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"The ring and the book" and "The old yellow book"

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Thesis

'The Ring and the Book' and 'The Old Yellow Book'

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O.Y.B. - 'The Old Yellow Book, Source of Browning's The Ring and the Book' by Charles W. Hodell, (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1908)

Quotations from Browning's 'The Ring and the Book' are referred to by Book number (Roman numeral) and line number (Arabic numeral). The edition used in this thesis is: Robert Browning: 'The Ring and the Book' (Oxford University Press, 1912, with an introduction by Edward Dowden)
Chapter I.

THE STORY OF 'THE OLD YELLOW BOOK'

A NARRATIVE OF EVENTS DRAWN FROM THE RECORDS OF 'THE OLD YELLOW BOOK'

In 1693 there lived in Rome a well-to-do bourgeois family, one Pietro Comparini and his wife Violante, with their daughter, Francesca Pompilia. Pietro was 64 years old, his wife about 61, and Pompilia was but a child of 13; according to her baptismal certificate she was born on July 17, 1680. She was baptized on July 23, 1680 in the parish church of San Lorenzo in Lucina where she was invested with the sonorous name of Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia. She was generally called, however, Francesca or Pompilia.

The Comparini were a family of comfortable means; Pietro's estate consisted of some realisable property, and of an income derived from a fidei commissum or trust estate, the funds of which, in the event of his dying without children, would pass into the hands of strangers since it was subject to a reversionary interest.

At this time there was also in Rome a certain Count Guido Franceschini, 'a nobleman of Arezzo, in Tuscany, (who) had stayed for some time here in Rome in the service of a person of some eminence' (i.e., Cardinal Nerli). Guido was born on January 24, 1657-1658; thus he was nearly thirty-seven when the
story of 'The Ring and the Book' opens. Of Guido, Treves says: 'He followed no avocation, and as his other brothers were priests he assumed the title of Count.' According to descriptions by contemporaries Guido's appearance was far from prepossessing; 'Franceschini was low of stature, thin and pallid, with prominent nose, black hair and a heavy beard.' Guido was the youngest son of an impoverished, second-rate noble family of Arezzo. In the pursuit of seeking preferment in the official world of Rome Guido found himself suddenly entirely without a means of support. In spite of the fact that the Franceschini occupied a palace in Arezzo, 154 miles north of Rome, they were desperately poor. Thus at the opening of the story we find Guido loafing around Rome looking for something to do. 'Guido Franceschini was staying at Rome in idleness, out of service of a certain Cardinal, without a soldo, by which service he had provided for himself up to that time. His usual loafing-place was in the shop of certain women-hairdressers, where he often announced his intention of setting up his house with some good dowry.' Faced with the fact that he had not made a brilliant success of life, financially or otherwise, and spurred on by the ambition of his elder brother, Paolo (whom Treves describes as 'a man of parts, a consummate trickster, a Machiavelli of the back streets and a coward to boot') he decided to take a wife with dowry enough to be of advantage to his own house. When he had revealed this desire to a certain hairdresser near the Piazza Colonna, she proposed to him the Signora Francesca Pompilia, thirteen years of age,

1. Treves, p. 11
2. E.L., p. 266
4. Treves, p. 12
the daughter of a certain Pietro Comparini and Violante Peruzzi. For beside the promised dowry, she was heir to the reversionary interest in bonds and other properties worth about 12,000 scudi. When he had heard of this advantageous dowry, which seemed to him to be quite to his point, he lost no time in revealing it to his brother Abate Paolo, who had dwelt here in Rome for many years in the service of a Cardinal. He went along with Guido to the mother of the young woman. . . When they had made it appear that their income was of considerable amount, they succeeded in their intent; although it was then found out that their entire capital did not amount to the total of their income as given in that note.  

