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Chaotic Consequences of Corruption in
Browning's *The Ring and the Book*

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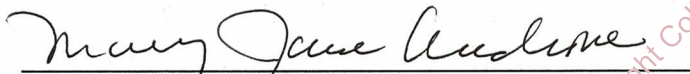
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Chaotic Consequences of Corruption in Browning's *The Ring and the Book*

Robert Browning, an English native and Victorian poet, is well-known for his strategic use of the dramatic monologue. In fact, Browning's *The Ring and the Book* is a poem composed of over 20,000 lines separated into 12 dramatic monologues. Each monologue includes a single narrator through which the poet conveys the speaker's subconscious intentions, motives, and flaws. On the other hand, the audience takes on the role of a silent observer, enabling the reader to evaluate the speaker's reliability. As Langbaum notes in *The Poetry of Experience*, "Our judgments depend, therefore, on what we understand of [the speakers] as people--of their motives, sincerity, and innate moral quality" (115). Therefore, Browning tasks the reader with assessing the speakers' qualities instead of portraying his narrators as one-sided, static characters with little room for interpretation. Many of Browning's works involve morally corrupt or mentally ill speakers. For instance, his shorter poems "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess" involve speakers that kill their romantic partners in an effort to take control of their circumstances. In those works, as well as in *The Ring and the Book*, the "dramatic monologues are poems about states of mind" in which the speakers reveal their own "inner landscape[s]," or cognitive and emotional conditions, that help to explain their unnatural actions (Roberts 36).

More specifically, Browning's *The Ring and the Book* is a tale of an Italian murder case and study of individuals' relationships to one another, law, religion, morality, conscience, honor, and their communities. Within the framework of a crime and trial, the main characters, Guido and Pompilia, seem to represent the fundamental aspects of good and evil, perpetrator and victim. However, the definitions of those characters are much more complex than their "good" or "bad" behaviors. Through Browning's use of dramatic monologue, he is able to relate multiple perspectives of the same case including those of the townspeople, educated officials, the Pope,

the murderer, and the victim herself. Nevertheless, the empathetic response that the dramatic monologue demands places the reader in a strange predicament: the characters first introduced as victim and murderer cannot be defined solely by those roles.

Within *The Ring and the Book*, each section's dramatic monologue contributes new information to the fundamental facts of the central conflict. This, in turn, creates a constantly changing view of the characters themselves, continuously forcing the reader to modify his or her perceptions of each speaker and the case as a whole. That constant reevaluation of knowledge and perception fits exactly with the text's main objective of determining absolute truth. Through employment of dramatic monologue, the reader learns that Pompilia is not just a sacrificial lamb and that Guido is not simply a murderous fiend; instead, Browning expertly portrays characters that have been influenced by external forces to realize their unfortunate fates. Therefore, Pompilia and Guido are not inherently good and evil characters respectively because they are products of societal corruption and learned internal falsehoods. It is that corruption of the true self that ultimately leads to insecurity and destruction. Overall, Browning's use of dramatic monologue is the perfect format for *The Ring and the Book* because its inherent unreliability, ambiguity, and multi-faceted nature is, in itself, a case study of absolute truth and the individual perspective. Thus, the information presented through dramatic monologue forces the reader to analyze the relationship between an individual's personal truth, the actual truth, and the negative consequences that arise after corruption of truth occurs. This paper argues that the violent, chaotic, and destructive events in *The Ring and the Book* are accurate exemplars of the ramifications of corruption.

Browning's choice format of the dramatic monologue lends itself entirely to the intricacies of the human condition. In this layout, Browning selects and identifies a speaker,

includes specified diction in dialogue, and expresses the speaker's intentions. By having an individual speaker and a silent but perceptive interlocutor, Browning reveals the narrators' perspectives both implicitly and explicitly through specified language. The speakers' differing viewpoints and biases in each monologue are vital to the work as a whole because the reader is apt to sympathize with the opinions of each speaker. After forming a sympathetic relationship with a character, the following section introduces a new voice that speaks out, and the reader's perspective changes to accommodate the new information and feelings of that additional perception. For that reason, the poem is not in first person because that single point of view would only provide a limited realm of knowledge. Browning, therefore, masterfully provides a multi-faceted view of a single, significant event in order to fully explore the flaws of human perception and the unattainable concept of absolute truth.

Since the dramatic monologue allows for a close relationship to develop between reader and speaker, the reader is made aware of both the expressed perceptions and internal biases the speaker may have. Depending on the diction used or connotations perceived, certain speakers' subconscious ideas are presented through their own dialogue. The reader strictly follows a single speaker in each monologue, learning the narrator's thought processes, paths of self-discovery, and epiphanies. This allows the reader to witness the "origin in experience and self-realization" that causes the narrators to form their own opinions of others or discover traits about themselves (Langbaum 20). It is in those moments of self-realization that the narrators recognize their own internal corruption, and the reader sees their reactions to those epiphanies.

Before the literary characters are given their own monologues, Browning opens the poem with "The Ring and the Book" section where he introduces the "truth" of the homicide case. The speaker recounts his discovery of an old court document that describes the Franceschini case and

notes, “The thing’s restorative” in that it provides the case’s “pure crude fact” separated from the heated, emotional context of the crime (Browning 3). He compares the truth to pure gold that is then combined with an alloy, properly shaped, stripped of the temporary alloy, and left to cool as a beautiful golden ring. Browning’s written historical account is analogous to casting gold in that the book’s “gold” is its factual information that he manipulates to develop his own story. He says, “From the book, yes; thence bit by bit I dug/ The lingot truth that memorable day,/ Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold” (Browning 11). In this comparison, Browning reveals that the “lingot truth” is not a completely pure substance. Instead, he must examine his limited materials to understand their basic, non-fiction components. Next, the alloy is comprised of the biases inherent in individual perspectives and written language which influence the information’s credibility. So, the speaker seeks to eliminate all falsehoods from the original source in order to obtain the most truthful account of the historical event.

Simultaneously, Browning presents a philosophical conundrum: “Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?” (Browning 16). After all, a person’s bias and the inherent inaccuracies presented in both spoken and written language help to form knowledge and thus personal truth. He adds, “Fancy with fact is just one fact the more” (Browning 11). Just as the gold is alloyed to make it a malleable form, the pure truth is contorted by language so that the majority of its meaning is maintained, but it is slightly altered by the process. As Robert Langbaum explains in *The Poetry of Experience*, “Truth...is relative—psychologically, to the nature of the judge and person being judged; [and] historically, to the amount of disequilibrium in any given age between truth and the institutions by which truth is understood” (125). Therefore, the main antagonist’s passionate murders of his wife and her family are not just part of an evil scheme, but they act as retaliation against the societal system that refused to follow through with its

preceding codes of justice, or what the murderer perceived to be true. Thus, the faulty “truths” by which the narrators live are the very barriers that prevent them from forming their own individual identities, and the subsequent breaking down of those “truths” ultimately leads to their downfalls.

