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CHARACTER ARCHETYPES IN THE RING AND THE
BOOK

VELMA SPURLIN CROSS

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES IN THE RING AND THE BOOK

An Abstract

Presented to

the Graduate Council of

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Velma Spurlin Cross

August, 1977

ABSTRACT

The Ring and the Book is based on an actual historical situation. However, through contrast of exemplary archetypal figures, Browning went beyond the historical surface of the story and delved into the complexity of human experience. He transformed the everyday persons in a real-life situation into extraordinary men and women who exemplify love and hate, bravery and cowardice, innocence and cruelty. And as a result of their associations with each other, Guido (Trickster), Caponsacchi (Soldier-Saint), Pompilia (Virgin Goddess-Earth Mother), and Pope Innocent XII (Wise Old Man) all achieve a new level of self-understanding.

Guido manipulates, destroys, ends up a victim of his own evil, and attains self-knowledge only at his death. Caponsacchi makes a choice for self-sacrifice and love and finds in his exercise of courage a new depth of life and a self-fulfillment he had not previously experienced.

The good and beautiful Pompilia encounters and overcomes evil because of the courage and love she finds in Caponsacchi. Similarly it is the transforming emotion of her own love and forgiveness which enables Caponsacchi to achieve transcendent being and saves Guido from complete degradation. Finally, Pope Innocent XII, already old and wise, finds new sources of hope for the future in Pompilia's unselfish love and Caponsacchi's intuitive courage. He learns to trust the instincts of the human heart as well as those of his mind.

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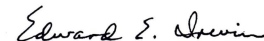
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Velma Spurlin Cross entitled "Character Archetypes in The Ring and the Book." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English,


Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the
Graduate Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Ring and the Book is based on an actual historical situation. However, Browning freely admits that his poem goes beyond the facts, beyond human testimony, for "Art remains the one way possible of speaking truth (XII, 843-44)." ¹ Mythologization allowed Browning to discuss history and psychology simultaneously and to show how inextricably bound are our disordered surface lives and the common mythological patterns at the roots of our existence.

Henri Talon notes, "Browning was guided by a vision of man's complexity as depicted in exemplary archetypal figures: the criminal, the hero, and the saint." ² However, by contrasting these archetypal figures, Browning went beyond the historical surface of the story and delved into the complexity of human experience.

His mythologization is aided through association with legends. Thus the characters are not so much historical individuals as they are projections of the dreams and thoughts of mankind. The great legends emerge over and over. Jung called them "archetypes of the collective unconscious" and with his publications contributed the theory of archetypes to myth criticism. He called archetypes "the manifestation of myth-forming structural elements ever-present in the unconscious

¹All quotations from The Ring and the Book are from the Centenary Edition of The Works of Robert Browning with introductions by Sir F.G. Kenyon. Volumes V and VI. (New York: Arms Press, Inc., 1966).

²Henri A. Talon, "The Ring and the Book: Truth and Fiction in Character Painting," Victorian Poetry, (VI (1968), p. 359.

psyche" and defined myths as "the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms, become manifest and articulate to the conscious mind." ³

One critic offers this view: "Jung posits a human mind which acts as a repository of certain transpersonal images common to the species. Grounded in the evolutionary processes of mankind, these images are actually 'thought-feelings,' universal components so deeply rooted in the psyche that they are bound to manifest themselves in all human action. The poet, as seer, is an organism so refined that he is capable of perceiving them and expressing them for us." ⁴

Plato felt that the use of archetypes helped the human mind to form its judgments. After Descartes, the idea of its value deteriorated. Certainly, Browning felt the worth of mythologization in his work: "Art—wherein man nowise speaks to men,/ Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth (XII,858-59)." Stanley Edgar Hyman in The Armed Vision has stated, "Not only are the archetypal patterns the basis of literature, . . . but at least for our own time literature is one of the great disseminators of the archetypal patterns." ⁵ Myth is of value to us now, not necessarily intrinsically, but because it suggests to us

³Wilfred Guerin, and others, A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 135-36.

⁴Sven Amens, Archetypes of the Family in Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 23.

⁵Peter Hays, The Limping Hero (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 3.

universal patterns of behavior and because of its unconscious ability to affect our inclinations and personalities through its adaptation of archetypal images.

The myth critic has a difficult job, for he must seek out those things in certain literary genres which elicit universal reactions. "Unlike the formalistic critic, who concentrates upon the shape and symmetry of the work itself, the myth critic probes for the inner spirit which gives that form its vitality, its enduring appeal." ⁶ Myth criticism takes us beyond the historical, back to the beginning of man and deep into our own hearts. However, the critic must take care to remember that literature has more numerous functions, and he must not lose the experience afforded by the work as a whole in favor of dissecting its parts.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Robert Browning's usage of the archetypal figures of the Trickster (Guido), the Soldier-Saint (Caponsacchi), the Virgin Goddess-Earth Mother (Pompilia), and the Wise Old Man (Pope Innocent XII) in The Ring and the Book and to determine what an archetypal reading contributes to the body of scholarship surrounding this poem. It is my contention that Browning leads these characters along a road of self-discovery, all the while letting their archetypal significance strike a chord deep within our own subconscious, so that quite unexpectedly, we are brought to a deeper awareness of our own lives through our reactions to their changing situations.

⁶ Guerin, p. 122.

Guido, Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope all achieve a new level of self-understanding as a result of their associations with each other. Browning gives us embodiments of evil, courage, innocence, and wisdom. Then, as readers, we are to see these archetypal characters kaleidoscopically arranged and rearranged—changing in their perceived roles yet remaining intrinsically the same. Their perceptions of each other are colored by their own characteristics. Our own ability to recognize Guido's evil, the courage of Caponsacchi, Pompilia's goodness, and the Pope's wisdom is colored in much the same way.

The second chapter examines the sinister Guido as Trickster. The third chapter examines the Soldier-Saint, Guiseppe Caponsacchi. Chapter four examines the Virgin Goddess-Earth Mother, Pompilia. Pope Innocent XII as the Wise Old Man is examined in chapter five.

