuses Browning's ironical wrath as just indignation with the "truth extracting process." The conventional institution of law was far removed from real justice and truth. "The ineptness, the heartlessness of the law, had indeed made the tragedy [the Roman murder case] all the darker."[31]

Satire against the law is found throughout The Ring and the Book. In Book I, Browning delivers his verdict on the efficacy of law when he says:

> And ignore law, the recognized machine,
> Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
> Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
> Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world?
> The patent truth-extracting process,--ha?
> (I.1102-1106)

Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid deal with law in the abstract; however, there is a continuous discussion of law "as the arbiter of human wrong."[32] All the commentary foreshadows the appearance of Archangelis and Bottinius. The subject of law prefigures the problem of perceiving truth in a world addicted to appearances and lies. The legal theme reaches a climax in the episodes

[31]Hodell, p. 252.

[32]Wyant, p. 310.

involving the lawyers.[33] Cook expresses their climactic importance in the following way; "had he omitted to tell us what the lawyers had to say, his design would have been imperfectly fulfilled; we should have had a cause célèbre with the cause left out."[34] To give visible, and thus more dramatic form to law, "law undergoes humanization in Books VIII and IX. Browning endows it with arms and legs, so to speak, and sets it walking."[35] Upon their unstable legs, "the two crafty lawyers conform with the artistic credo that truth cannot be told, only shown."[36]

For their separate and private imaginative audiences, Archangelis and Bottinius perform as actors in a burlesque. Worcester observes that "of all the types of satire, . . . burlesque offers the greatest freedom to the artist and exacts the most from him in terms of creative invention. Burlesque is imitative, yet the imitation goes no deeper than the surface and form. Once an affinity with the model has been established, the more extravagant and ludicrous the action the better the public is pleased."[37] Browning exhibits extremely effective use of his imaginative powers in his burlesque of the lawyers.

[33]Ibid., p. 311.

[34]Cook, p. 162.

[35]Wyant, p. 316.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Worcester, p. 49.

Although his argument is based upon the facts of the Old Yellow Book, Archangelis modifies the facts, juxtaposes the facts, exaggerates the facts, and twists the facts to his own purposes. Any method of bending truth to substantiate his case is legally acceptable; therefore, he may twist Scripture out of context, he may distort any sacred story from the Bible, he may prove his point by any corrupt interpretation of pagan mythology, or he may resort to any real or imagined precedent of legal authority. In the legal proceedings, Browning's satire directed against reliance on facts and the human inability to interpret facts continues. The process of rationalization undergoes increasing ridicule. Both Archangelis and Bottinius, however, deal more in opinion than in fact.[38] This implies that Browning is not only satirizing fact but also a prejudiced view of fact.

In his preliminary portrait of Archangelis in Book I, Browning gives a sketch of Guido's lawyer that would do justice to Chaucer. His two chief attributes are domesticated sensuality and unimaginative professionalism.[39]

> The jolly learned man of middle age,
> Cheeks and jowl all in laps with fat
> and law,
> Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts
> use,

[38]Sullivan, p. 119.

[39]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 152.

> Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
> Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
> Still captive in those dear domestic ties!
>
> (I.1123-1128)

The initial picture of Archangelis is a refreshing contrast to the grim atmosphere of the poem and the tragic theme.[40] A man of laughter, a man of learning, a man capable of resisting "the name and fame that tempt our flesh," he is the epitome of the Victorian concept of domesticity. His devotion to the "hearth" compares favorably with the simple domestic pleasures of Victorian England. By implication, Archangelis follows the virtuous pattern of Browning's exemplars, Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort.[41] Nevertheless, the seeds of satire take root from these lines. Later, for example, "Archangelis seems to lampoon many domestic Victorian virtues along with the law."[42]

Additional descriptive lines show Archangelis in physical action as the rough draft of his case for Guido takes form amid many voluntary interruptions. The "birthday-banquet for his only son," Giacinto, planned for the night, occupies much of his attention. Little

[40]Altick and Loucks, p. 61.

[41]Dorothy Marshall, Victoria (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 77.

[42]Honan, "The Murder Poem for Elizabeth," p. 223.

curly-headed Giacinto, not mentioned in the Old Yellow Book, is a figment of Browning's imagination,[43] and has the obvious function of permitting Browning to depict Archangelis as a loving father. He brings himself to his task of preparing a defense for Guido reluctantly. There is a conflict between Archangelis's basic lack of interest in Guido's case and "his desire to shine in court for the sake of his son."[44]

> The birthday-banquet for the only son--
> Paternity at smiling strife with law--
> How he brings both to buckle in one
> bond;
> And, thick at throat, with waterish
> under-eye,
> Turns to his task and settles in his
> seat
> And puts his utmost means to practice
> now:
> Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin
> forth,
> And, just as though 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.
>
> (I.1137-1151)

In contrast to the mob-scene setting of Half-Rome and the Other Half-Rome, Archangelis's monologue takes place

[43]Gest, p. 45.

[44]Sullivan, p. 105.

in the privacy of his own home. His imagination, therefore, peoples the small study with an appreciative audience, as he prepares his rough notes for the written argument to be submitted soon to the court for the trial proper. The time is a blustery, rainy day in late January several weeks after the death of Pompilia.[45]

Archangelis has a nervous temperament, apparent in his habitual physical movements, his short ejaculatory sentences, his parenthetic asides, and his flitting attention to Guido's case. His primary interests, home and Latin, claim more of his attention than law; consequently, he is never able to concentrate on the case completely for any great length of time. In this connection, Honan remarks: "All possible distraction that can beset a mind, as it approaches a stated task, and later continues to beset it as the task is haltingly accomplished, are recorded by a mini-camera and sound-track positioned inside blubbery Archangelis's mouse-sized brain--which at last produces a mountainous brief for Guido that is nine-tenth rhetoric and one-tenth sheer viciousness."[46]

To a degree, Gest corroborates this picture of Archangelis by attacking the lawyers as "pompous asses." He defends the actual lawyers of the Old Yellow Book, however,

[45]Ibid., p. 102.

[46]Honan, "The Murder Poem for Elizabeth," p. 223.

as "experienced men, learned in their profession, and of high standing."[47] He recognizes that real professional skill is being satirized and condemns Browning for his contemptuous ridicule of them. Archangelis is the poet's most superb caricature.[48] Contrary to the opinion of Gest and Honan, Cohen thinks Archangelis makes an eloquent pleading.[49] The very absurdity of the case entails shrewd handling of material. Altick and Loucks give him credit for agile and cunning "rhetorical escapes" in spite of the comedy of his impossible case.[50] They defend the skill of Archangelis and Bottinius by saying: "The lawyers are not mere buffoons as most critics, following Browning's own misleading term, have considered them."[51]

The satire inherent in the characterization of Archangelis is complex in that the strands are not easily separated. Great irony is evident in the emphasis "which Archangelis places on home and fatherhood as he prepares to defend Guido Franceschini, the wife-murderer and callously indifferent father."[52] Archangelis's attitude toward

[47]Gest, p. 44.

[48]Wyant, p. 316.

[49]Cohen, p. 121.

[50]Altick and Loucks, p. 162.

[51]Ibid., p. 152.

[52]Sullivan, p. 103.

Giacinto is totally different from Guido's attitude toward his infant son, Gaetano. Equally callous is Archangelis's joy in the good luck that the murder brings to him. Ironically, the opportunity will help advance Giacinto's future.

The tranquility and love of home life demonstrated by Archangelis becomes even more ironic when one considers that this domesticity is purchased through murder and a wrecked home. In addition he attributes to God his stroke of good luck. God favors him by giving him a murderer to defend.

> Now, how good God is! How falls plumb
> to point
> This murder, gives me Guido to defend
> Now, of all days i' the year, just when
> the boy
> Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
> For some such illustration from his sire,
> Stimulus to himself! One might wait
> years
> And never find the chance which now finds
> me!
> The fact is, there's a blessing on the
> hearth,
> A special providence for fatherhood!
> Here's a man, and what's more, a noble,
> kills
> --Not sneakingly but almost with parade--
> Wife's father and wife's mother and
> wife's self
> That's mother's self of son and heir
> (like mine!)
> --And here stand I, the favored
> advocate,
> . . . . . .
> Pray God, I keep me humble: not to me--
> Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus!
> (Praise not to us, Master, but to you!)
> (VIII.73-86;91-92)

Satire on Victorian home life blends with satire on pride, on humility, on pedantry, and on the nature of God. Thus, God is "good" by promoting a triple murder to bless a domestic "hearth." Archangelis sees the opportunity to defend Guido as an opportunity to enhance himself in the eyes of Giacinto and to provide a "stimulus" to future achievement for his son. Ironically, the proud Archangelis prays God to keep him humble for the blessings of three murders. "The favored advocate" bestows praise not on a God beneficent to all but to one who promotes evil for the benefit of a legal practitioner, such as he. Not only has God been so good as to send him a nobleman to defend, but also the case will be heard at the time of the coming festival,[53] an added bonus.