Since Browning’s narrators are not omniscient beings, they have narrower views of the case’s facts. Conversely, the reader is presented with a plethora of information from numerous monologues. As Langbaum notes, “The little truths are classified and re-classified by the analytic power. But the great truths are creatively perceived by a combination of thought and feeling” (18). Therefore, the reader plays a bigger role in the creation of truth than might be recognized. In gathering small bits of information across the twelve monologues, the bigger picture of the crime is shaped by the overall feelings, intuitions, and biases of the reader. Omniscience allows the reader to identify marks of corruption in the truth and to watch the consequences of those falsehoods unfold.

Following the truth’s corruption comes the corruption of the self which presents a central conflict in *The Ring and the Book*: the inability to choose one’s own destiny. That lack of control stems from the societal influences that coerce characters to grasp for any independence they might attain. In *The Elusive Self in the Poetry of Robert Browning*, Hassett writes that people experience the “urgent but often compromised impulse to determine one’s worth” which she considers “the fundamental issue in Browning’s art” (3). In this circumstance, characters in Browning’s work are only able to determine their worth through their society’s values, whether through their family dynamics, religion, or moral expectations. By giving plenty of background information, Browning expresses how his characters are forced into making decisions like marriage, suicide, and murder because of the often conflicting values of the self and society.

Those social values are an outward set of standards that can only be met if an individual rejects part of his true self in exchange for satisfying external expectations.

The second monologue is that of Half-Rome, representing a lofty population of the city. Here, Browning opens with an extremely opinionated perspective of the case based on traditional conventions which include women's subservience to men and brutish methods of justice. Half-Rome seeks the reader's approval of his opinions by citing the purpose of natural law and moral consequence. The speaker asks, "Who is it dares impugn the natural law,/ Deny God's word 'the faithless wife shall die'/?/ What are we blind?" (Browning 66). This statement proves that Half-Rome sympathizes with Guido because the speaker feels Guido acted in accordance with his natural rights as a man and husband. Since manhood is closely connected to reputation and honor in Roman conventions, the speaker finds Pompilia's death deserved because she ruined the Count socially.

Half-Rome then describes Pompilia's parents, Violante and Pietro, as conniving criminals and "the pair/ Who, as I told you, first had baited hook/ With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,/ Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore/ and gutted him" (Browning 63). By using such forceful language, the speaker reveals that he believes Guido was tricked into marrying the false Pompilia and wrongfully ruined for his poor decision-making. Finally, Half-Rome gives a harsh ultimatum regarding the moral climate of Rome in relation to the Franceschini case. The speaker declares:

If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,...

Then I say in the name of all that's left

Of honor in Rome, civility, i' the world

Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source, --

There's an end to all hope of justice more. (Browning 66)

Here, Half-Rome's representative reveals his complete disappointment and outrage at the societal changes that have made Pompilia's murder an unpardonable act. After all, Half-Rome believes that Guido had every right to kill his adulterous wife and "Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman" (Browning 67). In fact, Half-Rome acts as though Guido's complete lack of self-control is the appropriate conduct of man because "Vengeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave" that "bathed his name clean in their blood" (Browning 65). In short, Guido is justified in indulging his rage and murdering his allegedly adulterous wife because, according to traditional societal values, her death reinstates his noble reputation. Essentially, since Pompilia *might have* committed adultery, her alleged actions become the truth in the eyes of Half-Rome. This assumption formed with a bias against women yields Half-Rome's view of Pompilia's assumed culpability and evil nature which eventually contributes to her unnecessary murder.

In contrast, the third monologue opens with a diametrically opposed view of Pompilia. To the Other Half-Rome, Pompilia is a victim described as "little," "patient," and "flower-like," a young, delicate girl forced into marriage and motherhood (Browning 68). In this monologue, the speaker presents Pompilia as a faultless victim whose "earth was hell to her" because of the horrific torture she had to endure from her "noble" husband (Browning 68). However, Other Half-Rome's perception seems flawed because it does not show adequate attentiveness to Guido's losses in marriage. Instead, the monologue focuses on Pompilia's complete innocence and the dramatic ordeal of the Franceschini case.

Interestingly enough, Half-Rome's profiling of Guido is analogous to Other-Half Rome's favorable description of Pompilia. Other Half-Rome calls her "lamb-pure" and "lion-brave"

because she is absolved of any fault in his eyes, but the same was said by Half-Rome about Guido. The previous speaker believed Guido to be righteous in his actions because he acted in accordance with Half-Rome's traditional beliefs; however, Other Half-Rome believes Guido to be a devil for killing his faultless wife. Furthermore, Half-Rome sees Guido as a figurehead of traditional Roman values and honor. Conversely, Other Half-Rome views Pompilia's undue punishment as representative of the pitfalls of old society. Through these juxtaposed monologues, Guido and Pompilia are proven to be character foils, contrasting the completely culpable with the genuinely innocent. Krishnan notes in agreement, "Guido the villain is not possible without Pompilia the Saint," reflecting the blatant character foil Browning creates (213). However, by defining Guido and Pompilia as solely murderer and victim, the narrators lose part of the truth and ignore the actual motivations behind the characters' actions.

Almost in response to Rome's polarized views, "Tertium Quid," presents a juxtaposition of the opposing arguments and provides a more balanced judgement of the case. The Latin name of the section refers to "Something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things, but distinct from both" ("tertium quid" OED). Therefore, the title "Tertium Quid" represents an abstract combination of Rome's thoughts and conjectures related to the case. Even though the narrator presents information from both of Rome's sides, he mentions the public's predictable reaction to the incident as well. He knows Rome will look to the Law to define the truth, and calls the legal system "a machine" meant "to please the mob" (Browning 106). Through this statement and his choice descriptions of the public as "the mob," "plebs," and "commonalty," he reveals his corrupt, elitist mentality and the belief that his opinion of the Franceschini incident is superior to others (Browning 107).