CHAPTER II

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI: TRICKSTER

Throughout literary history evil has found its embodiment in the character of villainous Tricksters who, in their own perverted state, manipulate and deceive in order to destroy others. Jack Matthews has elaborated on the role of the Trickster in literature, noting: "It is appropriate that the Trickster, who represents one of the oldest and strongest motifs in both literature and folktale, should appear so nearly universally and in so many forms. It is part of his essential vitality that he crops up in the most divergent cultures, as if even the theme embodies the human spirit of energetic play, of cleverness, of the impulse to manipulate others. . . . At the heart of the term is the idea of manipulating others, of using them, of deceiving them for one's own material purposes or for the simple thrills of pride and wrong-headedness. . . . The Trickster seems unaffected by the inhibitions and moral probings that trouble most of us." ⁷

Paul Radin in his book, The Trickster, further elaborates on the characteristics of this archetypal character—a creature half animal and half divine who can change his shape at will. The Trickster is associated with animals, supernatural beings, and monsters, and is often linked with the more sinister animal species such as ravens, coyotes, wolves, and spiders. He may be comical, sad, or vicious at various

⁷Jack Matthews (ed.), Archetypal Themes in the Modern Story (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 233-34.

stages of his development, but at each stage he is manipulating—using and deceiving others to further his own ends. As a mythological shadow figure, he incorporates all of the base characteristics of man in his personality.⁸

Karl Kerenyi in his essay, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," notes that the Trickster operates outside fixed boundaries of custom and law "never wholly subdued, ruled by lust and hunger, forever running into pain and injury, cunning and stupid in action. Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the Trickster. His function . . . is to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted."⁹

C. G. Jung in "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" mentions the Trickster's fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks: "In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level . . . a reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness."¹⁰

Browning particularly plays up Guido's subhuman characteristics, and this becomes important to the mythological structure. One critic notes, "According to Jung, the animal stands for the non-human psyche, for the world of subhuman instincts, and for the unconscious areas of

⁸Paul Radin, The Trickster (New York: Schocken Books, 1956).

⁹Quoted by Radin, p. 185.

¹⁰Quoted by Radin pp. 200-01.

the psyche. The more primitive the animal, the deeper the stratum of which it is an expression. As in all symbolism, the greater the number of objects depicted, the baser and more primitive is the meaning." ¹¹

In a similar statement Northrop Frye states, "The nearer the romance is to myth, the more attributes of divinity will cling to the hero and the more the enemy will take on demonic mythological qualities. . . . Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world." ¹²

Count Guido Franceschini has everything going for him on the surface, "a great birth, traditionary name,/ Diligent culture, choice companionship . . . conversancy with the faith (X,430-32)," yet subhuman characteristics are rampant in passages describing him. Descriptions of his personal appearance are ample to warrant him a physically ugly and repulsive man:

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallied, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old (I,780-84).

Tertium Quid found him "little, long-nosed . . . lantern-jawed (IV,718)," as did Pompilia whose description left him "old/ And

¹¹J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), p. 13.

¹²Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 187.

nothing like so tall as myself,/ Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush
of beard (VII,394-96)." To the Pope he was a "puny starveling (X,483)"
having goblin-like, fox-faced, cat-clawed brothers and descending from
a "grey mother with a monkey mien (I,571)."

Guido is a cripple "born to the hereditary stoop (V,127)." He is
vicious and sinister, a perverted character who seeks to destroy all
that he touches. The Comparini's short stay in Arezzo was enough to
convince them of his cruel nature: "Four months' experience of how
craft and greed/ Quickened by penury and pretentious hate/ Of plain
truth, brutify and bestialize (III,522-24)." Pompilia refers to him
as "the ignoble noble, the unmanly man,/ The beast below the beast in
brutishness (III,1298-99)." His neighbors have called him slothful,
proud, rapacious, "a parasite and picker-up of crumbs (III,406)." Finally the court pronounces him "devilish and damnable (I,247)," and
the poet likens him to a star, but one fashioned from hell rather than
heaven.

Animal imagery abounds in passages describing Guido, and like the
traditional Trickster, he generally finds himself compared to the more
sinister creatures in the animal world. Guido is "the main monster
(I,551)" who whines and becomes a type of were-wolf on the night of
Pompilia's murder. He and his men have "blood-bright eyes,/ And black
lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,/ And tongues that lolled (I,
616-18)." In the course of his narrative, Other Half Rome refers to him
as a fox, a wildcat, a worm, a beast, a wolf, and a lion. Capon-
sacchi used images of a spider, a scorpion, a miscreate, and spittle
to refer to Guido. He is a snake who will not die "so much as slide

out of life,/ Pushed by the general horror and common hate/ Low,
lower (VI,1911-13)."

Guido, perhaps unconsciously as Radin suggests, uses animal imagery in referring to himself. He calls himself "born fish with gill and fin/ Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed/ In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile/ Reared of the low-tide and aright there-in (V,172-75)." Mary Rose Sullivan has noted the subhuman characteristics of Guido and states, "Guido's references to himself as a wolf emphasize his cunning meanness rather than the boldness he would like to have. He ends trying to hide his skulking cowardice behind a facade of ferocity, but the mask falls and exposes the grotesque stunting of his moral nature." ¹³

The Trickster may be sad, comical, or vicious at various stages of his development. Guido with his distorted mentality shows all three facets of his personality in his courtroom appearance. He seeks pity at first, comparing himself to a lonely, weakened Christ:

I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 't is wine,
Velleitii,—and not vinegar and gall (V,2-5).

His sadness is replaced with comic gestures, for he states, "My one reward, I help the Court to smile (V,139)."

His vicious stages are many and varied, yet one shows his true colors well. Pompilia is a mere possession to him. "I have paid my

¹³ Mary Rose Sullivan, Browning's Voices in The Ring and the Book: A Study of Method and Meaning (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 206.

pound, await my penny's worth,/ So, hoodwink, starve and properly
train my bird,/ And, should she prove a haggard,—twist her neck
(V,708-10)." Soon, no one is laughing.

As Trickster, Guido is half beast-half man and is able to change his shape at will. One moment he is beguilingly innocent; the next finds him cornered and vicious. His second speech to the court comes from "the same man, another voice . . . The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,/ That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,/ Til in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined;/ Then you know how the bristling fury foams (I,1285-99)." In the final courtroom scene before his death, Guido changes form by removing his sheep's clothing and showing the true wolf underneath—"There, let my sheepskin garb, a curse on 't, go (XI,443)."