> Carnival-time,--another providence!
> The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
> To edify, to give one's name and fame
> In charge of, till they find, some
> future day,
> Cintino come and claim it, his name
> too,
> Pledge of the pleasantness they owe
> papa.
>
> (VIII.280-285)

There is incongruity, native to satire and the grotesque, in linking murder with a holiday celebration, with the beneficence of God, and with personal edification.

[53]R. T. Flewelling, "The Ring and the Book," The Personalist, 2 (October 1921), 220.

The rare opportunity to display his skill before "applausive Rome" advances Archangelis's self-esteem. "He is pleased with himself, with his son, and even with God, and in no doubt that God is pleased with him."[54] Linked to pride is the very noticeable satire on Archangelis's pedantry. Almost from the beginning of his monologue his avid interest in Latin is presented by Browning in exaggerated terms. Giacinto is precocious in Latin. Archangelis is more interested in Giacinto's Latin than he is in the case of Guido.

Although he is not enthusiastic about his profession, Archangelis livens up his case for Guido with Latin quotations. Over half of his speech is an experimentation with Latin.[55] "Approximately one verse in five of Archangelis contains some Latin, 61 verses are entirely in Latin, . . ."[56] His use of Latin is a form of self-praise. Greater than his obsession with his son or his delight in food is his absorption with Latin. He plays with the newly coined epigram and the clever witticism. He is especially gleeful over discovering an error in grammar: "In monasterio! He mismanages / In with the ablative, the accusative!" (VIII.952-953).

[54]Sullivan, p. 108.

[55]Ibid., p. 106.

[56]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 222.

In spite of his obsession with Latin, it does not flow easily for him. Honan sees the gaps in the Latin as an interruption to concentration on Latin itself because he is consciously building up a social face for himself. He magnifies his pedantry as he admires the imagined effect his scholarly knowledge of Latin will have on Judge Tommati. Honan sees Archangelis's legal language with its alternating combination of English and Latin as representing his outward professional face toward the world. Unfortunately for Guido's ultimate fate, Archangelis is more concerned with the glorification of himself than saving the neck of Guido.[57]

Archangelis seizes upon Latin as a puzzle, sometimes experimenting with five different Latin versions of the same thing. For example, much time passes as he tries five different Latin versions of "Count Guido marries" to hit upon the one most suitable to his self-esteem. Imagine Archangelis as he experiments. "Duxit in uxorem"? He questions the use of the literal ("He led into marriage") as being too "commonplace." What other phraseology will add to the picture of his professional competence? "Taedas Jugales iniit, subiit" ("He went under the yoke")? Or should he say, "Connubio stabili sibi junxit" ("He joined himself in a lasting marriage")?

Virgil represents for him the epitome of classical Latin scholarship, but, alas, he cannot become the Latin

[57]Ibid.

poet he no doubt could be if his legal profession did not take his time from poetry. He cannot even write the Latin poem he had promised himself he would write for Giacinto's birthday.

He returns to a fourth consideration of the Latin: "Nupserat, heu sinistris avibus" ("He had married, alas with evil omens"). A fifth attempt follows: "Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus, Pompiliae . . . ," ("Master Guido, born from noble birth, Pompilia . . .").

In another experimentation, Archangelis decides to admit that Guido carried a pistol, even though this is damaging to his case, because the Latin phrase for pistol carries all sorts of opportunities to display his scholarship.[58] In his rejection of simplicity, he seizes upon fantastic figures of speech, thrusts Pompilia and Guido into stock roles, and flatters his auditors in order to compensate for lack of logic. "His Latin represents the final, pieced-together, polished, comically grandiloquent Archangelis that the world is to see."[59]

To increase his stature as a Latin pedant, "No classical form is too florid for his uses; . . . no Latinate polysyllabic word or phrase is too outrageous for him."[60]

[58]Sullivan, p. 106.

[59]Honan, p. 224.

[60]Sullivan, p. 117.

In the course of his speech, he quotes or paraphrases Tarquin, Virgil, Persius, Mochus, Homer, Archimedes, Nero, Tacitus, Horace, Thucydides, Sophocles, Ovid, and Isocrates. The technique of magnification is basic to the satire on pedantry. Kernan says of this technique that "Inflation of self and the magnifying tendency which it expresses lie at the basis of some of the standard techniques of satire: high burlesque . . . render[s] in the largest terms the ludicrous pretensions to greatness and nobility of men completely lacking in these virtues."[61]

According to Hodell, no other character in the range of Browning's analysis of odd, twisted, or bad characters is comparable to Archangelis. Browning's method of depicting Archangelis makes his monologue an artistic mosaic in that segments of his character accurately reflect the historical Archangelis of the Old Yellow Book; "some large and important pieces are reproduced with absolute accuracy; but there is genuine art in their arrangement for the purpose of reproducing the effect of these lawyers upon Browning's own mind."[62]

The innuendoes in the Latin paraphrasing reflect artistry in selection and in juxtaposition, creating irony and humor. More importantly, the Latin sidelights color

[61]Kernan, The Plot of Satire, p. 37.

[62]Hodell, p. 272.

the character of the lawyer.[63] "The Latin is not invented by the author, but is taken almost entirely from the [Old Yellow] Book, and its presentation in Book VIII is perhaps part of the truth of the impression of the [Old Yellow] Book upon Browning's Latin taste. In it he holds up the ignorant stylistic arrogance of the [Old Yellow] Book to ridicule."[64] Cook does not consider a knowledge of Latin to be essential to grasping the humor of Book VIII. "Browning provides . . . a more or less literal translation; there is humour, it is true, in the translation which a Latinless reader may sometimes miss, but he will not miss it often."[65]

Hodell and Gest differ on the quality of Latin in the Old Yellow Book. Hodell found problems in translating the "barbarity of the syntax, idiom, and diction of the original. Certain Italian colloquialisms are shrouded in obscurity."[66] Gest admits the difficulty in reading the familiar, colloquial Latin, which was used by the lawyers, if one has read classical Latin only.[67] From those critics who slander the Latin, Gest defends the composition:

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid., p. 258.

[65]Cook, p. 163.

[66]Hodell, p. 4.

[67]Gest, p. 35.

"Analysis of argument will show that the sentences, although long and often parenthetical, are logical in structure--products of acute, well-trained minds, often driven at high pressure, and intent rather upon the matter to be presented than the manner of its presentation. Browning's sneers at the Latinity of the Old Yellow Book are undeserved."[68] Mrs. Marion T. Lumpkin, a Latin scholar in Clarksville, Tennessee, who did a literal translation of the Latin in The Ring and the Book for this study, agrees with Gest that the Latin holds to a high standard of quality.

Those who agree with Hodell, Lewis, and Raymond as to the "barbarous Latin and the amorphous Italian" do more to substantiate the presence of satire in The Ring and the Book. Raymond acknowledges that "their [the lawyers'] crabbed forensic quibbles are . . . slightly enlivened by quaint Latin puns illustrating the humour of pedants."[69] Foreign languages, particularly Italian in an easy, conversational tone, are employed frequently by satirists.[70] Furthermore, Highet states that it is typical of burlesque to coin "a new language, hybridized from dignified Latin and colloquial Italian, called 'macaronic' after the coarse

[68]Ibid., p. 68.

[69]Raymond, p. 5.

[70]Highet, p. 51.

peasant dish."[71] Browning undoubtedly utilized the mixture in his parody.

The complex nature of satire develops around the caricature of Archangelis. He mentions fourteen times his delight in food.[72] As he prepares the rough draft of Guido's case, he intersperses his arguments with references to the forthcoming birthday feast.[73] Archangelis's characteristic gluttony is a target of satire. The lawyer never seems to stop talking about food. Archangelis "domesticates law"[74] by references to food, cooking, and eating. "This steady obsession also intrudes upon specific and ostensibly unrelated matters at hand: the law, Guido, Giacinto, the accomplices in the murder, abstract concepts--are all images in terms of the table."[75]

The satire on imagery which debases man to the level of animals is related to the satire on gluttony. "Archangelis dreams of eating some of the same animals used as an analogy to Pompilia--lamb, rabbit, fish, and pigeon."[76] Not only his gluttony but also his attitude toward law are thus revealed: "people, the law, Pompilia are significant to the advocate only as they are able to contribute to his

[71]Ibid., p. 104.

[72]Sullivan, p. 106.

[73]Snitslaar, p. 97.

[74]Wyant, p. 318.

[75]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 200.