Despite his biases, this narrator is more reliable than his predecessors because he recognizes that the case is not simply a morally black and white matter but that the reasons behind each individual's actions should be examined. The narrator of "Tertium Quid" addresses the inherent conflict in evaluating both sides' testimonies in that: "One calls the square round, t'other the round square" (Browning 106). Here, he mentions the problem that the truth is always altered by perception. So, the speaker presents information from either side and asks the interlocutor to develop his or her own opinion. For example, in relation to Violante's behavior, he asks the reader to "Compute her capability of crime" and reconsider her characterization after providing background information (Browning 111). The speaker essentially asks the reader to distinguish if Violante is the "Black, hard, cold," and morally corrupt woman that Half-Rome makes her out to be (Browning 111). Then again, he mentions Guido's unfortunate upbringing too. Guido was removed from his church apprenticeship, and so the speaker notes, "Guido thus left,--with a youth spent in vain/ And not a penny in purse to show for it," which helps to explain why Guido is unmotivated in his aristocratic position (Browning 115). As a result, the inclusion of Guido's background information instills a bit of sympathy in the reader for the story's antagonist as well.

After presenting both sides of the argument and asking the audience to sympathize with both views, the speaker questions in summation, "Who/ Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance" (Browning 117). In other words, since Pompilia is a false daughter and Guido is a poor aristocrat—essentially "each cheated each"—does it follow that each should be punished equally (Browning 117)? Although the narrator of "Tertium Quid" does not answer this question directly, he does cite the response of the justice system:

The courts would not condemn nor yet acquit

This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense

As end the strife to either's absolute loss (Browning 133)

In short, the courts, instead of definitively declaring who is liable, assume some fault on each party because the evidence presents "each quality [as] being conceivable" (Browning 133). The narrator adds, "all of you want the other thing,/ The extreme of the law, some verdict neat, complete," but nothing involving the discovery of truth, or the culprit of a crime, is wholly unflawed (Browning 134). Overall, his final conclusion that "Each party wants too much, claims sympathy/ For its object of compassion" proves that nothing is truly fair because each party seeks its own reparations which are linked to their senses of self-worth (Browning 141). Consequently, no one is truly satisfied because, oftentimes, one values his or her own worth more favorably than how others value that same individual. This is precisely the case when Guido realizes he will no longer be given the lax legal treatment he expects. Thus, his injured sense of self-worth pushes him to murder the woman whom he believes to be the cause of his loss of privilege.

The next monologue is that of Count Guido Franceschini, Pompilia's murderer, the central antagonist, and a devastated nobleman completely stripped of power. At the beginning of his speech, Guido complains about the legal influence he is owed because of his aristocratic name, and he quickly learns from the judges' unfavorable decisions that his honor is no longer a powerful force in society. Despite his coaxing, he does not convince the court to annul his marriage or punish his wife and the priest for their supposed affair. Consequently, he lashes out at the Law for its preposterous ruling that nobility no longer receives legal favoritism. In solely focusing on his now invalid entitlements, Guido inadvertently confesses to the audience that honor is his most valuable trait. Therefore, Guido's sense of identity relies only on a social

status that he knows is “worth the market-price,--now up, now down,” ever-changing with society’s values (Browning 153). In an attempt to justify the worth he places in honor, he argues:

If what I gave in barter, style and state
 And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
 Were worthless,--why, society goes to ground,
 Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honour of birth,--
 If that thing has no value, cannot buy
 Something with value of another sort,
 You've no reward nor punishment to give
 I' the giving or the taking honour; straight
 Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
 Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards. (Browning 152)

In summary, he claims that society’s foundation is based on nobility’s worth, and if that value is diminished, he will not be the only man affected. He proclaims that if he falls in status, the rest of society will collapse along with him. However, civilization’s dynamic nature keeps humanity afloat, and the individual destruction of Guido’s reputation only means his collapse of self.

Guido’s external appraisal of self-worth reveals a sobering truth: the Count lacks a sense of independent identity; he lives a life solely based on external expectations without any internal sense of motivation toward self-actualization or his world’s betterment. This presents not only a condition of cognitive dissonance where the expectations of others compete with his own motivations, but it provides a frighteningly fragile situation in which an upset of honor results in the complete destruction of Guido’s sense of identity. The corruption of his personal truths

sends him into a murderous frenzy: he retaliates against his young wife and the very marriage into which he was forced.

The Count's marriage is effectively his undoing because it corrupts another of his personal truths about the superiority of men over women. After all, he clearly states what he would demand of his wife:

Why, loyalty and obedience,--wish and will

To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind

To the novel, nor disadvantageous mould! (Browning 155)

Guido explains that a wife's role is to bend to the husband's will and obey his requests, a traditional relationship that, he claims, would be beneficial for any woman. In fact, Guido never refers to love in marriage. He calls it an "obligation...To practise mastery" in exchange for "Pompilia's duty" to "submit herself,/ Afford me pleasure, [and] perhaps cure my bile" (Browning 158). His erroneous expectations that Pompilia would reject her own goals to "afford [him] pleasure" and "cure [his] bile," as if it is her responsibility to expunge the evil he embodies, sets up his marriage for failure.

Guido presents his hopeful expectation that Pompilia would "cure" him, or as Knoepfmacher mentions, she would be "a female complement who might restore an incomplete male self" in Guido (141). According to this paradigm, Guido expects his wife to make up for his shortcomings and unhappiness without attributing any of his faults to himself. Then, after his marriage's failure, the Count feels that the only way he can reclaim his independence is by regaining the part of himself he invested in Pompilia—his noble name. Unfortunately, the only

way to reclaim his identity—which is simply his noble title—is to eliminate the perceived source of his honor’s corruption: his innocent, yet disappointing wife.

First meant to be an extension of his honor and an ornament to adorn his outward reputation, Pompilia cannot fulfill Guido’s expectations, and so she is condemned to death. Guido says that while in the murderous act, “I rapt away by the impulse, one/ Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need/ To abolish that detested life” proving his instinctual reaction to destroy the good Pompilia represents (Browning 179). After he completes the homicide, he says, “I myself am whole now” (Browning 180). Thus, Guido, “a devouring male ego,” feels his identity is reinstated after “reduc[ing] that Female Other into nothingness” (Knoepflmacher 142-43). Overall, Guido is trapped in an unsuccessful marriage in which the custom’s purpose—the unification of love—is corrupted. Since his relationship is only arranged for the transfer of wealth, status, and reproductive capacity, he can only reap the consequences of a loveless marriage.