Paul Radin describes the Trickster as "at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does on impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercies of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being." ¹⁴

Because of Guido's subhuman characteristics, the Trickster's positive attributes of creator and giver fade completely into the

¹⁴Radin, p. xxiii.

negative traits of a destroyer and negator. The two will be blended again only with the birth of Gaetano who will share Pompilia's goodness and purity. Other good follows from Guido's actions, such as the meeting between Pompilia and Caponsacchi, yet he remains, like all Tricksters, incapable of discerning either good or evil, yet responsible for both.

Guido is, like the traditional Trickster, subject to his own impulses and emotions. He flings invectives and incriminates himself in court before he even realizes the things he is saying. And he repeatedly blames his actions on those friends and conspirators who laughed at him and challenged him to the point of murder.

Inherent in the definition of the Trickster is the idea that he dupes others and is himself duped in turn. Guido is no different. Half Rome calls him "the biter bit (II,597)" and Caponsacchi mentions "the waggish parents who played dupes/ To dupe the duper (V,1360-61)" leaving him "miserably caught/ I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies (VI,1799-1800)." Jack Matthews notes that sometimes the boomerang effect of the Trickster Tricked theme is merely the consequence of a character's actions.¹⁵ Guido is first tricked by Violante and later by his own carelessness in neglecting to arrange for an adequate means of escape after the murder of Pompilia and her parents.

Finally Guido finds himself tricked by the Pope. He began on an innocent hunt "only I lie trapped,/ Writhe in a certain novel spring

¹⁵ Matthews, p. 234.

just set/ By the good old Pope (XI,113-15)." He admits "I stumbled, got it so!/ Fell on my own sword as a bungler may (XI,498-99)."

One last characteristic of the Trickster is that he often embodies the mythological shadow figure, incorporating all of the base traits of humanity in his personality. Pompilia and Caponsacchi find Guido a shadow. Caponsacchi calls him "the black figure, the opprobrious blur/ Against all peace and joy and light and life (VI,1526-27)." Pompilia says he is "master, by hell's right . . . an ice-block 'twixt the sun and me . . . neutralizer of all good and truth (VII,1586-96)." The Pope acknowledges "not one permissible impulse moves the man (X, 537)."

Certainly Guido is found a much more complete villain in The Ring and the Book than he was in life. He was not just an evil man for Browning but a man "representing an early stage in human moral evolution." ¹⁶ David Shaw notes the mythic qualities of Browning's story and is aware of Guido's place in the scheme of things, calling him "a mythical Satan, dragon sufferer—a melodramatic agent in some cosmic drama which reduces and simplifies his emotions, then magnifies them to a height of epic pain and wrath." ¹⁷

Jung defined the shadow as the "darker side of our unconscious self,

¹⁶Tracy Clarence (ed.), Browning's Mind and Art (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 15.

¹⁷W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 258.

the inferior and less pleasing aspects of the personality which we wish to suppress,"¹⁸ He later states, "In the case of the individual, the problem constellated by the shadow is answered on the plane of the anima, that is, through relatedness . . . everything depends on the development of consciousness,"¹⁹ Guido is the shadow incarnate, and his struggle was to recognize and admit the dark aspects of his personality. Roy Gridley agrees that Guido discovers himself as incarnate hate in Book XI.²⁰ Only after accepting his own evil was he able to recognize Pompilia's goodness. His conscious mind is free from the fascination of evil, and he no longer lives it compulsively.

Guido, Trickster, goes about his life deceiving and destroying; finds himself brought to justice; discovers and accepts his true nature; is able to recognize Pompilia's purity; and can finally (according to a Venetian stranger) die honorably with the name of Jesus on his lips.

¹⁸Guerin, p. 138.

¹⁹Radin, p. 211.

²⁰Roy Gridley, "Browning's Pompilia," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 67 (Jan., 1968), p. 74.

CHAPTER III

GUISEPPE CAPONSACCHI: SOLDIER-SAINT

Caponsacchi is a much more complex personality than Guido, for he combines characteristics of a Knight-Errant, a Quest Hero, and a Soldier-Saint. His is a spiritual pilgrimage from shallow young man to saintly priest as he discovers within himself, and through Pompilia, the capacity for love and goodness on earth.

J.E. Cirlot gives an extensive explanation of the traditional knight's place in literature:

The education of the knight was directed in part to strengthening him physically, but in particular to developing his soul and spirit, his affections (that is, his morals) and his mind (that is, his reason) in order to prepare him adequately for the task of directing and controlling the real world, so that he might take his proper place in the hierarchies of the universe. . . . Mediaeval legends often refer to a green, white or red knight, but most frequently of all to a black knight . . . the Green Knight is the pre-knight, the squire, the apprentice sworn to knighthood; the Black Knight stands for him who undergoes the tribulations of sin, expiation and obscurity in order to attain to immortality by way of earthly glory and heavenly beatitude; the White Knight is the natural conqueror, . . . the "illuminated one" reemerging from a period of nigredo . . . Knighthood should be seen, then, as a superior kind of pedagogy helping to bring about the transmutation of natural man into spiritual man. . . . In every case, the wandering (or errantry) of the knight implies an intermediate position between the "saved" knight and the accursed hunter, with the difference that the knight errant, so far from being caught up in the pursuit of his desires, is of course striving to master them.²¹

The traditional Knight Errant is found slaying dragons, fighting for a beautiful lady (often a White Goddess), overcoming all opposition, and destroying evil men. Critics such as Park Honan, William Clyde DeVane

²¹Cirlot, pp. 161-64.

and David Shaw note Browning's usage of the Perseus myth and the Saint George legend. Caponsacchi's role as Knight-Errant is shown most effectively through Browning's use of the Andromeda theme and through his characterization of Caponsacchi as Saint George, the Soldier-Saint.

Andromeda's parents, in order to placate the gods, had her chained to a cliff to be devoured by a monster. Perseus slays the monster, marries Andromeda, and changes her fiance, Phineus, into a stone when he tries to interfere. Finally, at her death, Andromeda is placed among the stars. From this, the Andromeda theme has developed into literature which concerns the rescue by a hero of a beautiful maiden who is about to be sacrificed to a monster. There are usually substituted sacrifices, serpents, and guardians associated with the rescue, and nature itself aids in the escape.

Saint George was a martyr and patron saint of soldiers whose good deeds were supposedly known only to God. He is described as a knight from Cappadocia who saved a lady from a dragon and became a hero, but was later tortured and beheaded for his faith. Caponsacchi rescued Pompilia on April 23, Saint George's Day. Caponsacchi's family arms consisted of a "shield quartered with white and red (VI,237)," while Saint George's emblem was a red cross on a white background. He is repeatedly likened to Saint George in the narrative: "As in a glory of armour like Saint George,/ Out again sprang the young beauteous priest/ Bearing away the lady in his arms (I,585-87)."