[76]Ibid., p. 184.

own well-being and bodily satisfaction."[77] For him, "truth is merely a legal fiction to be used one way or another--so long as it helps to bring rich food to the table, 'for lambkins we must! . . . Feed me with food convenient for me! What / I' the world should a wise man require beyond?'"[78] Frequently the food imagery produces comedy in Archangelis's monologue. Unforgettable in his larynx are the "fritters deep down frying there" (I.1152).

Typically, Archangelis reverts to food as the rough draft of his defense of Guido Franceschini progresses:

> (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,
> And we want words.
> (VIII.1368-1377)

Davis sees Archangelis's slip of the tongue as epitomizing the distortion which is typical of his approach to the Franceschini case. In his fondness for food, Archangelis "unconsciously satirizes his own commitment to

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid.

the pursuit of truth by his undue concern for his stomach."[79] Ironically, "the pièce de résistance for Giacinto's birthday dinner will be lamb fry. The poem's imagery has firmly established Pompilia as the sacrificial lamb."[80]

Archangelis's dishonesty in professional matters infects his life at home. His greed for money is almost as great as his gluttony.[81] Although he disavows a desire for wealth, he nevertheless awaits the death of his father in greedy anticipation of the money that the old man may leave little Giacinto.[82] The possibility of food contributing to his father's death is mixed with hopeful speculations as to his will, as the satire on greed is reinforced:

> I doubt if dainties do the grandsire
> good:
> Last June he had a sort of strangling . . .
> bah!
> He's his own master, and his will is
> made.
> So, liver fizz, law flit, and Latin fly
> As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace!
> (VIII.118-122)

Browning's fictional Archangelis follows the pattern of the Archangelis of the Old Yellow Book in the matter of greed. The real lawyer wrote Cencini, the compiler of the

[79]Davis, p. 131.

[80]Altick and Loucks, p. 63.

[81]Davis, p. 129.

[82]Wyant, p. 316.

Old Yellow Book, that his reasons for defending Guido were purely pragmatic and that "the moral turpitude of a client does not matter when he [Archangelis] contracts a case, only the financial remuneration for services rendered."[83]

In preparing the rough draft for the defense of Guido, Archangelis is forced to conjecture about his opponent's arguments.[84] His task is to defend a murderer whose horrible crime already has been proven. His approach, he decides, will be by clever reasoning to get the least severe penalty for his client. His clever reasoning produces a parody that calls for all "the acuteness and vivacity of his genius."[85] Following the main line of argument Browning found in the Old Yellow Book, he develops honoris causa as the main reason for Guido's murderous deed. He pursues the argument that vindication of one's honor is justified by the laws of nature, man, and God. Since the legitimacy of the ends is not questioned, any means to the end is lawful.[86] The ironic humor in Book VIII owes much to "the way Archangelis blandly construes as deeds in defense of honor the sins of avarice,

[83]Ibid., p. 320.

[84]Altick and Loucks, p. 63.

[85]Snitslaar, p. 88.

[86]Altick and Loucks, p. 63.

cruelty, and blood lust."[87] He contends that all of Guido's actions, however reprehensible in themselves, are justified, because they were perpetuated to preserve his honor.[88]

Many of these arguments are found in the Old Yellow Book. "But Browning, a talented hand at intellectual comedy, improved on some and invented still others, with the result that Arcangeli cuts a ridiculous figure as he prepares Guido's defense against Bottini's anticipated attack. His personality is wholly comic. . . ."[89] Browning's making of Archangelis a buffoon and his prostitution of the law for his own purposes[90] aroused the ire of Gest.

In order to impress Judge Tammati, Archangelis marshals "an interminable array of precedents from ancient and modern Roman history, from the writings of the doctors of the church, and from the Old and New Testaments, to show that Guido's act should not be considered a crime."[91] Thus the satire on pedantry continues. He decides to follow the procedure of "ecclesiasticizing," "regularizing,"

[87]Ibid., p. 154.

[88]Wyant, p. 318.

[89]Altick and Loucks, p. 63.

[90]Wyant, p. 318.

[91]Sullivan, p. 110.

"emphasizing," "Latinizing," and "Ciceroizing," to paraphrase the outline from the poem (VIII.1730-1733). The quoting of Scripture as authority and the precedent of legal authority were the actual methods of the Old Yellow Book; however, the satire lies in the distortion, as Archangelis "is bound in his client's interest to represent Pompilia as one whose murder is not worth punishing."[92]

The first necessity is to "ecclesiasticize" one's argument. Archangelis is proud of his ability to reinterpret the divine message: ". . . I yield / The Lord His own again with usury,-- / A satisfaction, yea, to God Himself!" (VIII.1761-1763). His exaggerated self-esteem is satirized again as he "repeatedly and often humorously inverts Christian teachings, relying on surface resemblance between his 'texts' and the originals."[93] Misquotations and outright invention of scriptural passages serve as a rationale for honoris causa. For example, "That honor is a gift of God to man / Precious beyond compare" has no scriptural warrant. Although St. Peter urges "Honour all men . . . Honour the king" (I Peter 2:17), the word is used in a meaning wholly different.[94]

[92]Drew, "A Note on the Lawyers," p. 300.

[93]Altick and Loucks, p. 188.

[94]Ibid., p. 187.

Another example of deliberate misquoting follows:

> Our Lord Himself, made all 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!"
> (I will give my honor to no one.)
> (VIII.652-659)

The text Archangelis cites is not even in the New Testament. It is found in Isaiah 42:8: "I am the Lord: that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Here God is defending not honorem but gloriam. Neither Jesus nor honor is in the quotation Archangelis cites.[95]

Archangelis's paralleling of Guido to the suffering Christ produces a shocking blasphemy. The words of Christ are torn out of context to justify the very violence Christ deplored.[96] Archangelis adapts the words of Christ to Pompilia's alleged adultery: "Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests; / Praise you the impiety that follows, Fisc? / Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head?" (VIII.1293-1295).

This deliberate distortion of Scriptures for a preconceived end appears to have rationalism as its target.

[95]Ibid., p. 189.

[96]Ibid., p. 188.

"The rationalist had, at the least, to arrange some facts to fit his assumptions and employ a logical process of argument. An intuitionist could rely on an immediate vision of truth needing only to be announced with appropriate force."[97] Browning, the intuitionist, ridicules "a logical process of argument" by paradoxically using illogic. It is probable that the satire is directed against Higher Criticism, in which analysis of the Scriptures was based on a rational approach and involved historical and scientific dissection. The wrenching of the Scriptures out of their usual context perhaps reflects the upheaval of doubt that afflicted faith in Victorian England. God Himself is reduced to man, no longer free of sin, no longer a holy example.

A sample of Archangelis's specious reasoning will demonstrate his ridiculous case. He daydreams, wasting time on an impossible fantasy by regretting that Guido was foolish enough to confess; "otherwise he might have laid the crime at Caponsacchi's door."[98]

> When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
> To madness by his relegation, cast
> About him and contrived a remedy
> In murder: since opprobrium broke
> afresh,
> By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed
> sire,
> He it was quietly sought to smother up
> His shame and theirs together,--killed
> the three,

[97]Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 150.

[98]Flewelling, p. 220.

> And fled--(go seek him where you please
> to search)--
> Just at the time when Guido, touched by
> grace,
> Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
> Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
> "Neither do I condemn thee, go in
> peace!"
>
> (VIII.360-371)

Again the blasphemous comparison of Guido to Christ appears in a misapplication of Scriptures. Pompilia is here the woman caught in adultery, whom Christ commanded to go and sin no more. Satire upon the empty forms of religious ceremony is evident in Guido's delay in performing the murders while he attends devotions and the Feast of Nativity. "He was--why, where should Christian be?-- / Engaged in visiting his proper church, / The duty of us all at Christmas-time" (VIII.357-359). Guido's attendance at the Christmas service is an indictment of a Christianity in form only, which hides the most despicable evil and apparently has no power to convict of sin nor to change the individual.

Concurrent with the interweavings of religious satire, manifested in scriptural distortion in showing outward forms of religion that are empty of spirit and power, is the satire on natural law. The satire on natural law is emphasized to a greater extent through Bottinius, but Archangelis cites the bees and the elephant as having their own code of honor. Bees wreak vengeance upon an adulteress.