Guido, having worked his whole life for an intangible title that now has been stripped of its value, is enraged by the dishonorable results of his mismatched marriage. In turning to the Law, his goal is for Caponsacchi and Pompilia to be punished for the injustice they have done him in tarnishing his honor. However, that motive further reveals his selfish nature. He is not concerned with Pompilia’s love or the blackening of others’ souls but the harm in reputation they have done to him. Specifically, Guido projects a tragic hero mentality in which he believes he was doomed from birth and is now a martyr for all *honorable* men. He believes in a higher sense of obligation claiming, “I did God’s bidding and man’s duty” to kill in a passion of “natural vengeance” that all men should exact as a right (Browning 180, 166). After proclaiming his righteousness, he pleads to his fellow man, “Protect your own defender,—save me, Sirs!” in an

attempt to provoke sympathy (Browning 187). Then he proposes the recreation of a “better” world in which:

Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
 Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
 Customs that recognise the standard worth,—
 The wholesome household rule in force again,
 Husbands once more God’s representative,
 Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
 No longer men of Belial, with no aim
 At leading silly women captive, but
 Of rising to such duties as yours now,— (Browning 188)

Thus, Guido tries to pass off a murder as a righteous act for the good of humanity, and the reader is left with an intense feeling of evil persuasion at the end of the villain’s monologue.

After Franceschini expresses his hatred of the trickery surrounding his marriage and shares his negative perception of his wife, Giuseppe Caponsacchi declares Pompilia to be a saintly figure incapable of imperfection. When the priest begins his monologue, he erupts in anger at the justice system’s inability to prevent the death of a totally innocent woman. Immediately, the reader becomes aware of Caponsacchi’s complete infatuation with Pompilia’s godliness when he calls her, “The glory of life, the beauty of the world, /The splendor of heaven” (Browning 191). To Caponsacchi, Pompilia is the epitome of divine perfection in mortal form, and he feels as though his duty is to protect her and the religious truth she represents. Even so, Caponsacchi recognizes his own bias in explaining his history of the case because he calls his

account “my truth” (Browning 196). Therefore, Caponsacchi is a reliable narrator in that he accepts that his perception of Pompilia is skewed by his religious interests.

Through his speech, the priest reveals his refusal to be passive and claims it is man’s nature to be “bound, better or worse, to act” in the face of tragedy (Browning 192). Regarding his religious yearnings, Caponsacchi recognizes that “To engage in moral action, even if it is to do the wrong thing, is in the long run a step toward salvation” (Langbaum 295). He recognizes that running away with Pompilia could be misconstrued as a romantic relationship, but her well-being is more important than his reputation. Caponsacchi attempts to preserve the religious virtues of Pompilia out of his personal devotion to God and his love for humanity, implying that his spiritual motivations are much stronger than his worldly attachments.

In spite of his outward altruism and clerical position, other observers present the priest as an impostor. For example, he is thoroughly insulted when some individuals assume there is a romantic relationship between himself and Franceschini’s wife. The officials remark, “’Tis unfair, wrongs feminity at large,/ To let a single dame monopolize/ A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike,” alluding that the priest is a community scourge and “the lover in the smart disguise” (Browning 221). Yet, Caponsacchi repeatedly emphasizes that he is only infatuated with Pompilia according to her saintliness; no romantic love is felt between them. In fact, he feels as though he was acting in accordance with God’s will in obeying the innocent, troubled Pompilia. He says:

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,—

This new thing that had been struck into me

By the look o’ the lady,—to dare disobey

The first authoritative word. 'Twas God's. (Browning 211)

Hence, in response to slanderous claims, he proves that the public's perception of his identity is corrupted because he only refers to Pompilia as a religious authority. In other words, Caponsacchi respects Pompilia's virtue as he respects the supremacy of God, and since the priest associates Pompilia with the superiority of the divine, he subsequently demonstrates his own inferiority in relation to her. At one point he mentions that in obeying her word, "I had been lifted to the level of her" and that "'Duty to God is duty to her'" (Browning 211-12). With this statement, Caponsacchi further proves his spiritually-induced subservience to the young wife in order to preserve her condition of human perfection and rejects the public's tainted view of him as an adulterous impostor. Despite lack of evidence, the public's skewed evaluation of Caponsacchi's motivations still creates a frustrating social situation for the priest.

Moreover, Caponsacchi is disgusted with the external forces that cause the corruption of Pompilia herself. Since the Franceschini case evokes spiritual reflection on his behalf, the priest's speech often includes vivid imagery with pictorial representations of competing entities—truth and corruption, good and evil, purity and sin—as white and black. For instance, Caponsacchi's frequent use of figurative language in detailing the night of his botched escape to Rome with Pompilia reveals more spiritual significance of their defeat. He portrays Pompilia as:

...a whiteness in the distance, waxed
 Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
 Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
 The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
 Certainly, for the body was one black,
 Black from head down to foot. (Browning 214).

In this passage, Caponsacchi presents Pompilia as the white, pure truth, but even she is blackened by the worldly flesh to which she is bound. In this case, the priest uses the figurative eclipse of dark over light to convey the presence of corruption and to symbolize how the purity of Pompilia's soul is discolored by human existence.

Then, again he emphasizes the white, pure extension of divinity in Pompilia by juxtaposing her image with black, predatory depictions of Guido on the night she is captured. He details two opposing forces at a standoff "By the window all a-flame with morning-red,/ He the black figure, the opprobrious blur/ Against all peace and joy and light and life" (Browning 223). In this statement, the priest not only provides a visual contrast in the imagery, but he also presents the opposing emotional significances of the individuals as well. In referring to Guido as contemptuous and Pompilia as a source of utter joy, he parallels their characters with the forces of evil and good. Following the struggle, Caponsacchi demands Guido's accomplices, "'Detect/ Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge/ Between us and the mad dog howling there!'" (Browning 222). By referring to Guido as an animal, Caponsacchi comments on the corrupted natural order that Guido's identity represents. Instead of using logic or appealing to divinity for guidance, Guido indulges his passion in attacking and reclaiming his wife.

The priest conveys his emotionally-charged anger and the blame he places in the legal system when he declares, "'Twas you/ Hindered me staying here to save her" (Browning 231). Caponsacchi blames the Law for the complete corruption and subsequent destruction of Pompilia's symbolic religious truth. He then points out another flaw of the justice system: the use of torture to extract confessions. In this case, a man wrongfully confessed that he saw Pompilia and Caponsacchi kissing in a carriage, but the man was tortured before testifying. In this example, the legal officials do not recognize, or knowingly accept, the inherent bias they

cause in using torture to evoke confession. Caponsacchi asks about the information's questionable origin:

“When deposed he so?”