Caponsacchi certainly has all of the learnable attributes of a knight, for he is a loyal and daring soldier, not weak or cowardly. He

is of noble birth and takes his sense of honor quite seriously:

The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake
 All were against me, — — that, I knew the first:
 But knowing also what my duty was,
 I did it (IV,1108-11).

He is praised by Pope Innocent for his eagerness and quickness to answer Pompilia's call, even when true knights did not respond. He is the hero who aids beautiful Pompilia in her escape from the serpent-monster Guido. True to form, nature itself aids in the escape, and Pompilia was "fain to rush forth, call the stones/ O' the common street to save her (V,637-38)." Pompilia states, "Towns, flowers, and faces, all things helped so well!/ For, through the journey, was it natural/ Such comfort should arise from first to last (VII,1563-65)?"

However, unlike the traditional Andromeda characters, Caponsacchi is unable to rescue Pompilia physically from Guido's clutches. They are captured, separately sentenced to exile, and Pompilia is later murdered by her monster-husband while an absent Caponsacchi is helpless to prevent it. Nevertheless, Pompilia is rescued spiritually by Caponsacchi. It is because of his love and concern that she is able to call him her guide and savior, "the reflection of God's own justice and truth on earth, showing her the promise of eternity."²²

The legend of Saint George and the dragon is a Christian version of the Andromeda myth. Browning uses this legend so consistently that it is possible to understand each speaker by the manner in which he employs it. William C. DeVane, in his essay, "The Virgin and the Dragon,"

²²Sullivan, p. 94.

states, "The characters of evil import . . . use it in a debased form or for a debased purpose. Thus Guido uses it when in his defense he gives an account of one of his ancestors who met death in the region where Perseus and Saint George had performed their exploits." ²³

Similarly, Conti's use of the legend reveals his own inner interests:

"Our Caponsacchi, he's your true Saint George/ To slay the monster, set the Princess free,/ And have the whole High-Altar to himself (VII, 1323-25)."

Caponsacchi is an heroic Saint George, yet in a different sense than the legendary man. Erich Neumann distinguishes between extroverted and introverted heroes: "The aim of the extroverted type of hero is action: he is founder, leader, and liberator whose deeds change the face of the world. The introverted type is the culture-bringer, the redeemer and savior who discovers the inner values, exalting them as knowledge and wisdom, as a law and a faith, a work to be accomplished and an example to be followed." ²⁴ Caponsacchi fails as an extroverted hero in his physical liberation attempts, but succeeds as an introverted type in showing to Pompilia and to the world the value and wisdom of having courage and love. Eventually the Pope establishes Caponsacchi's intuitive instinct for service and love as an example to be followed by all priests.

²³Philip Drew (ed.), Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966), p. 107.

²⁴Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 220.

William Whitla traces the tragic action in Caponsacchi's story and relates it to traditional development in western medieval plays:

In the Saint George legend it is not only the dragon which is killed, but later the saint himself . . . Western mediaeval Saint George plays followed this tradition most scrupulously. But the hero could not be left dead, so he was revived by a doctor of physic. One is left with an essentially tragic action moving from the struggle (Agon) to the death (Pathos), to the discovery or recognition (Anagnorisis), the tearing to pieces (Sparagmos), and the final movement to triumph or catastrophe. Browning has made Caponsacchi struggle with himself (and he also has a sort of objective conflict with Guido). Then occur the deaths of the Comparani and Pompilia (also the symbolic death of Caponsacchi in his banishment), the discovery or recognition in the quest for truth on the part of the Pope who is the doctor of metaphysic, restoring justice, life to Caponsacchi, sanctity to Pompilia, and eventually catastrophe to Guido.²⁵

Caponsacchi has been a Knight-Errant, but his final sword becomes his "steadfast eye and quiet work (X,696)." The Pope assures Caponsacchi of his knighthood:

Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
Be glad thou hast let light into the world
Through that irregular breach o' the boundary, --see
The same upon thy path and march assured
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life's end! (X,1203-10).

According to Joseph Campbell, the Quest Hero leaves home to search for adventure, a mate, or a better place. His journey often involves encounters with a Wise Old Man or a White Goddess, and the hero is associated with sun and moon imagery. He may be a questing Knight-Errant striving for the glories of Knighthood or a young man whose

²⁵William Whitla, The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Robert Browning's Poetry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 124.

questing precipitates his initiation into the world.

Campbell traces the Quest Hero's actions:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom or the dark . . . or be slain by the opponent and descend in death. Beyond the threshold, then the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world, his recognition by the father-creator, his own divinization, or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being. The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection; if not, he flees and is pursued. At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread. The boon that he brings restores the world. ²⁶

Caponsacchi first leaves home to join the priesthood. At the advice of his elders and because he lacked an understanding of true commitment, he admits to playfulness as a young priest. He was originally "a courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames . . . A prince of sonneteers and lutanists (I, 1025-30)." Half Rome satirically refers to him as "the all-consoling Caponsacchi (II,783)." Later, Caponsacchi leaves his priestly home and meets adventure with Pompilia.

Caponsacchi is at first lured from his "castle" by the letters Guido has forged and later proceeds voluntarily in the adventure with

²⁶Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 245-46.

Pompilia. He encounters the "shadow presence" of Guido lurking behind curtains and spying on his meetings with Pompilia, yet he succeeds in escaping with her. They proceed to Rome and are aided in their flight by the wind and other favorable natural circumstances. At this point, however, the powers are unfriendly to him, and he is beset by Guido and prevented from saving the goddess.

He begins to face the threatening tests of the court appearances and of his exile to Civita. Finally, Pompilia is murdered, and Caponsacchi "arrives at the nadir of the mythological round." He undergoes the supreme ordeal of reevaluating his relationship with her and testifying on her behalf. His reward is his own divinization.

Caponsacchi tells the court, "I rise in your esteem, sagacious/ Sirs, stand up a renderer of reasons, not/ The officious priest would personate Saint George/ For a mock Princess in undragonated days (VI, 1769-72)."

Caponsacchi stands in a commanding attitude to address the judges and begins gradually revealing his motives and actions to the court and to himself.