> Why that displeasure of the bee to aught
> Which savors of incontinency, makes
> The unchaste a very horror to the hive?
> (VIII.485-487)

He then refers to the story of the elephant:

> That Aelian cites, the noble elephant,
> (Or if not Aelian, somebody as sage)
> Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
> His master's friend exceed in courtesy
> The due allowance to his master's wife,
> Taught them good manners and killed both at once.
> (VIII.504-509)

Continually drawing on the animal world, Browning, the satirist, reduces man by the device of a visual caricature.[99] In addition, the allegorical story of the elephant partakes of the nature of high burlesque in that there is an implication that the nature of the beast is higher than that of man. Animal stories often serve allegorically as satire on man.[100] Man must follow his natural instincts as do the bees and elephants. The only answer for the nobility, to which class Guido belongs, is the return to "primitive revenge" as the "natural privilege of man."[101] Although a representative of law, Archangelis spurns any help from law, thus heaping satire on law's ineffectiveness. "Si propriis manibus" ("If they do not undertake [the deed] with their own hands"), "non sumunt,"

[99]Hodgart, p. 118.

[100]Leyburn, p. 57.

[101]Altick and Loucks, p. 158.

("they do not take vengeance") (VIII.779-780). Browning satirizes blind instinct by repetitive passages. "The natural man may effervesce in ire" (VIII.678).

In the case of a dispute over a fence, law might intervene, but in the weightier matter of honoris causa, the nobleman must take the law into his own hands, thus becoming the instrument of a higher law. Browning's satire on civil law and natural law merges into an attack on both:

> . . . In a cause like this,
> So multiplied were reasons pro and con,
> Delicate, intertwisted and obscure,
> That Law refused loan of a finger-tip
> To unravel, readjust the hopeless twine.
> (VIII.765-769)

Although the major defense of Guido is honoris causa, Archangelis's specious reasoning produces comedy, as he imaginatively combats the six "aggravations" that add enormity to the crime and to the potential of Guido's punishment. For example, "(a) Aggravation IV dealt with the fact that the homicides were committed in the home of the Comparini [which] aggravates the crime, as everyone's home should be his safest refuge, (b) Especially as Guido entered with changed clothing so that the homicide was committed by strategem."[102] Archangelis uses the changing of garb to reduce the force of Aggravation IV. "He excuses Guido's disguise by comparing it to Paul's disguise in a dark cloak when he was let down the wall at

[102]Gest, p. 469.

Damascus."[103] He considers this a valid justification of Guido and says, "I shall not add a syllable" (VIII.1322). In his self-satisfaction at having presented a "logical" argument, he completely vindicates Guido by the illogical comparison.[104] Continuously, the fawning Archangelis makes an "attack on weak grounds and neglects the strong points."[105] The ridiculing of the lawyers adds greater emphasis to the attack on law.

As already seen in the other caricatures, "diction, imagery, rhythm, syntax--all may become characteristic of the speaker portrayed and, if employed with exceptional skill, may be used so that they help reveal him."[106] This is especially true of Archangelis. The far-fetched comparison, the stilted language, the absurd intermingling of Latin and English make the parody more ridiculous.[107] Phonetic quality of sound and explosive consonants suggest the obesity and energy of Archangelis.[108]

The reduction of man by analogy to the animal and insect world continuously degrades him. For example, Archangelis identifies Guido's four accomplices as fleas.

[103]Snitslaar, p. 103.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid., p. 99.

[106]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 81.

[107]Snitslaar, p. 110.

[108]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 269.

Guido is Tobit's dog, who hurrying from Rome after the murder is slowed down "by having to scratch the importunate fleas who insist on being paid."[109] Although he had lured them with the promise of money, "He spared them the pollution of the pay" (VIII.1610); thus, Guido's greed and deception are satirized.

Bottinius, the lawyer defending Pompilia, is more of a caricature than Archangelis.[110] The caricatures of Archangelis and Bottinius demonstrate a characteristic of satire noted by Hodgart: "It seems to be an essential of good satire that it possesses no single fixed style; it works by comparisons and contrasts and these demand an ever-changing mimicry."[111]

Although the two lawyers have many similarities, they contrast in temperament and in physique. Bottinius is "austere, deliberate, self-centered"; Archangelis is fun-loving and flippant, one who ends his monologue on the notes of a song. Archangelis plays a more sympathetic role as a loving father with a good nature and pride in domestic life than does Bottinius with his suspicious, mean nature. His arguments are presented in "an oblique, insinuating fashion, contrasting with Archangelis's assured manner."[113]

[109]Altick and Loucks, p. 238.

[110]DeVane, p. 334.

[111]Hodgart, p. 63.

[112]Cook, p. 179.

[113]Sullivan, p. 102.

Ironically, Bottinius believes Pompilia guilty of adultery; the belief "runs like a dark thread through his whole defense of her."[114] He has a deep-seated distrust for women, particularly for Pompilia.[115] Flewelling sees him as a professional dealer with crime who partakes of the atmosphere of the underworld. "He knows too much about the world because all he knows is bad. He has been on the watch for evil so long that he trusts nobody. He's as keen for dishonour in a man or looseness in a woman as a hound is for the rabbit's track. He naturally believes there are no honest men nor pure women."[116]

The real Bottinius of the Old Yellow Book admitted for the sake of argument far too much against Pompilia. Hodell voices the opinion that the anger of the poet rose against Bottinius for this reason. Cook prefers to think that it was "half-humored contempt" rather than "anger" that caused Browning to expose Bottinius in a supreme example of caricature. "It [the caricature] exposes real absurdities and abnormalities, exaggerating them with a true regard to what makes them abnormal and absurd."[117] Because Browning represents Pompilia as the incarnation of the pure

[114]Ibid., p. 118.

[115]Ibid., p. 102.

[116]Flewelling, p. 221.

[117]Cook, pp. 181-182.

woman, Snitslaar suggests that he may have been hostile toward Bottinius for the manner in which he defended Pompilia. For this reason, he may have been more malicious in his parody of Bottinius than in that of Archangelis.[118]

Since Bottinius can barely conceal his distaste for defending Pompilia, he devotes his energies to exhibiting his skill with words and his wide knowledge of classical literature. He, like Archangelis, is a target of satire on pedantry. In keeping with his grandiose notions, he intends to recreate Pompilia's story in the archetypes of myth and legend. Like Archangelis, he is willing to create "fictions which are parasites on actuality."[119] His particular forte is language.

The parody in Book IX has as its basis the caricature which Browning creates from the combination of Bottinius and Gambi, who as a team defended the Pompilia of the Old Yellow Book.[120] Browning introduces him in Book I:

> Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
> Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,
> To-morrow her persecutor,--composite, he,
> As becomes who must meet such various calls--
> Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth.
> A man of ready smile and facile tear,

[118]Snitslaar, p. 113.

[119]Armstrong, Reconsiderations, p. 186.

[120]Snitslaar, p. 114.

> Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
> And language--ah, the gift of eloquence!
> Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove,
> O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
> . . . . . .
> Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
> And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
> With sudden age, bright devastated hair.
> (I.1164-1173;1189-1191)

The setting is Bottinius's study several days after Archangelis's monologue. Bottinius, who is a conceited, self-centered pedant, is reading aloud the month-long investigation of Pompilia's case.[121] Unlike the rough draft of Archangelis, his written brief is in its final polished state. "Because in the Roman courts no allowance was made for personal confrontation, the lawyers [were] confined to written briefs."[122] However, he wishes he could present it before a live audience, and he directs his arguments to an imaginary audience of fifty judges, a crowd of Roman citizens, and the Pope himself. Carefully timing his speech and glorying in his eloquence,[123] Bottinius is vividly rendered by Browning as he practices:

> Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
> The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,

[121]Altick and Loucks, p. 218.

[122]Ibid., p. 170.

[123]Sullivan, p. 103.

> As, in his modest studio, all alone,
> The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives
> and strains,
> Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that
> would crow,
> Tries to his own self amorously o'er
> What never will be uttered else than
> so--
> Since to the four walls, Forum and
> Mars' Hill,
> Speaks out the poesy which, penned,
> turns prose.
>
> (I.1192-1200)

With the self-importance of a cocky rooster--to continue Browning's image--Bottinius begins his case with the assumption that Pompilia is a typical woman, indiscreet, deceitful, and unfaithful to Guido. His whole defense of her actions must lie on the concept that "the end justifies the means." Because of the tyranny of Guido, anything she did to escape him was excusable.[124]

Bottinius, like Archangelis and the Other Half-Rome, lapses into periods of fantasy. In the beginning of his monologue, he indulges in the fancy of an artist working on a painting of the Flight into Egypt. Bottinius imagines the artist combining the art of the lapidary and the painter as he portrays Pompilia, the infant Gaetano, and Caponsacchi as the fleeing Holy Family. In the sensuous manner of the Renaissance painters, he imagines himself as artist transforming Pompilia into a "voluptuous Italian peasant girl."[125] "Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous" (IX.53)

[124]Ibid., p. 111.