“After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . .”

“—Granted by friend the Governor, I engage—”

“—For his participation in your flight! (Browning 227).

Through his questioning, Caponsacchi discovers the legal favoritism Guido was given so that he could gather evidence against the young wife. Caponsacchi continues his furious rant and gives the judges an ultimatum. He declares, “I saved his wife/ Against law: against law he slays her now:/ Deal with him! (Browning 230). Essentially, he demands that the law complete its duty by punishing Guido once and for all.

After releasing his harsh accusations of Law's flaws, the priest comes to terms with his situation. Not only has he lost an incredible inspiration in Pompilia, but he has watched her suffer under the influence of the world's evils while she tried to lead the purest life possible. He resolves:

I have done with being judged.

I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,

To the point that I apprise you,—in contempt

For all misapprehending ignorance

O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—

That I assuredly did bow, was blessed

By the revelation of Pompilia (Browning 230).

At this point, Caponsacchi has completely eliminated any sense of his own corruption through his testimony; yet, he assumes again that the officials will misunderstand his love of Pompilia in the “vulgar way,” and spread rumors that “[t]he priest’s in love,” (Browning 230). In the end, Caponsacchi is still in disbelief over the misused power of the courts. He questions:

How could you get proof without trying us?
 You went through the preliminary form,
 Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
 The adversary. (Browning 234)

Once again, he cites the misuse of power within the courts and the system’s fallibility. Since the courts were obviously hesitant to condemn a noble, Caponsacchi finds the justice system partially responsible for the ramifications of its corruption—Pompilia’s death.

The following monologue is that of the victim: Pompilia Comparini-Franceschini. The victim’s speech reveals several sources of corruption that mar and ultimately destroy her character. First and foremost, Pompilia’s origin story perverts the ordinary relationships of the biological family. Since she is born of a prostitute and sold to Violante, her true identity creates an element of secrecy that eventually stifles her family’s social improvement. Additionally, Pompilia’s mismatched marriage to her old, hateful husband stunts her coming of age and exploration of individualism. Although she understands her womanly duty to be married, she is thrown into marriage because of her adopted mother’s want of wealth and social advancement.

However, Pompilia defends her mother and says she only sought to place her daughter “In soil where I could strike real root, and grow” which proves the girl’s ability to empathize with others (Browning 244). Despite the corrupted nature of the relationships that entrap

Pompilia in her isolated social circumstance, she shows incredible understanding and compassion in her attitude toward her parents' mistakes. She says, "Pietro at least had done no harm, I know;/ Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes/ Such revenge lawful" (Browning 243). Here, she recognizes her parents' flaws while still judging that the punishments paid to her family are completely unjustified. Thus, Pompilia's naturally good character rises above the external, immoral forces that attempt to lead her to misery.

Even though Pompilia understands the logic behind her union with Guido, their incompatible marriage is in itself a corruption of ideal romantic love. Instead of marrying someone out of genuine interest and compassion, Pompilia is traded away in a mere business deal for fame and financial success. That foundationally loveless relationship eventually results in the amalgamated misery of Guido and Pompilia stuck in a union that is emotionally unfulfilling. This corruption in marriage's purpose results in the couple's disastrous relationship involving physical abuse, a lack of emotional connection, and a complete disdain for one another.

Furthermore, Pompilia identifies forces that attempt to corrupt her sense of individual identity and purity. She first mentions that Violante wanted her to "get to be the thing I called myself" through marriage because "wife and husband are one flesh" (Browning 244). Yet, that premise is shown to be flawed through her horrible brute of a husband. Pompilia is unable to express or explore herself in the Franceschini household because Guido punishes any behaviors he finds unsatisfactory. In effect, Pompilia's identity becomes forcibly attached to that of a stranger in the hopes that it would help her develop her maternal qualities and become a "whole" woman.

Later, Pompilia recognizes the double standard that exists for women: they can neither live with men nor live without them. On one hand, Pompilia is instructed to marry a man in order to better herself. Conversely, her experience with her husband proves to be the most torturous experience of her life. At one point she even asks Caponsacchi, ““Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind/ Of mere unhappiness at being men,/As women suffer, being womanish?”” (Browning 216). It is in this question that Pompilia reveals insight of a corrupted society that punishes women for their innate differences.

However, as Chodorow notes, “Difference and gender difference do not exist as things in themselves,” but they exist in a “relational construction” (4). This point can be used to analyze the relationship between Guido and his new wife. Guido understands his role as the husband to comprise those traits that are considered masculine, not feminine. So, if Pompilia is the innocent, inexperienced girl, he should be her foil in a harsh, masterful husband. Therefore, the marriage begins with conflicting spousal expectations and the general assumption that each—male and female—have specific, distinctive roles to fill. While Pompilia did not know her responsibilities in marriage, Guido expected complete obedience in exchange for sharing his title. The assumption that a wife should be controlled and denied the expressive rights of men creates a corrupt social hierarchy that ignores the commonality of all humanity, thus resulting in the female identity’s repression and eventual internal collapse.

Additionally, Pompilia feels firsthand the corruption of the law which is supposed to protect her. In her naivety, Pompilia believes the officials’ advice, but she soon discovers the false guidance of the Archbishop and the Cardinal who entrap her in the torturous marriage. Disappointed by the lack of humanity she is shown, Pompilia learns to remove her faith from mankind and to place all of it with God. She notes, “henceforth I looked to God/ Only, nor cared

my desecrated soul/...Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind” (Browning 256). Having witnessed the corruption of her fellow man and missing a source from which to seek advice, Pompilia is forced to look to a divine influence. In summation, the law’s representatives deny their purpose in refusing to help serve Pompilia. This ineffectuality of the law, the first source of help she seeks, is ultimately a contributing factor in her death.