Roy Gridley notes, "The effect of Caponsacchi's presenting and then denying so many roles assigned to him by others is to reinforce the theme of his search for self-definition and to limit the area in which that definition can be found. He knows very well what he is not; it takes him the whole monologue to find out what he is."²⁷ True to form, he attains an expansion of consciousness.

²⁷ Roy E. Gridley, "Browning's Caponsacchi: 'How the Priest Caponsacchi Said His Say,'" Victorian Poetry, VI (1968), pp. 285-86.

The final work of the Quest Hero is that of the return. Caponsacchi comes under the court's protection in order to testify at Guido's trial. The boon he brings does restore the world, for we discover through his life that we can overcome this earthly moral testing ground and reach another level.

Our Quest Hero has searched for adventure and for a better place and has found them. He has gained the reward of his own divinization, brought to the surface and nurtured by the Virgin Goddess, Pompilia. True to her archetypal form, she is "the anima . . . the mover, the instigator of change, whose fascination drives, lures, and encourages the male to all the adventures of the soul and spirit, of action and creation in the inner and outward world. . . . It sets the personality in motion, produces change, and ultimately transformation." ²⁸

Cirlot notes, "the true journey is neither acquiescence nor escape—it is evolution. For this reason Guenon has suggested that ordeals of initiation frequently take the form of 'symbolic journeys' representing a quest that starts in the darkness of the profane world . . . and gropes toward the light. Such ordeals or trials—like the stages in a journey—are rites of purification." ²⁹

Caponsacchi has been transformed from a courtly cupid to a guiding star leading Pompilia and all who would follow into a world of courage

²⁸Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 33.

²⁹Cirlot, p. 157.

and love. Pompilia tells us his brow "reverberates the truth/ And flashed the word God gave him back to man . . . Through such souls alone/ God stooping shows sufficient of His light/ For us i'the dark to rise by. And I rise (VII,1796-1845)."

Finally, we view Caponsacchi as Saint. According to Joseph Campbell, the hero as saint is "endowed with a pure understanding, restraining the self with firmness, turning away from sound and other objects and abandoning love and hatred; dwelling in solitude, eating but little, controlling the speech, body, and mind, ever engaged in meditation and concentration, cultivating freedom from passion; forsaking conceit and power, pride and lust, wrath and possessions, tranquil in heart, and free from ego—he becomes worthy of becoming one with the imperishable." ³⁰

Caponsacchi's saintliness has been brought to question. Speakers in the poem are careful to point out his superior gift of making madrigals, his trips to Pompilia's house when he had no way of knowing she did not write the letters, his eagerness to help Pompilia personally when he might have sent a woman, and his open flight with her. He is referred to as a "blackish white (V,1194)," "courtly spiritual Cupid (I,1025)" whose innocent love turned out to be "scarlet fiery (III,895)."

The poet himself recognizes this conflict within Caponsacchi, but he does not accuse him—"Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil (I,1017)!" Caponsacchi defends himself by saying that if as a man, he had obligations to help weak innocence, how much greater was his

³⁰Campbell, p. 354.

responsibility as a priest.

It is readily apparent that Caponsacchi was no saint before his confrontation with Guido and Pompilia. But it is equally as apparent that he attains sainthood as a result of that experience. Sister Mary Richard Boo notes, "Through the instrumentality of Pompilia he has undergone a process of purgation and illumination which forms an accepted part of the pattern of spiritual progress, and by the end of Book VI he has unquestionably attained at least a firm beginning of spiritual perfection." ³¹

Caponsacchi enters his quest for divinity when he begins to see through the shams of his fellow churchmen. He has taken priestly vows with the understanding from other priests that they are to be taken lightly. However, after his experience with the pure Pompilia, he is aware of a greater spiritual depth and can say, "I too am taintless (VI, 197)." He has struggled with the worldly and spiritual sides of his nature (reflected by his dual vocabulary in court), and the spiritual side triumphs.

Pompilia recognized Caponsacchi's potential saintliness immediately. She says of him, "The glory of his nature, I had thought/ Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth (VII,915-16)," and later, "A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall/ From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay (VII,1214-15)." Her belief in him led to his own discovery of his "immeasurable depth" of soul (VII,1445). And, eventually, each is to the other "a 'pure white soul' illuminating the blackness of inexplicable

³¹Sister Mary Richard Boo, "The Ordeal of Guiseppe Caponsacchi," Victorian Poetry, III (1965), p. 180.

evil that surrounds it." ³² Mary Rose Sullivan has not used Neumann's terms to describe the function of the anima, but she has certainly recognized this mutual ability for transformation of character on the part of Pompilia and Caponsacchi. Similarly, William Whitla states that Pompilia and Caponsacchi follow the star in each other. ³³ On her death bed Pompilia calls on Christ to show in her own time the glory of Caponsacchi's soul—"Thy Saint (VII,1485)."

Caponsacchi—the courageous, questing, solider-saint—initiates an encounter with life, experiences its depths of evil and its heights of goodness, and discovers within himself the capacity for courage and love and selflessness—traits which form the foundation of sainthood.

³²Sullivan, p. 94.

³³Whitla, p. 127.

CHAPTER IV

POMPILIA: VIRGIN GODDESS-EARTH MOTHER

The traditional Virgin Goddess figure represents the human soul in its purity and goodness. As Robert Graves notes in The White Goddess, she must be innocent, naive, untarnished, and inaccessible except by rape. As earlier shown, she is often an ideal goal of the Quest Hero. She is repeatedly addressed as "Our Lady"—finely clad in white, mild, steadfast, and chaste. Her whiteness is not the horrifying whiteness of the White Goddess but is "the pleasant whiteness of pearl-barley, or a woman's body, or milk, or unsmutched snow." ³⁴ Finally, Sven Armens notes her forgiving nature stating, "punishment as the instrument of legality has no place in Mary's all-embracing benevolence." ³⁵

Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia Comparini fulfills these requirements. William Whitla states, "Pompilia is a type of the pure and chaste virgin, a sort of conflation of the imagery associated with Venus and the Virgin in the style of the courtly love tradition." ³⁶ Pope Innocent recognizes her goodness, calling her "God's gift of a purity of soul . . . who showed for once/ How He would have the world go white (X, 677-81)." She is referred to in Book I as "one soul white enough for

³⁴Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948), pp. 352-61.

³⁵Armens, p. 17.