[125]Altick and Loucks, p. 218.

establish Pompilia as a sex image. Continuing the fancy, Bottinius becomes the artist painting a pen portrait of Pompilia. He dispenses with the family and concentrates on Pompilia, giving his reasons parenthetically: (". . . I leave the family as unmanageable, / And stick to just one portrait, but life-size") (IX.163-164). As in the role of imaginary artist, Bottinius now uses the lapidary art figuratively to define Pompilia's character; "she embodies the ambiguity as well as the loveliness of the opal (both she and the jewel are the more desirable for their apparent impurities). Like the lapidary, Bottini will use his skill to reveal the subsurface flashes of natural desire beneath the apparent whiteness of her chastity."[126]

In the preliminary artistic sketches, Davis, as well as Altick and Loucks, sees indirect satire. Davis sees Bottinius as a legalistic Pre-Raphaelite, and in the extended metaphor of a painter, "the Pre-Raphaelite penchant for detail is mocked."[127] Another interpretation of the "ludicrous extravagance" of artistic detail is given by Altick and Loucks. They believe "that Browning is here indulging in self-parody," as the poet is capable of expressing serious ideas in a comic or burlesque manner.[128]

[126]Ibid., p. 170.

[127]Davis, p. 151.

[128]Altick and Loucks, p. 23.

Having painted, ironically, an encomiastic portrait of Pompilia, Bottinius implies that he proposes to work on the grand scale. Throughout The Ring and the Book, there are indications of satire on the epic form. Bottinius announces: "A great theme: may my strength be adequate!" (IX.190), and almost immediately he plunges in medias res with the marriage. "I dare the epic plunge-- / Begin at once with marriage" (IX.216-217). He claims also the right to retrogress to any previous action for the necessary completion of his portrait of Pompilia. Later, however, perhaps the epic breaks down into a pastoral idyll with the romantic imagery of Caponsacchi and Pompilia as a shepherd and a shepherdess in the controversial love letters.[129] "He is Myrtillus, Amaryllis she" (IX.538).

After having presented the tragic events in trappings of the epic, Bottinius, in his oratorical defense, rests his case primarily on "the assumption that the natural instinct for self-preservation justifies any deed (dicaeologia: Excuse through dire necessity)."[130] It is natural law, providing a continuing thread of satire in The Ring and the Book, that receives its measure of satire through Bottinius's so-called defense of Pompilia's innocence. Sexuality is harmless because it is natural.

[129]Ibid., p. 169.

[130]Ibid., p. 176.

Pompilia's actions are innocent because she acted instinctively.[131] To her, adulterous love is only a means to an end.[132]

Pompilia's natural endowments are beauty and woman's wiles:

> O' the weaker sex, my lords, the weaker sex!
> To whom, the Teian teaches us, for gift,
> 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 melting wiles, deliciousest deceits,
> The whole redoubted armory of love?
> (IX.224-231)

Bottinius cannot conceive that Pompilia is good and acted without feminine wiles; therefore, his case is an elaborate web of supposition.[133] The supposition follows a similar pattern of sentence construction to bring up various accusations against Pompilia. The introductory sentence begins with an "if" clause, followed by a deprecatory denial of the truth of the "if" clause. Then Bottinius constructs an elaborate and magnified defense of how the charge might be answered if it were true. For example, it is alleged that Caponsacchi visits Pompilia at night. "Nocturnal entertainment in the dim / Old

[131]Armstrong, Reconsiderations, p. 191.

[132]Altick and Loucks, p. 176.

[133]Dornberg, p. 191.

labyrinthine palace; lies we know--" (IX.557-558). Bottinius offers none of the proof that Caponsacchi could not have been present, but imagines how the night could have been spent if he were there.[134] Through his imaginary re-creation and dramatization of the alleged incident, he strengthens rather than refutes the charge.[135] Bottinius imagines that because Pompilia's deceit was dedicated to a high cause [her escape from Guido], she was honor bound to prepay Caponsacchi for future services by "nocturnal entertainment" and "midnight meetings."[136] Furthermore, Pompilia is not chary of her charms.

> The lady, foes allege, put forth each charm
> And proper floweret of feminity
> To whosoever had a nose to smell
> Or breast to deck: what if the charge be true?
> 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.297-305)

Browning has Bottinius say "foes allege," but it is clear Bottinius believes it himself. He admits far too much and "practically accuses Pompilia of bestowing her womanly favours on any first comer!"[137] Pompilia is faithful to her

[134]Sullivan, p. 111.

[135]Ibid., p. 112.

[136]Altick and Loucks, p. 176.

nature. For this reason, "the apparent sin [of wholesale adultery], when carefully scrutinized, is really virtue misinterpreted."[138] When Pompilia entertained the men of the town, Guido should have recognized that his wife was simply being a good hostess, the proper wife for a nobleman. Bottinius heaps blame on Guido for misconstruing "such bounty in a wife."[139] Those who drink from the same "chalice" are presented (and thus reduced) in terms of imagery drawn from the insect world:

> 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?
> One chalice entertained the company.
> (IX.310-314)

Why should the husband complain since his wife's charms are not diminished by "each stranger's bite"?[140] The master will never miss the charms bestowed on others. Bottinius argues that Pompilia would be unnatural if she made no use of woman's proper endowments.[141] He attributes

[138]Altick and Loucks, p. 173.

[139]Ibid.

[140]Sullivan, p. 114.

[141]Altick and Loucks, p. 171.

all of her alleged wantonness to her obeying what he deems to be natural law for her sex.[142]

> "Nor teeth, nor horns, but beauty,
> Nature gave!"
> Pretty i' the Pagan! Who dares blame
> the use
> Of armory thus allowed for natural,--
> . . . . . .
> . . . Grant she somewhat plied
> Arts that allure, the magic nod and
> wink,
> The witchery of gesture, spell of word,
> Whereby the likelier to enlist this friend,
> [Caponsacchi]
> Yea stranger, as a champion on her side?
> Such man, being but mere man, ('twas all
> she knew).
> (IX.427-429;433-438)

Since Bottinius's suspicious mind is unable to accept Pompilia's innocence, his defense of her is far more harmful to her than any argument of Archangelis. He is condescendingly amused at "woman's weakness." He asks the court to recognize "that Pompilia acted only as women have always acted with deceit and wiles to gain her own way."[143]

In pursuing the classical method of <u>paramolgia</u> (concession to gain an unforeseen advantage), Bottinius uses other terms similar to <u>if</u>: <u>concede</u>, <u>grant</u>, <u>admit</u>, <u>suppose</u>.[144] Thus the satire on natural law gains increasing emphasis through repetition in a variety of forms of diction.

[142]Ibid., p. 342.

[143]Sullivan, p. 113.

[144]Ibid., p. 112.

"Concede we there was reason in his wrong, / Grant we his grievance and content the man!" (IX.327-328).

In her wantonness, Pompilia becomes more fastidious. She renounces "bounty" in favor of discrimination. "She laudable sees all, / Searches the best out and selects the same" (IX.335-336). That the man is a well-favored priest is a tribute to her taste in men.[145] He is "Well-born, of culture, young and vigorous" (IX.350).

Although Bottinius's arguments in defense of Pompilia heavily lean toward the natural use of sex, he defends her on other charges. For example, her need for money for the journey brands her as a thief as well. Cook calls Bottinius's argument for Pompilia's theft "a fair burlesque."[146] This argument was not actually used by the Bottinius of the Old Yellow Book, but a list of stolen articles is given in the sentence of the Criminal Court of Florence.[147] That she helped herself to money from "her husband's store" brands her as a thief:

> Money, sweet Sirs! And were the fiction fact,
> She helped herself thereto with liberal hand
> From out her husband's store,--what fitter use
> Was ever husband's money destined to?

[145]Altick and Loucks, p. 174.

[146]Cook, p. 189.

[147]Snitslaar, p. 133.

> With bag and baggage thus did Dido once
> Decamp,--for more authority, a queen!
> (IX.648-653)

Altick and Loucks see the climax in Bottinius's case for Pompilia in what they call "the most audacious sexual scene in Victorian literature. Only a poet confident of his reputation for unintelligibility would have dared print such lines."[148] The lines give the account of the arrival of the fugitives at the inn at Castelnuovo:

> Ah, Nature--baffled she recurs, alas!
> Nature imperiously exacts her due,
> Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak:
> Pompilia needs must acquiesce and swoon,
> Give hopes alike and fears a breathing-
> while.
> The innocent sleep soundly: sound she
> sleeps,
> So let her slumber, then, unguarded save
> By her own chastity, a triple mail,
> And his good hand whose stalwart arms
> have borne
> The sweet and senseless burden like a
> babe
> From coach to coach,--the serviceable
> strength!
> Nay, what and if he gazed rewardedly
> On the pale beauty prisoned in embrace,
> Stooped over, stole a balmy breath
> perhaps
> For more assurance sleep was not
> decease--
> "Ut vidi," "how I saw!" succeeded by
> "Ut perii," "how I sudden lost my brains!"
> --What harm ensued to her unconscious
> quite?
> For, curiosity--how natural!
> (IX.727-745)

[148]Altick and Loucks, p. 180.