In spite of all those external obstacles, Pompilia endures observers’ misperceptions too. The girl understands that even though she is pointing toward the truth and invoking God’s word, others still misinterpret her behaviors and intentions. She says:

So we are made, such difference in minds,
 Such difference too in eyes that see the minds!
 That man, you misinterpret and misprise—
 The glory of his nature, I had thought,
 Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
 Through every atom of his act with me:
 Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,
 Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
 You all descry a spider in the midst.
 One says, “The head of it is plain to see,”
 And one, “They are the feet by which I judge,”
 All say, “Those films were spun by nothing else.” (Browning 257)

In this statement, she describes that no matter how clear the truth may seem to her, outsiders’ perceptions of that truth are often misguided. Now, instead of asking the advice of men,

Pompilia knows to only “[speak] truth to the Truth’s self” to gain the proper guidance (Browning 264). Furthermore, she notes that men only care for their worldly lives, and so her “Prayers move God,” but “threats, and nothing else, move men!” (Browning 273). However, Pompilia does not seem to contain the self-preserving instinct of man. Instead, she opens her heart to the will of God and accepts the unjust consequences of her life’s decisions.

After proving man’s corrupt nature, Pompilia seeks to prove her own spiritual purity. She explores this in relation to her marriage with Guido. She claims:

His soul has never lain beside my soul;
 But for the unresisting body,—thanks!
 He burned that garment spotted by the flesh!
 Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
 It caught, and disinfection it had craved
 Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
 So as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell! (Browning 276)

Although Pompilia notes that Guido ruined her flesh, she relays that her soul is untouched, thus retaining her spiritual purity. She then claims that Guido is her savior because he led her to trust in God when she lost faith in everything else. Furthermore, Guido is the force by which her soul is detached from her mortal flesh, allowing her to rise into heaven. It is with faith in the divine and the priest’s help that she is able to come to terms with the misery that is her life. In her conclusion, Pompilia praises Caponsacchi’s altruism and simultaneously reflects on his character. She notes:

Through such souls alone
 God stooping shows sufficient of His light
 For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise. (Browning 278)

Hence, her last words recognize that Caponsacchi is a pure soul and that kindness is the only saving grace of humanity. Her declaration that she shall rise shows her unwavering determination and confidence in her moral perfection even when faced with death. Thus, the corruption of biological ancestry, marriage's purpose, Law's duty, and her own innocence are the major elements that destroy the good Pompilia represents.

After that emotional confession, Browning writes the monologue of a legal official. In the section titled, "Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis," Guido's lawyer again notes the general public's misconception of the law as a clear judge of right and wrong. He claims that the community expects the law to sort out "this huge, this hurly-burly case" in order to "excogitate the truth" and "Give the result in speech, plain black and white" (Browning 281). However, that expectation is clearly unattainable due to bias and the case's general lack of tangible evidence. Plus, the lawyer's true motivation is not to prove the truth, but to defend his client. His method is to simply ask "Where are we weak?" and make proper adjustments to the truth in order to prove Guido a more innocent man (Browning 286). For example, instead of explaining the facts of the case, he ponders:

Here were we proving murder a mere myth,
 And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent,—ay,
 Absent! He was—why, where should Christian be?—

Engaged in visiting his proper church,

The duty of us all at Christmas-time; (Browning 287)

Hence, Guido's lawyer completely falsifies the facts of the case in order to defend the murderer, as he is hired to do. In fact, he even says Guido "came but to forgive and bring to life" in replacement of the murderous plot Franceschini obviously intended (Browning 287). Part of the lawyer's justification for the crime coincides with Half-Rome's belief in a man's right to punish his adulterous wife. He claims that "The honour, we were robbed of eight months since," could be "recoverable at any day/ By death of the delinquent" as Half-Rome stated earlier (Browning 302). Without conveying Guido's faults, the lawyer declares Pompilia "a disgrace and nothing more" to emphasize the perception that Guido was cheated of a proper wife (Browning 315). The attorney then claims the purpose of Pompilia's murder was "to lesson wives" about keeping a faithful marriage and so that Guido "might creditably live" (Browning 317).

Once again the lawyer proves that he modifies language to distort the truth. The lawyer claims, "We must translate our motives like our speech/ Into the lower phrase that suits the sense/ O' the limitedly apprehensive" (Browning 312). He further explains his process of adapting language to suit the audience:

To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,

And, having first ecclesiasticised,

Regularise the whole, next emphasise,

Then latinize and lastly Cicero-ise,

Giving my Fisc his finish. (Browning 318)

Essentially, he describes his process of altering and fabricating information to benefit his clients. After administering this process the truth is completely changed, proving that the true meaning or motivations of the case are never fully relayed to the judges effectively.

Conversely, Bottinius uses truth to argue Pompilia's innocence in the next monologue. In sharp contrast to Pompilia's good intentions in marriage, the defender cites Guido's lack of interest and disdain for his good wife. Bottinius claims, "Nothing died in him/ Save courtesy, good sense and proper trust," revealing that Pompilia did not do her husband harm, but Guido refused to extend his wife proper care (Browning 328). Bottinius also includes Guido's jealous perception that it would be in Pompilia's nature to make him a cuckold. Guido's response to that suspicion, instead of creating an emotional connection with his wife or gathering ample proof, is to punish her for the sins he thinks she commits during his absence. Pompilia's lawyer notes the consequences of Guido's needless mistreatment when he states:

Causeless rage breeds, i' the wife now, rageful cause,

Tyranny wakes rebellion from its sleep.

Rebellion, say I?—rather, self-defence, (Browning 329)

The lawyer proclaims that after Pompilia has experienced much physical abuse and emotional torment, she is justified in trying to reclaim her own sense of self by any means, even by escaping her husband.

Nonetheless, Bottinius later notes that women have a limited means by which to avoid dangerous situations. This is evident in Pompilia's unsuccessful efforts to seek aid from political and religious officials. Since all of her attempts to beseech help were in vain, Bottinius claims Pompilia could only rely on her natural resource, physical beauty, to gain attention. He argues

that even if she used, “Arts that allure, the magic nod and wink,/ The witchery of gesture, [and] spell of word,” to attract Caponsacchi, she was only seeking “a champion on her side” as a source of help (Browning 329-30). After all, why would her means to the end matter if Guido’s do not? Guido seems justified in writing false love letters and persuading officials in order to reclaim his honor, yet his wife is not permitted to enlist the help of a priest by showing him favor. The lawyer further tries to justify Pompilia’s alleged actions by claiming:

What prevents sin, itself is sinless, sure:
 And sin, which hinders sin of deeper dye,
 Softens itself away by contrast so. (Browning 337)

In effect, he argues that an act of seduction used to seek help should be ignored because that act prevented more serious sins from occurring.