³⁶Whitla, p. 116.

three (534)," and Caponsacchi says, "The white I saw shine through her was her soul's . . . the perfect soul Pompilia (VI,1142-1162)."

The innocence of Pompilia is reinforced throughout the poem, often even by those who take Guido's side in the case. She is referred to as a child, a lamb, a dove. Even Half-Rome pictures her as a helpless minnow on Violante's line. The Comparinis first "had baited hook/ With this poor gilded fly Pompilia thing (II,1355-56)." Even Pompilia continually asserts her own innocence by referring to her illiteracy and ignorance. She explains, "I was blind (VII,668)."

Mary Sullivan marks the repetitions of "strange" and "surprise" and "dream" in Pompilia's speech, noting that "the cumulative effect of these repetitions is to emphasize the inexplicability of evil to a soul such as Pompilia's, which has never experienced any promptings but good," ³⁷

Perhaps innocence is best shown through continued references to her madonna-like appearance. Caponsacchi calls her "Our Lady of all the Sorrows (VI,707)" and compares her to Raphael's Madonna paintings. Monna Baldi goes to her room to be healed simply by touching her, and Cavalier Carlo, a painter of virgins, slips into her hospital room to paint her as she lies there. And Pompilia likens herself to Mary as she holds Gaetano, saying, "This time I felt like Mary, had my babe/ Lying a little on my breast like hers (VII,1692-93)."

As a Virgin Goddess, Pompilia must be naive. She is led to her marriage as a lamb to its slaughter and has no hint of the real meaning

³⁷Sullivan, p. 89.

of her union with Guido. She naively believes that the church and its ministers will help her to escape her prison. And when they do not, she accepts Caponsacchi's help, thinking all the while that he has come to aid her only because God has bound him to a promise to care for all souls.

The white imagery surrounding Pompilia emphasizes her untarnished character. The poet in Book I says her parents held her up, getting mud-splashed themselves, to keep her clean. Tertium Quid calls her a "rose above the dunghheap, the pure child (IV,246)." Caponsacchi describes her as "wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun (VI,1518)." But, perhaps the loveliest expression of all comes from the lips of Celestino, her Confessor:

There's something here,
Some presence in the room beside us all,
Something that every lie expires before:
No question she was pure from first to last (III,800-803).

If she is to be a Virgin Goddess, Pompilia must be inaccessible except by rape, and she proves to be in spite of Bottinius' doubt that she could be so beautiful and yet so innocent. He refers to her as "a dove with dingy feathers (IX,1233)." Yet it is understood that Pompilia's whiteness is tinted with flame for Bottinius only because he is incapable of believing in perfect womanhood, and not because Pompilia herself is imperfect.

She goes to the Archbishop requesting to be given sanctuary in a convent so that she can retain her virginity. Even the Abate admits her to be a "Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf (III,365)." Pompilia does not remain intact and virginal physically because Girolamo rapes

her and then, in turn, Guido forces himself on her. However, as Harding notes in Woman's Mysteries, the term "virgin" used in a psychological connotation refers not to external circumstances but to an inner attitude.³⁸ Erich Neumann has also explained the discrepancy between "virginal" Goddesses bearing children. The matriarchal viewpoint, for a variety of reasons, considered no relationship between the sexual act and the bearing of children; pregnancy and sexuality were completely dissociated.³⁹

Cirlot notes that the Great Mother is usually considered to be a symbol of the fertilized earth and is surrounded by nature images such as animals, flowers, and gardens.⁴⁰ As "Our Lady" (the Virgin Mary) Pompilia is a provider of both physical and spiritual life. Sven Armens states, "she is both the archetypal Good Mother of the secular vegetation mysteries, the actual fruitful source of organic being, and the archetypal Virgin of the spiritual inspiration mysteries who, through the transforming emotion of love, enables man . . . to achieve transcendent being."⁴¹

Nature imagery abounds in The Ring and the Book, and the majority of it centers around Pompilia. She is constantly associated with innocent living creatures. She is dove-like to Other Half Rome and as gentle and innocent as a lamb to the Pope and Caponsacchi. Her lamb-like innocence is reinforced by Tertium Quid when he alludes to her as a bait for Violante's trap and as the Comparini's pet lamb "fed with flowers, Then

³⁸ M. Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), pp. 5-30.

³⁹ Neumann, The Great Mother, p. 269.

⁴⁰ Cirlot, p. 127.

⁴¹ Armens, p. 11.

'ticed as usual by the bit of cake/ Out of the bower into the butchery (IV,675-77)." Similarly, Guido likens her to a sacrificial calf when he first sees her in Pietro's home.

Flower imagery also abounds in Pompilia's descriptive passages. She calls herself a wild briar'slip and a "Wilding flower-tree-branch (VII,341)" who is struck low when she tries to see the sun. Other Half Rome compares her "flower-like body (III,5)" to a branch from the Eden tree growing in a garden plot sheltered by Violante and Pietro. Even Tertium Quid mentions "The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown/ Lily-like out o' the cleft in the sun-smit rock/ To bow its white miraculous birth of buds/ I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse (IV, 322-25)."

Pompilia's Earth Mother qualities are further reinforced by the fact that she is fertile and has given birth to a son. Guido "took the field, encamped his rights (VI,1435)." His friends and advisors urged him to "go plant in garden-plot/ Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood,/ In confidence the seed shall germinate (XI, 1094-96)." Bottinius uses the Earth Mother fertile field image in showing how Guido plowed his field and planted before someone else could seed it with thistles.

Pompilia has a forgiving nature. She forgives Violante of her deceptions and can even forgive Guido of his evil. Roy Gridley points out that "by retrieving, re-creating, and ordering her past, Pompilia has been able to forgive Guido; this forgiveness is the final stage of her growth toward saintliness."⁴³

⁴²Armens, p. 32.

⁴³Gridley, "Browning's Pompilia," p. 83.

Her death is a type of divorce from Guido, and she says, "This blood of mine/ Flies forth exultingly at any door,/ Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow (VII,1716-18)." Even the hardened Guido can marvel at her forgiveness:

This one ghost-thing half on earth,
Half out of it, —as if she held God's hand
While she leant back and looked her last at me,
Forgiving me . . .
Oh, from her very soul, commending mine
To heavenly mercies which are infinite (XI,1726-31).