Caponsacchi, seducing Pompilia while she slept, only gave way to nature[149] under the auspices of distorted Scripture. "Love was the only thing she [Pompilia] could offer, to entice the man to undertake such a dangerous enterprise for her sake; and this offer was very convenient for the young priest, who thus broke his vows, not for his own lust, but for pity's sake."[150]

> . . .--the lady here
> Was bound to proffer nothing short of love
> To the priest whose service was to save
> her.
>
> (IX.507-509)

Until the very end of the monologue, Bottinius continues the supposition, the denial, and the more protracted, fanciful explanation of what could have taken place until the denial is forgotten in the contemplation of the presumed misconduct.

Hodell states that Caponsacchi's kissing the unconscious Pompilia, her receiving of clandestine visits from Caponsacchi after the return to Rome, and the lie in the very hour of death to save her paramour and to destroy her husband (all of which are suggested by Bottinius) are a falsification of Bottinius as found in the Old Yellow Book. The Bottinius of the Old Yellow Book based his attack upon the brutal and illegal aggravations of the murders. The venomous depiction of Bottinius in The Ring and the Book

[149]Armstrong, Reconsiderations, p. 191.

[150]Snitslaar, p. 130.

reflects Browning's reaction to the historical Bottinius of the Old Yellow Book, his reaction "against professional pride and the utter moral and religious obtuseness of Bottinius."[151]

Not only was it alleged that Caponsacchi enjoyed "nocturnal visits" to the castle prior to the journey to Rome, but also that Caponsacchi visited the Comparini household to see Pompilia when her parents' home became her prison and Caponsacchi was sentenced to three years exile to Civita Vecchia. Bottinius speculates on this possibility:

> . . . 'Tis said,
> When nights are lone and company is rare,
> His visitations brighten winter up.
> If so they did--which nowise I believe--
> (How can I?--proof abounding that the
> priest,
> Once fairly at his relegation-place,
> Never once left it), still, admit he
> stole
> A midnight march, would fain see friend
> again,
> Find matter for instruction in the past,
> Renew the old adventure in such chat
> As cheers a fireside! He was lonely too,
> . . . . . .
> "Little by little break a habit, Don,
> Become necessity to feeble flesh!"
> And thus, nocturnal taste of intercourse
> (Which never happened,--but, suppose it
> did)
> May have been used to dishabituate
> By sip and sip this drainer to the dregs
> O' the draught of conversation.
> (IX.1240-1250;1265-1271)

[151]Hodell, p. 273.

The debasement of Pompilia's character through alleged sexual promiscuity is connected continuously with patterns of metaphor and scriptural distortion. There is a recurrence of the image of jewel or pearl lost in the mud. She was never a "milk-white" pearl but one "suffused / With here and there a tint and hint of flame,-- / Desire,--the lapidary loves to find" (IX.204-206). The precious stone is linked with discoloration, dust, and rubbish.[152] "Grime is grace / To whoso gropes amid the dung for gold" (IX.549-550). In addition, the debasing colors black and blue suggest despoiling. "The white dove has been besmirched."[153]

One metaphor of animal imagery pictures a conflict of brute strength between Guido and Pompilia. Pompilia is a recalcitrant heifer that needs subduing:

> . . . 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.
> (IX.250-254)

Satire inherent in the social structure emerges from the heifer metaphor. The culture recognizes the right of the husband to subdue his wife to his own whims through his own natural superiority.

[152]Sullivan, p. 114.

[153]Ibid., p. 115.

Although Bottinius continuously degrades Pompilia's character through the distortion and revision of scriptural passages,[154] he is more at home in the world of myth and god.[155] "Whereas Arcangeli uses biblical citation chiefly as authority for his arguments, Bottini chooses them for their descriptive power, heightening by the sensual overtones."[156] Pompilia is classed with Mary Magdalene in the company of fallen women. Bottinius builds "an elaborate casuistical argument by depicting Pompilia as a Magdalene, a sinner saint (that is 'Who sinned not even where she may have sinned' (IX.1479) because her sins were committed in good cause."[157] She is a saint contrasted with Guido even though "Souls washed white / But red once, still show pinkish to the eye!" (IX.1489-1490).

Bottinius selects two passages from I Samuel 16 and II Samuel 6 that in no way mention seduction and rewrites the passages to afford precedent for Caponsacchi's alleged misconduct. "If wooing another man's wife while he was away shearing sheep was not reprehensible in David, why should it be so in Caponsacchis, also a man of God, who called while Guido was absent tending his vineyard at

[154]Altick and Loucks, p. 154.

[155]Sullivan, p. 118.

[156]Altick and Loucks, p. 193.

[157]Ibid., p. 168.

Vittiano?"[158] Probably the most flagrant degradation of the scriptures relates the Virgin birth to the birth of Pompilia's child. Parthenogenesis made it possible for Pompilia, the Virgin Mary's analogue, to conceive a child without a father:

> Spontaneous generation, need I prove
> Were facile feat to Nature at a
> pinch?
> Let whoso doubts, steep horsehair
> certain weeks,
> In water, there will be produced a
> snake.
>
> (IX.1342-1345)

The snake imagery, used several times in The Ring and the Book as applicable to Pompilia, adds to the subversion of innocence by satanic imagery. Bottinius treats the idea of parthenogenesis with ridicule. "Thanks to the lucky circumstance that a horse appears on the municipal arms of Arezzo and with the aid of a pun on 'conception,' he [Bottinius] manages to suggest that the whole town may have participated in fathering Pompilia's child."[159]

Distortion of the Scriptures and fanciful rewriting of Scriptures are a blasphemous treatment that naturally leads into additional satire on Higher Criticism. Bottinus manipulates the Scriptures to add authority to the picture of Pompilia as he sees her. In this connection an attack

[158]Ibid., p. 194.

[159]Ibid., p. 314.

against the misuse of classical composition may be seen in Bottinus's ironically following the advice of Aristotle: "The narration should depict character to which end you must know what makes it so."[160] Furthermore, error in Higher Criticism is implied in that a critical analysis of secular literature results in biased conclusions in keeping with the bias of the critic.

In addition to criticism of the church through the blasphemous distortion of Scriptures, Bottinius exposes both the church and state as guilty of sins of omission. Ecclesiastical and governmental officials meant well but never fulfilled the promise of their institutions:

> Just so, the Governor and all that's great
> I' the city, never meant that Innocence
> Should quite starve while Authority sat at meat;
> They meant to fling a bone at banquet's end:
> Wished well to our Pompilia--in their dreams,
> Nor bore the secular sword in vain--asleep.
> Just so the Archbishop and all good like him
> Went to bed meaning to pour oil and wine
> I' the wounds of her, next day.
> (IX.1102-1110)

The apathy of the church and state reveals an indifference to human suffering. Languishing in selfish ease, the officials forget the pricks of conscience in sleep, in feasting, and in procrastination.

[160]Ibid., p. 164.

As is true of caricatures, diction contributes to satire. Bottinius's diction increases the impact of the satire on vanity and pedantry. Through the use of archaic terms, he displays a knowledge of ancient literature and a respect for antiquity. In addition, the sprinkling of archaisms keeps him from having to come to terms with the present and ironically distorts his present judgment. His diction is artificial and forced, and "his absurd figures reveal his pomposity and superficiality."[161] The tone, frequently coarse and brutal, suggests the coarseness and brutality of the speaker. The artistry of Browning's composition reflects character.

Satire on the unprincipled Bottinius is further developed in his anger at Fra Angelico Celestino's sermon wherein he has testified to Pompilia's purity by discrediting law. Bottinius takes it as a personal affront and vows to get even by changing sides. Ironically, the Convertites, who have previously befriended Pompilia, will strive through a lawsuit to prove her adulterous so as to gain the inheritance of her property at her death. Bottinius, filled with spite and personal grievance, has no compunction about changing sides to defend the rights of the Convertites. Soon after Pompilia's death, the Convertites file their claim to Pompilia's estate.[162] The

[161]Honan, Browning's Characters, p. 228.

[162]Cook, p. 224.

satire on the sisterhood is even more devastating than that on Bottinius. His unprincipled conduct is in keeping with his character, but the changing of sides by the Convertites destroys their image of Christian charity and benevolence. Their unchristian action in an attempt to reap material benefits enhances Browning's attack on greed. Even the church is susceptible to greed.