Despite his purpose in trying to prove Pompilia’s goodness, Bottinius still projects some traditional values that undermine women’s independence. For instance, he argues:

Now, what is greatest sin of womanhood?
 That which unwomans it, abolishes
 The nature of the woman,—impudence. (Browning 337)

He claims the most severe sin is the “self-abolishment” of womanly nature as would be attained if Pompilia was too bold a creature. Here, even Pompilia’s defender exposes corruption in his perspective of the female sex as inherently inferior to its male counterpart. However, the attorney still praises Caponsacchi for his active role in helping Pompilia when no one else would. Bottinius notes:

He only, Caponsacchi 'mid a crowd,
 Caught Virtue up, carried Pompilia off
 Thro' the gaping impotence of sympathy
 In ranged Arezzo: (Browning 342).

With this statement, Bottinius simultaneously compliments Caponsacchi for his role in preserving Pompilia and comments on the general lack of sympathy that the public expressed for Pompilia's misery. Thus, Bottinius contrasts others' lack of sympathy with the priest's altruism. He does the same in proving the good and evil of the Franceschini pair. He says:

By painting saintship I depicture sin,
 Beside the pearl, I prove how black the jet,
 And through Pompilia's virtue, Guido's crime. (Browning 351)

In attesting Pompilia's complete innocence, he seeks to prove Guido's complete liability. Therefore, Bottinius substantiates his defense by citing the corrupted forces that threatened his client.

Next is the Pope's monologue. Browning's inclusion of the Pope's perspective advances the reader on the quest for truth by citing the most powerful and spiritual man in Italy. Despite the innate purity associated with the Pope, he reveals, "I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,/ As a mere man may, with no special touch" (Browning 383). This statement exposes that even the Pope's judgement could be flawed. He feels immense pressure in deciding a man's fate as he calls himself, "the solitary judge,/ To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea" that will ultimately result in life or death (Browning 360). It in his monologue that the aging religious figure realizes the complexities of his judgments and calls his challenge a "trial of my soul," the

results of which would determine his relationship with God (Browning 385). Ultimately, the Pope decides that Guido should be punished for his heinous crimes instead of being extended the noble courtesy of legal leniency. Thus, the Pope proves his credibility by rejecting the immoral possibility of letting a murderer avoid punishment.

The Pope also cites more sources of corruption in his speech. For instance, the public perception of his religious authority is disputed too. He notes, “Some surmise,/ Perchance, that since man’s wit is fallible,/ Mine may fail here?” (Browning 361). He mentions man’s lack of faith in their own friends when he states:

Man must tell his mate
 Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
 Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think
 “He lies, it is the method of a man!”
 And yet will speak for answer “It is truth”
 To him who shall rejoin “Again a lie!”
 Therefore this filthy rags of speech, this coil
 Of statement, comment, query and response,
 Tatters all too contaminate for use,
 Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too,
 The Word. (Browning 364)

Here, the Pope showcases how man’s response to truth is doubt, no matter the source. Whether it be a stranger, friend, official, or divine source, it is in man’s nature to doubt the “filthy rags of speech” that language conveys. On the contrary, the last two lines of the quote above prove the Pope’s faith in God’s Truth.

He contemplates man's belief that "Low instinct" and "base pretension" represent one's inner core of truth—one's identity. This view coincides with Guido's rejection of Christian morals in exchange for actions that result in personal gain (Browning 367). The Pope further explains this folly with man's tendency to "Rest upon human nature, take their stand/ On what is fact, the lust and pride of life!" (Browning 398). The Pope, in effect, summarizes man's self-serving, worldly purposes that interfere with their attainment of spiritual truth. This problem extends to all men because they act in accordance with their wants and desires instead of acting for the good of humanity. Furthermore, without Guido's selfish attachment to his aristocratic title, Pompilia might still be alive.

After deciding Guido's fate, the Pope manages to consolidate his views of Pompilia and Caponsacchi as well. He essentially negates the rumor that surrounds their escape to Rome. He states that the girl-wife was only "Dutiful," "Submissive," and "Tolerant" of her social circumstance until her physical and emotional torture was too much to bear (Browning 379). On the part of Caponsacchi, the Pope claims it was only "the honest love/ [that] Betrayed you" because his actions motivated by spiritual passion were perceived by others as romantic involvement (Browning 383). The Pope also comments that Caponsacchi was "All blindness, bravery and obedience!—blind?/ Ay, as a man would be inside the sun," (Browning 390). The religious leader recognizes that Caponsacchi made poor decisions but only on behalf of the moral good he preserved in helping Pompilia. In conclusion, the Pope states the inherent corruption of all men, even when they are faced with the truth. He says:

White shall not neutralise the black, nor good

Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:

Life's business being just the terrible choice. (Browning 383)

Therefore, men cannot just be described as good and bad; they must be judged on a smaller scale according to their choices. In summation, the Pope's monologue proves that *all* men are fallible and consequently vulnerable to corruption. He also proves that the corruption of his moral judgments would destroy his spiritual connection to God.

In the last character monologue, entitled "Guido," the Count has a burst of self-realization when faced with his death. In this epiphany, he realizes that he has been repressing his true motivations in order to meet society's expectations. Even the heading of the section reveals a change in Guido's character; he is stripped of his noble title, Count Franceschini. Now, instead of seeking external validation, he is forced to look within himself to find his true self—Guido. It is through this introspective process that he begins to identify his motivations and how his "Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips" that speak *his* truth (Browning 407).

An incredibly crucial piece of Guido's self-recognition comes from his emotional expression in this section. Browning's use of dramatic monologue allows the reader to sympathize with a man who is continuously searching for the true motives behind his dastardly actions. One of those pent up emotions is a ferocious anger. As Krishnan notes, "Anger,...is intensely individual," in that it manifests in different actions according to the individual's mechanism of release (207). Guido's frustration lies in his inability to control his identity's development. Therefore, he lashes out in retaliation against the people that he believes hinder his success the most: Pompilia, Violante, and Pietro. However, in expressing intense emotion through a fit of passion, Guido creates his own tragic downfall in an explosion of fury and fervent murder—another chaotic circumstance where he loses all self-control.