Pompilia is the last person Guido calls for at his death: "Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . . Pompilia, will you let them murder me (XI,2426-27)?" And, the Pope has found a new depth of compassion in Pompilia, too: "What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God/ But just the instance which this tale supplies/ Of love without a limit (X,1367-69)?" Certainly Pompilia fulfills this role for Caponsacchi. Experiencing her goodness and unlimited love enabled Caponsacchi to achieve sainthood. He says, "For Pompilia—be advised,/ Build churches, go pray! . . . I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so (VI,1881-86)."

Jung relates that "in the same way that the anima gives relationship and relatedness to a man's consciousness, the animus gives to woman's consciousness a capacity for reflection, deliberation, and self-knowledge."⁴⁴ In turn, Caponsacchi fulfills this role for Pompilia. As she is dying she asks for "Not simply . . . Time to confess and get her own soul saved— But time to make the truth apparent (IV,1427-29)."

⁴⁴ Joseph Campbell (ed.), The Portable Jung (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 154.

Pompilia becomes reflective and tells her Confessor the story of her life with Guido and of her flight with Caponsacchi. She deliberates on the causes of Guido's behavior and finally concludes that his attack on her is her absolution. "I am just absolved,/ Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair (VII,351-52)." She attains a new self-knowledge and names her son Gaetano—after a new saint and indicative of her fresh start. Seeing courage and love in Caponsacchi renewed her faith and strengthened her life. She states on her deathbed:

Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
 One point o' the circle plainer where I stand
 Traced round about with white to front the world (VII,1644-46).

. . . because this man restored my soul,
 All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
 As well as suffered, —nay, got foretaste too
 Of better life beginning where this ends (VII,1667-70).

Pompilia was "a probationary soul that moved/ From nobleness to nobleness (III,20-21)." Yet, her greatness lay in her ability to love and not in her innocence or mistreatment. It was the transforming emotion of her love and forgiveness which enabled Caponsacchi to achieve transcendent being and saved Guido from complete degradation. We must agree with Pope Innocent when he says of Pompilia:

Everywhere
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
 Everywhere; but they make not up, I think
 The marvel of a soul like thine (X,1013-18).

CHAPTER V

POPE INNOCENT XII: WISE OLD MAN

Pope Innocent XII is a fourth figure in Browning's narrative of archetypal characters. Northrop Frye in The Anatomy of Criticism states that the true father is sometimes represented by a wise old man or teacher.⁴⁵ Cirlot, however, notes "The Old Man is always the father (the master, tradition, contemplation, the celestial sovereign, justice), while the Youth is the son (the governed, subversion, intuition, the hero, boldness)." ⁴⁶ The Wise Old Man is aged, kind, helpful, positive, and possessed of a greater wisdom than other men. He represents the totality of human experience—total man.

Sven Armens has traced the development of the Wise Old Man in literature. "The wise old man's knowledge of liturgical directions, his religious authority, led to his becoming codifier of the group law; as mediator between man and his God, he became by extension, magistrate, judge, and military chief. Since he was so favored by the gods, and his legislative regulations with regard to marriage, divorce, and property rights were considered to be divinely inspired, his word was law, its validity as a sacred injunction was not to be questioned."⁴⁷ His function is to weigh the male and female aspects of his cases and to balance good and evil.

⁴⁵Frye, p. 199.

⁴⁶Cirlot, p. 361.

⁴⁷Armens, p. 39.

Finally, in his Dictionary of Symbols, Cirlot notes, "In the modern study of symbols, the Old Man is regarded as the personification of the age-old wisdom of humanity, or of the collective unconscious. . . . According to Jung, the Old Man, particularly when invested with special powers of prestige, is the symbol of the 'mana' personality, i.e., the spirituality of the personality which emerges when consciousness is overburdened with clarified, apprehended and assimilated matter welling up from the unconscious." ⁴⁸

Antonio Pignatelli, Pope Innocent XII, is eighty-six years old, "kind,/ From his youth up, reluctant to take life,/ If mercy might be just and yet show grace (I,289-91)." He is called upon to help render judgment in Guido's murder trial, yet he ends by helping Pompilia, also. She is rescued first from Guido by Caponsacchi and later, when ultimate justice is endangered, her rescuer is the Pope. ⁴⁹

Pope Innocent's helpfulness extends beyond the trial situation itself and incorporates each man's responsibility for judgment: "this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow,/ All the world's cark and care (X,321-22)." When the courts are unable to settle the issue, Pope Innocent must make the decision for innocence or guilt:

Once more on this earth of God's
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
And stay my six plus fourscore years, my due
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act in place of Him—
The Pope for Christ (X,163-69).

⁴⁸ Cirlot, p. 231.

⁴⁹ Boyd Litzinger and K.L. Knickerbocker, The Browning Critics (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 191.

Mary Rose Sullivan states, "Though his selflessness and human sympathy eventually guide him to the right decision, Pope Innocent XII, far from being an omniscient and dispassionate judge, is simply one more in the circle of questioning and limited observers of human conduct."⁵⁰ Yet, he, like the traditional Wise Old Man, is positive of his verdict and remains convinced that his understanding of the situation is a correct one. "Mankind is ignorant, a man am I:/ Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin! . . . I stand on my integrity,/ Nor fear at all (X,258-77)."

Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these—
Not absolutely in a portion, yet
Evolvable from the whole: evolved at last
Painfully, held tenaciously by me (X,229-32).

Much of the Pope's wisdom is a result of the fact that he has the totality of human experience to draw from; he represents total man. He has "trod many lands, known many deeds,/ Probed many hearts, beginning with his own (X,303-04)."

There are ten sets of audiences which the Pope addresses in his solitary dialogue. Park Honan notes that the Pope speaks to each of these audiences in a different manner and that each confrontation brings to light something new and different in this complex character: for example, modesty and self-respect; spiritual humility and reverence; mercy and a capacity for indignation; scorn; muted anger; admiration, wonder, and even spiritual adoration; a certain decorousness, but also manliness; a sense of humor and stoicism; severity and a basically uncompromising

⁵⁰ Sullivan, p. 136.

moral absolutism, ⁵¹

Pope Innocent says, "This life is training and a passage . . . The moral sense grows but by exercise (X,1411-15)," and he has exercised his moral sense for eighty-six years. He is not merely Pope, but also Antonio Pignatelli "a mere old man o' the world (X,393)."