Ironically, Bottinius's petition to Mother Law increases his own self-deception as a minister of law: "Gently, O mother, judge men--whose mistake / Is in the mere misapprehensiveness!" (IX.1515-1516). The misapprehension of justice is truly a subject for satire in one who poses as a disciple of justice. Browning is especially gifted in unmasking characters. Feinberg considers "unintentional self-exposure" as an astute form of satire in that it exposes "the revelation of a defect by a person trying to conceal it."[163]

The travesty of the lawyers' mishandling of cases is a wholesale ridicule of law. Both Archangelis and Bottinius possess a common lawyer's mission to "teach our common sense its helplessness" (I.1099). Their pleadings are a "leash of quibbles strung to look like law!" (XII. 376). The defense of Archangelis "is, and is intended to

[163]Feinberg, Introduction to Satire, p. 212.

be, mere quibbling."[164] Bottinius's quibbling, intended to prove Pompilia's innocence, is "in every word a confession of her utter depravity."[165] Both complicate and damage the cases of their respective clients, Guido and Pompilia.[166] Drew clearly sees satire in Browning's depiction of the lawyers. They are not eccentric characters invented for the humor of their eccentricity: "On the contrary, they are to be read as satirical, and that in no superficial sense. It is hardly necessary to point out how consistently the law is scrutinized and condemned in the poem."[167] As early as 1898, Porter and Clarke in an "introductory Essay" to The Ring and the Book remarked: "There is not a more brilliant example of searching sarcasm in literature than in the portrayal of his brace of lawyers, hitting not only at these easily recognized types, but at the institution of law itself, as at present constituted."[168] Browning takes aim at the inhumanity of legal "lies," perversions of truth which are not actual untruths in The Ring and the Book.[169]

[164]Arthur Symons, An Introduction to the Study of Browning (1887; rpt. New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 142.

[165]Ibid.

[166]Altick and Loucks, p. 60.

[167]Drew, "A Note on the Lawyers," p. 302.

[168]Porter and Clarke, p. xxvi.

[169]Davis, p. 227.

Both lawyers use classical oratory. They follow the traditional and conventional tactics of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Briefly, their main arguments are classical in origin: "the end justifies the means; the use of concessions to stave off an argument; . . . the use of probabilities; . . . arguing without reaching a conclusion; . . . begging the question; reasoning from false, irrelevant, superadded, or suppressed premises, and the crafty construction of unnecessary embellishment of an argument to hide its true purpose."[170] Great English satirists, "like Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift, were thoroughly schooled in classical rhetoric."[171] Browning also was a student of classical rhetoric and knew its advantages in the presentation of satire.

In addition, both lawyers, particularly Bottinius, are the agents of Browning's satire on the perverted use of classical logic. Illogic results from misguided application of logic. They demonstrate a confusion of truth "in a maze of abstraction and verbal trickery."[172] Chesterton writes, "True satire is always, so to speak, a variation or fantasia upon the air of pure logic."[173] In

[170]Altick and Loucks, p. 153.

[171]Edward P. J. Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 328.

[172]Bullitt, p. 68.

[173]Ibid.

the cases of both lawyers, Browning applies the method of caricature to reason and to rhetoric "by adopting the lines of argument in the Old Yellow Book and then greatly inflating and extending them."[174]

A major subject of satire in the lawyers' monologues is natural law. The authority cited in support of natural law is debased, either in the form of animals or insects, which instinctively possess principles of conduct higher than man, or in the form of distorted Scriptures taken out of context and twisted to any preconceived end. There is an utter inability to comprehend the spiritual. Satire measures the gulf between the spiritual potential of man and man "in actuality," finding in this gulf "material for mockery."[175]

Both lawyers are filled with conceit and professional vanity and are thus appropriate targets of satire. For both, truth is less important than the opportunity to advance themselves. "In their different ways, they both use classical allusions, specious arguments, and outright lies, strained analogies, and grandiose rhetorical flourishes, and consider themselves creative artists in their chosen medium of words."[176] Both distort truth

[174]Altick and Loucks, p. 151.

[175]Davis, p. 89.

[176]Sullivan, p. 119.

through scriptural allusions and misquotation and contribute to the complex nature of religious satire in The Ring and the Book.

Throughout the self-parody of Archangelis and Bottinius, the satiric techniques of reduction and magnification recur; in addition, the pattern of confusion, which is less used by Browning, characterizes "the complete lack of common sense" that the lawyers demonstrate in their approach to the Franceschini trial in The Ring and the Book.[177]

Neither lawyer is able to dispel the charming innocence of Pompilia. In spite of "Bottinius's defiling touch . . . conveyed by the persistent linking of beauty with mud . . . ," he convicts himself of being incapable of recognizing her innocence and goodness. The result is an increased sympathy for Pompilia and a corresponding weakening of sympathy for Guido.[178]

The travesty of the court cases presented by Archangelis and Bottinius supplies the greatest evidence of satire in The Ring and the Book. The extravagant caricatures are alike in providing excellent examples of satire on vanity and pedantry. Archangelis embodies a satire on Victorian domestic life, on an ostentatious

[177]Davis, p. 112.

[178]Sullivan, p. 119.

display of Latin phraseology, on a lack of professional industry and perseverance, on a lack of compassion for the hurt and innocent, and on an egocentric idea of a God who deals capriciously with man, bestowing on him the gift of the murderer, Guido, to defend. His opponent, Bottinius, magnifies the satire on natural law through his portrait of Pompilia and his case in her defense. He can conceive of Pompilia in no way except as an example of guile and deceit and sexual promiscuity. Thus he continues a pattern of the Eve symbolism, portrayed earlier by Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, and Tertium Quid. Particularly he provides an example of satire on logic. Both lawyers, Archangelis and Bottinius, are Browning's instruments for conveying various facets of satire.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although Browning obviously had more important matters to satirize than the epic, The Ring and the Book poses a mocking contrast between the formal epic and the modified form that he uses in his poem. It approaches the epic in length and in formal divisions, providing a framework for his attack on society. Chesterton perhaps unwittingly contributed to the recognition of the presence of satire in The Ring and the Book when he called the poem "the great epic of the enormous importance of small things."[1] The fact that the subject matter is a sordid murder seems ridiculous when compared with the subject matter of a formal epic, wherein heroic deeds germane to the development of a nation are performed by a hero and his noble followers who personify the heroic ideal. The glorification of episodic adventures central to the historical development of a nation is in contrast to the glorification of a scandal connected with common people, a prostitute, and a degenerate family of the nobility. Instead of recounting noble deeds, the story in The Ring and the Book exposes the major sins that debase humanity.

[1]Chesterton, p. 163.

In the process, Browning paradoxically demonstrates the presence of spirituality in the midst of evil in an ugly story about commonalty. It is ironic that Browning uses a criminal trial to lead the reader to a vista of heaven and of infinite truth. He shows that great spiritual truths may emerge from the sordid as well as the heroic. Thus, there is implied satire of the formal epic in subject matter and in character.

In contrasting Browning's The Ring and the Book with the traditional epic, Chesterton calls attention to the importance of the reader's listening in Browning's poem; there are self-revelations found in Browning that require careful attention to comprehend. The monologuist in Browning's epic utters his inward thoughts in a colloquial style, antithetical to the elevated, formal style of a true epic. The message often comes through a distortion of grammatical form and syntax. Noticeably, for example, Archangelis and Bottinius with their specious arguments mockingly pervert the ordered logic of the speakers of the formal epic.

Browning made copious use of satirical devices in The Ring and the Book. In fact, it is the persistent use of these devices that eventually focuses the attention of the reader upon an awareness of the methods of satire that Browning uses in the poem. The basic techniques are reduction and magnification, and, to a lesser degree,

confusion, based upon a structure of polarities, or contrast. The contrast becomes clear through a variety of methods, including debasing forms of imagery, grotesque characterization and description, the complex manipulation of language and grammatical form, and the self-revelation of character. Rhetoric, irony, and the grotesque are Browning's most effective tools for rendering satire.

Because of the broad definitions of satire and the inability of writers on the subject to agree on a standard definition, it is easy to see satire in The Ring and the Book because of resemblances to accepted satire, because of the amorphous nature of satire, and because of a broad latitude in the scope of satire that permits a lack of conformity to any particular type. Through comparison with traditionally and historically accepted satires, the satire in The Ring and the Book seems established. Satire in the peom fits requirements according to such authorities as Frye, Kernan, Elliot, Feinberg, Highet, Hodgart, and Worcester.