On the other hand, Guido also discusses his assimilation into noble society through marriage and wealth according to others' influences which corrupt his truly evil self. For instance, Guido notes his lack of interest in marriage, but he is told, "A man requires a woman and a wife," and so he seeks out one (Browning 407). Later he notes:

There was my folly; I believed the saw.
 I knew that just myself concerned myself,
 Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack,
 In a woman, (Browning 407)

Guido was forced into an inappropriate circumstance, marriage for the sake of saving his family name. Yet he notices now that he, in being human, understands the necessity for truth, especially the truth that he begins to recognize within himself. He starts:

—why, the woman's in the man!
 Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!
 Overmuch life turns round my woman-side;
 The male and female in me, mixed before,
 Settle of a sudden: I'm my wife outright
 In this unmanly appetite for truth, (Browning 407)

Here, Guido begins to understand the reasons behind Pompilia's misery and her need to seek out the truth. While Pompilia nature has always been motivated by truth, Guido's motivations are linked closely to very foundations of his identity: reputation, loyalty, and heritage. Although Guido now recognizes the error of his ways in murdering his wife, he still believes in "something changeless at the heart of me/ To know me by, some nucleus that's myself" that is irrevocably evil (Browning 456). He even claims, "Nor is it in me to unhate my hates," which proves he is

unwilling to modify his attitude and self-serving bias (Browning 456). This awful arrogance signifies a lack of significant transformation because he accepts his own evil and embodies it.

In fact, Gridley notes, “Guido, aware of the failure of his strategic rhetoric, speaks more freely” after he admits his villainy (51). From this point on, Guido becomes very blunt in describing his newly learned personal truths. For instance, in relation to murdering Pompilia, he recognizes “the folly for which I slew her,” but he is not willing to repent for this sin (Browning 407). He proceeds to call Pompilia, “a nullity in female shape,” showing absolutely no regret for his hatred of her (Browning 428). After he married her, he claims that he was disappointed with her because:

This wife of mine was of another mood—

Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,

Nor feign the love that brings real love about:

Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her. (Browning 434)

Although many might think this view is corrupted morally, this is Guido’s true perspective of women. Therefore, he is rediscovering his own truth and redefining himself after consolidating his ideas about what *he* thinks, not what society wants, solidifying the “nucleus” that is himself. Even more sinister in this next passage, Guido reveals himself to be devoid of any redeeming qualities. He questions:

But why particularise, defend the deed?

Say that I hated her for no one cause

Beyond my pleasure so to do,—what then? ...

Why should you master natural caprice?

Pure nature! (Browning 434)

Here, Guido essentially says that he had no reason to kill Pompilia other than the existence of an innate hatred that he felt toward her. In fact, he says that it was “beyond my pleasure” to commit the act, adding a sadistic element to his already frightening moral composition.

Guido subsequently provides his own animalistic self-representations. He claims his motivations coincide with those of the common man who values mortal life more than eternal existence. He says:

they laugh frankly in the face of faith

And take the natural course

...Down they all drop to my low level

we swine/ Did eat by born depravity of taste! (Browning 420).

Guido’s animalistic comparison between the common man and hungry swine further proves his willingness to embrace the lowness he has discovered in himself. Guido does not repent or feel shameful about these descriptions, but he embodies them in confidence as traits to which he has grown accustomed.

Guido again comments on the corruption of the common man who focuses on worldly pleasures instead of yearning for spiritual ascension toward the Truth. He says, “Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i’ the Book,” but “Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize!” (Browning 419). Guido notes this corruption because it afflicts nearly all noblemen. In his lifetime, Guido had to focus on wealth, title, and reputation, all of which are only valuable as worldly titles. However, he still seeks to blame society for his unfortunate circumstance asking, “Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for?” (Browning 425).

By this section of the monologue, Guido still claims, “I see not where the fault lies” in his actions, but that quickly changes when the officials come to take Guido to his execution (Browning 434). It is when he is on death’s doorstep that he finally tries to argue his way out of the sentence. First, he appeals to the guards, claiming, “I was just stark mad,—let the madman live/ Pressed by as many chains as you please pile,” revealing that he does identify with the common man’s self-preserving need to live on Earth (Browning 457). Then he pleads:

Don’t open! Hold me from them! I am yours,

I am the Granduke’s—no, I am the Pope’s!

Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .

Pompilia, will you let them murder me? (Browning 457)

In this last cry for help, Guido calls out first to his influential friends, then to divine sources, and lastly, to the woman he selfishly murdered. Although Guido redefines himself according to his own terms, that recognition of his own inherent evil cannot save him from death. In his moment of need, he calls out to Pompilia, his opposing natural force, to rescue him from his own mortal corruption; but, she is incapable of redeeming him.

Browning’s last monologue inverts the title of the first, thus being called “The Book and the Ring.” In this section, the speaker reviews some truths about the human condition and spiritual corruption. His first motto is to ““Let God be true, and every man/ A liar”” (Browning 468). Although a bit harsh, this statement has been proven accurate throughout *The Ring and the Book*. He continues:

who trusts

To human testimony for a fact

Gets this sole fact—himself is proved a fool;
 Man's speech being false, if but by consequence
 That only strength is true; while man is weak,
 And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,
 Should learn to love what he may speak one day. (Browning 471)

In summation, man's word is never pure truth. Thought, language, bias, and personal motivations alter the truth that can only exist purely in art and God's word. Furthermore, each man interprets the truth differently, resulting in several, individual modifications of the truth that can be linked back to a single source. He also mentions a recurring problem in using the truth:

but here's the plague
 That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
 Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,
 Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
 Nor recognisable by whom it left—
 While falsehood would have done the work of truth. (Browning 477)

This theory is quite true. In many cases, lies account for the evidence behind a verdict or a gossiping community's beliefs. However, the preservation of the truth is proven to be more important. In the poem, Pompilia is showcased as the most innocent, redeemable character because she only told her truth. Caponsacchi and the Pope are also honorable characters because they stuck to their spiritual truths. Conversely, Guido is the character most punished because he rejected his innate, evil identity in an attempt to assimilate into society. Overall, the last monologue focuses on the unattainable absolute truth, a natural yet unsolvable human curiosity.

In conclusion, Browning employs dramatic monologue in *The Ring and the Book* to examine the inner turmoil that the corruption of truth causes. Information presented through dramatic monologue forces the reader to evaluate the relationship between an individual's personal truth, the actual truth, and the negative consequences that arise after corruption of truth occurs. Browning's work includes examples of corruption in identity, life purpose, power, spirituality, love, and language, and it shows the destructive results of corruption. In the most important cases of identity corruption, Guido and Pompilia, lose their senses of self and live their lives in complete misery until their deaths. Although those characters, represented by good and evil, are natural polar opposites, the effects of society's influence force them to collide and eventually destroy themselves. It is also interesting to note that the epitome of society's convention—arranged marriage and the obstruction of true love—brings the mismatched couple together. Browning shows through his characters' relationships, social influences, and spiritual values that the results of the truth's corruption are always destructive, chaotic, and deadly.

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