Mary Rose Sullivan states, "Pope Innocent XII may be wise and philosophical, but he is not infallible, and his abstract, theological speculations can never lead him to unswerving truth in the tangled threads of human conduct. He can only approach this kind of truth when he speaks as Antonio Pignatelli, fallible and uncertain, but with an understanding of human motives that springs from a deep-rooted love of his fellow-creatures and from the desire to protect and nourish those given to his care . . . The Pope must express loft thoughts in lofty language, he must view the world from a higher plane than other men, but at the same time, the man Pignatelli knows his roots go deep in the same soil as Guido Franceschini's and the 'mass of men' daily sinking in the mire." ⁵²

As judge, the Wise Old Man's function is to weigh the male and female aspects of his cases and to balance good and evil. In his role as judge, Pope Innocent represents human consciousness and is, as a result, pulled between his own feelings and those of the society and the Church. His role as Pope pulls him in one direction, yet he remembers his "ancient self, who wast no Pope so long (X,384)." In desperation, he reads of

⁵¹Park Honan, Browning's Characters: A Study in Poetic Technique (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 151.

⁵²Sullivan, pp. 132-33.

former popes and their decisions, but they cannot help him in his own individual choice. He thinks of Euripides with his pagan wisdom and insight, but the final choice still resides with him. "And I am bound, the solitary judge, to weigh the worth, decide upon the plea (X,1945)."

Pope Innocent is very aware of public opinion and of the magnitude of his decision. He has to consider all opinions and weigh the facts before rendering judgment. By accepting his imperfections and rising above them, he is able to judge justly. His wisdom is not merely intellectual, but involves love and sacrifice:

. . . dark, difficult enough
 The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
 I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
 As a mere man may . . . Through hard labour and good will,
 And habitude that gives a blind man sight
 At the practised finger-ends of him, I do
 Discern, and dare decree in consequence (X,1241-51).

Pope Innocent decides that he must trust the impulses of his heart as much as his mind. He must weigh the traditional female-oriented intuitive knowledge with the male-oriented intellect. The Pope decides that it is not the philosophers but the souls like Pompilia who have gleaned the most from life. "Popes have been wrong—witness their judgments on Formosus—and the unlearned or unreasoning right—witness the intuitive and impulsive acts of Pompilia and Caponsacchi— and the difference is that these last two knew 'love without a limit' in yielding to the promptings of the heart." ⁵³

The "white light" in his own life and in Pompilia becomes his guide, representing inner goodness and spirituality. His intellectual powers

⁵³ Sullivan, p. 133.

have given him some aid in his search for truth, but Pompilia has provided the "soul" of his judgment, the love and goodness that make his decision fair.

The Pope weighs the case for Pompilia and against Guido. His final judgment must deal with Caponsacchi. Pope Innocent has been like the traditional Wise Old Man—the master, tradition, contemplation, the celestial sovereign, justice. And Caponsacchi has played his part as the governed one, the hero representing intuition, subversion, and boldness. The Pope must balance good and evil and decide which role Caponsacchi played in this situation. Shall Caponsacchi be condemned for leaving the bounds of the church or praised for seeing the necessity to do so? Whatever the final decision, Pope Innocent will be a better man for having made it, just as Caponsacchi and Pompilia were strengthened by their confrontations. He asks, "Shall I too lack courage? . . . Refuse, with kindred inconsistency,/ To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong (X,1299-1302)?"

Pope Innocent is aware that a new day is dawning in church rule. "Do not we end, the century and I (X,1903)?" Yet, he is optimistic of the future and of men like Caponsacchi challenging the church to new levels of greatness. Everyone must share some blame for the evil done. "Have we misjudged here, over-armed our knight,/ Given gold and silk where plain hard steel serves best,/ Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,/ Made an archbishop and undone a saint (X,1467-70)?"

Yet in addition, everyone shares the opportunity for growth and spiritual development which the Pope and Pompilia and Caponsacchi found. Courage and unselfish love triumph.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Henri Talon has described beautifully Browning's ability to strike chords of response in the human heart.

Some poets, like Browning, will always invent beautiful myths as they meditate upon simple human stories, because it is in man, now, that many a poet perceives the divine. It is in the exalted figures of the men and women his imagination conjures up that he can "follow his heart with his eyes." In them he finds—sometimes rightly directed, sometimes perverted—man's need of transcendence, which is part of man's truth. And it is to reveal this the better that he adds fiction to "facts," mythologizing traits to the "real" features.⁵⁴

In The Ring and the Book, Robert Browning transformed the everyday persons in real-life situations into extraordinary men and women who exemplify love and hate, bravery and cowardice, innocence and cruelty, and show us each man's freedom of choice between good and evil. These characters made their choices and then lived life to its fullest. Only Guido's choice, for evil, was an end in itself. Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope made choices for the good and found self-fulfillment and a certain transcendence from their mere physical existence because of this.

Guido, Trickster, manipulates and destroys and ends up a victim of his own evil. Self-knowledge comes only at his death as he calls for Pompilia and receives her forgiveness.

Caponsacchi makes a choice for self-sacrifice and love and finds in his exercise of courage a new depth of life and a self-fulfillment he had

⁵⁴ Henri A. Talon, "The Ring and the Book: Truth and Fiction in Character Painting," Victorian Poetry, VI (1968), p. 365.

not previously experienced. His encounter with Pompilia leaves him changed, and his quest for meaning in life attains for him a measure of sainthood.

The good and beautiful Pompilia affects the lives of Guido and Caponsacchi and is, in turn, affected by them. She can encounter and overcome evil because of the courage and love she finds in Caponsacchi. She reflects on her experiences and reaches a new level of self-knowledge. Guido's experience has left him more selfish; Pompilia only becomes more selfless.

Finally Pope Innocent XII, already old and wise, finds new sources of hope for the future in Pompilia and Caponsacchi. He learns to trust the instincts of the human heart as well as those of his mind.

We, as Browning's audience, attain also a new degree of self-knowledge. The archetypal significance of Guido, Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope imparts an immediate awareness of basic character traits. And we are able to classify and more fully understand other characters by their interpretations of these archetypal characters' actions.

We are given insights into the character of people who cannot recognize the goodness of Pompilia or the evil of Guido or the courage of Caponsacchi or the wisdom of the Pope. And, we learn something of our own individual makeup by discovering our interpretation of their degrees of guilt and innocence.

Browning leads these characters along a road of self-discovery, all the while letting their archetypal significance strike a chord deep within our own subconscious, so that quite unexpectedly, we have been brought to a deeper awareness of our own lives through our reactions to their changing situations.

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