In The Ring and the Book, plot, setting, and characterization contribute to satire. The plot follows a circular course, typical of satire. The setting (time and place) conforms to a traditional pattern for satire. Browning, as the satirist, objectively removed from the scene, applies his oblique artistry to a remote time and pretends to be solely concerned with problems long dead, but he rekindles the ashes of the murder case of the seventeenth century to

reveal contemporary problems of the nineteenth century and universal problems that defy the boundaries of time. The characters Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid, Archangelis, and Bottinius are all caricatures who spin their tales, motivated by various degrees of prejudice, to a real or imagined audience amid confusion and chaos. The distortion of caricature permits Browning to expose disproportionately the weakness of the individual and the group that the caricature symbolizes.

Not only are plot, setting, and character so ordered as to produce satire, but modern notions of structuralism, experience, empirical testing, and transformation also indirectly contribute to the uncovering of elements of satire within individual monologues and in their relationship one with the other. Browning attempts impartially to discover truth through emotional experiences by giving voices to his monologuists. The reader empirically tests the truth of each speaker through the unmasking of the speaker, which ultimately results in a moral judgment. Meaning becomes transformed as it passes through the distorted vision of caricatures.

The motivations that prompted Browning to write The Ring and the Book were evidently multiple and complex. That he accidentally made use of satire in the structure of The Ring and the Book is not plausible. The more one studies Browning, the easier it is to agree with Chesterton that

Browning did not write anything without a particular purpose in mind. Chesterton states this position cogently: "It is exceedingly dangerous to say that anything in Browning is irrelevant or unnecessary. We are apt to go on thinking so until some mere trifle puts the matter in a new light, and the detail that seemed meaningless springs up as almost the central pillar of the structure."[2] Through satire, the distortion of truth is a pillar of the structure.

A brief recalling of targets of satire in The Ring and the Book establishes the fact that major targets and minor targets appear periodically and episodically throughout the poem. In a pattern of interweaving, strands of prevailing satire follow a repetitive course that runs the gamut of the poem. The most dominant satire is directed against the law and the church. Intricately bound up with attacks on law and church are attacks on government, the golden mean, the status of women, social and political conventions, and favoritism toward the nobility. Among abstract qualities that Browning attacks are hypocrisy, greed, deception, deceit, pride, vanity, pedantry, selfishness, stupidity, cruelty, fantasy, sentimentality, and injustice. The humanized caricatures of the citizenry of the world and the lawyers expose the inability of man to perceive facts truthfully and realistically. Their distortion of factual knowledge through prejudice, sentimentality, or a sense of

[2]Ibid., p. 100.

class superiority dramatizes Browning's contention that only the artist may interpret facts so as to enable man to understand more clearly transcendent meaning.

Through his caricatures of the lawyers, Browning attacks specious reasoning, arguments of classical logic, deliberate and intentional complications, degradation of sex, natural law, Victorian domestic virtues, manipulation of logic to the perversion of truth for self-interest, procrastination, and fantasizing of issues. Through all the caricatures, Browning dramatizes mechanical forces in opposition to spiritual forces. Material considerations appear dominant, but they are actually superficial.

Many of the criticisms of society are universal and timeless, but Hodell confirms the idea that Browning's dramatization of the Rome of the late seventeenth century was done in part to call attention to existing conditions in the nineteenth century in England. Many of the evils portrayed in The Ring and the Book were not matters of concern as social injustice in the Rome of the seventeenth century. Worldliness in the church and marriages of convenience were accepted as norms of behavior. Man, as the superior, had a natural right to treat his wife as he chose, since she was his chattel. The culture of his day would have condoned the murder of an adulterous wife, and Guido would have escaped punishment if it had not been

for aggravating circumstances. Victorian society needed to be awakened to human rights, particularly to the rights of women.

The satire in The Ring and the Book is both direct and indirect. Indirectly, Browning reveals animosity toward a number of targets, including natural law, Higher Criticism, rationality, and utilitarianism. An understanding of these ideas is basic to an understanding of their significance as subjects of satire in The Ring and the Book. In connection with Browning's negative attitude toward natural law and natural morality, Armstrong observes that "all the characters except the Pope posit some kind of innate 'natural' morality to explain the case."[3] The absurdity of the "morality" of natural law is most effectively revealed in the arguments of Archangelis and Bottinius. Archangelis bases his case for natural law on "instinctual aggression," which vindicates through revenge. "The natural man may effervesce in ire" (VIII.678). On the other hand, Bottinius rests his case primarily upon the assumption that the natural instinct for self-preservation justifies any deed. He defends all of Pompilia's alleged misconduct on her obeying what he believes to be the natural law of her sex. Browning did not believe that what is "natural" is right and attacked a philosophy of the

[3]Armstrong, Reconsiderations, p. 190.

eighteenth century that was influencing the thinking of the nineteenth century.

The assumption that what is natural is right has a basis in rationality. It is intimately related to natural theology. Natural theology is only incidental in The Ring and the Book, but it adds to the discreditation of reason. One example of natural theology is Archangelis's formulation of God in his own image. Browning believed that intuition is superior to reason, and man's effort to discover God through rationality and empiricism is unacceptable to him. Paradoxically, the totality of illogical reasoning in The Ring and the Book is an attempt by Browning to expose rationality as an ineffectual means of arriving at truth.

Although Browning was not strictly traditional nor orthodox in his religious views, he could not accept Higher Criticism and its rationalistic interpretation of Christianity. For Browning, Christianity was a living experience. The essence of Christianity was love and man's adoption of love in the human heart and manifested toward humanity. Higher Criticism was too cold and too impersonal. In fact, Browning's method of structuring The Ring and the Book for the discovery of truth had an antecedent action in his bout with Higher Criticism in that "he had gathered (assembled) a massive collection of different Bibles, learned Hebrew, gathered thirteen works of Bible criticism;

all, one suspects, to try to filter out the pure white truth from these prismatic textual variants: a procedure very like that of the other great textual exploration, The Ring and the Book."[4]

The problems of contemporary England that Browning indirectly addresses in The Ring and the Book are partially the heritage of the eighteenth century, particularly rationalism, but they are also partially the result of tremendous advances in science, especially in biology and geology and theoretical sciences. The assault on faith was a very real problem for Browning. "Browning thought his way into a distrust of thinking. . . . He experienced within himself a desire for faith, a fascination in doubt, and human limitations which led to imperfection."[5] Ultimately, he chose faith, a faith that he believed in intuitively; therefore, he spurned the efforts of man to test faith rationally.

To discover truth, which was Browning's basic quest in writing The Ring and the Book, involved the search for truth in the midst of deceit, deception, half-truths, and prevarications. Ironically, recognizing its satire plays a major role in discovering the truth of The Ring and the

[4]Woolford, p. 109.

[5]Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, "A Tentative Apology for Robert Browning" in The Beginning Critics, ed. Boyd Litzinger and K. L. Knickerbocker (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 274.

Book and in discovering the truth of the major philosophic and religious beliefs of Browning. Browning employs empirical methods of testing truth through emotional experiences. Hodell recognizes that the quest for truth in The Ring and the Book is Browning's contribution to the facts of the Old Yellow Book. In the opinion of Hodell, "The [Old Yellow] Book is utterly lacking in an underlying moral truth--a dominant and formative motive. . . . The larger truth . . . the real meaning of the tragedy had to be supplied entirely by Browning. . . . And 'truth' is a master word throughout the poem to which each speaker returns with strong insistence. The philosophy of life's truth is one of the most important phases of thought behind the story and the characters of this poem."[6] Ascertaining truth by the method employed by Browning is precarious; however, it is true to life. Truth must be filtered through prejudices, circumstances, distortions, and disguises. Satire helps to produce Browning's effects. Browning has artistically rendered life through multiple versions of truth.

Because truth can never be wholly perceived by the finite mind, the ring is symbolic of a quest for truth that is unending. In the metallurgical process as applied to the metaphor of the ring, satire is the purifying agent in the acid that strengthens the gold and gives shape to the ring. Deception, a tool of the acid of satire, renders the

[6]Hodell, p. 231.

discovery of truth through a long series of discoveries--"piercings of illusion, discreditings of falsehood and resultant glimpses of truth."[7] Disillusionment, a product of the discovery of evil intermixed with good, produces comedy. The humor of Browning is frequently grotesque.

Knickerbocker recommends that "any reappraisal of Browning should be filled with quotations from and references to the poems themselves."[8] Quotations from the monologues of Half-Rome, the Other Half-Rome, Tertium Quid, Archangelis, and Bottinius point indisputably to satire covering a variety of targets. The acid of satire operates as an agency to free truth from the confining elements that cloud understanding. As nearly as the finite mind of the artist (in this instance, Browning) can perceive the truth and as nearly as his most discerning and intuitive characters (artistic creations, nearest to the ideal) can perceive it, the literal and metaphysical truth of The Ring and the Book becomes apparent through the satire.

[7]Altick and Loucks, p. 110.

[8]Knickerbocker, p. 267.

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