Paolo quickly arranged the match with Violante who 'was driven by the ambition of establishing her daughter in the home of persons of good birth.' The wedding took place in the parish church of San Lorenzo in Lucina on Sunday, September 6, 1693. Pietro had agreed to bestow a dowry of 2,600 scudi and a gift of his entire possessions to the couple on condition that 'the Franceschini. . . take the said Comparini (Pietro and Violante) to the city of Arezzo, and there to feed, clothe, and provide them such service as they would need.' The marriage, however, was not consummated until December 1693, an interval of three months. During the interim Guido had departed for Arezzo to prepare the (dilapidated) palace for his bride and his parents-in-law.  

Palace life at Arezzo was far from serene; domestic broils arose soon after Pompilia and her parents went to live at
Arezzo. 'The two mothers-in-law immediately strove for the
hegemony,' and the discord increased when the Comparini dis-
covered that they had been deceived as to the represented
wealth of the Franceschini. That the Comparini were brutally
mistreated and suffered untold miseries in their new home is
evident from the affidavit of the maid servant of the penurious
Franceschini, Angelica Battista. The poverty of the household
larded over by Donna Beatrice Franceschini is attested to by
this servant who says, among other things: 'For the food of all
this tableful, the Franceschini bought on Saturday a suckling
lamb, on which they spent, at most, twelve or fourteen 'gratie'.
Then Signora Beatrice cooked it and divided it out for the entire
week... During the days of the week when they ate there was
no other sort of meat on the table to satisfy the needs of all
the tableful... And because this meat was so tough that Signor
Pietro could not eat it (as they had not cooked it enough),
Signor Pietro did without eating meat, for the most part, and
ate only a little bread, toasted and in bad condition, and a
morsel of cheese... Then the wine which served for the table
was but a single flask; and as soon as the wine was poured into
this, Signora Beatrice made me put in as much more of water...
and very often there was more water than wine.' Three months
later, in March, the rupture occurred; the Comparini, Pietro
and Violante, returned to Rome.

Immediately after the Comparini had returned to Rome a
Jubilee was announced by the Pope, Innocent XII. Violante took
advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to reveal in confes-
1. Gest, p. 6
2. E.L., p. 52
sion and to her husband that Pompilia was not her daughter but the child of a disreputable woman from whom Violante had purchased her several days before her birth. Pompilia had been 'adopted to bring it about that the reversionary interest would fall to their house, and hence to make good the many debts of her husband.' This confession by Violante was not motivated by any prick of conscience, rather by the fact that such a declaration would make it possible for the Comparini to sue for the dowry, and thus, in a measure, Violante would be avenged on Guido. Not only did Violante make this disclosure in confession, but she announced publicly the base condition of Pompilia's birth. The result was that the noble-born Guido became the object of derision of his fellow-townsmen for having been deceived into a marriage with the daughter of a prostitute by an unknown father. Thus Pietro brought suit against Guido to recover the dowry. The trial took place in Rome in the summer of 1694, before Judge Joannes Domenicus Thomatus as Auditor Curiae. Guido won the case, however, despite the fact that six witnesses attested to the illegitimacy of Pompilia's birth, and the dowry contract was allowed to stand. Appeal was then taken by Pietro to the Tribunal of the Sacred Rota, before Monsignor Molines, but the suit, nevertheless, remained undecided.

Such allegations as Violante made satisfied her thirst for revenge on Guido, but they tended to react cruelly on poor Pompilia. It appears from the evidence in the records that on the pretext that Pompilia bore him no heir and because of

1. E.L., p. 261
jealousy, probably feigned, Guido cruelly and maliciously maltreated his young wife who actually feared for her life, for, as she says in her deposition: 'Furthermore at the beginning of these troubles (i.e., domestic unhappiness), I went twice to Monsignor the Bishop, because he might have remedied it in some way; but this did no good, because of his relation with the house of my husband. And so as I was a stranger in that city and did not know how to free myself from these perils and abuses, and as I feared that if Guido did not slay me with weapons he might poison me, I planned to run away and to go back to Rome to my father and mother.'

In order to carry out this contemplated flight, her last resource to escape her marital difficulties, she appealed to a certain Guiseppe Maria Caponsacchi, a friend of Giovanni Battista Conti whose brother had married Guido's sister. Caponsacchi, it seems, was at this time a young man of twenty-four. He was of noble birth and a sub-deacon in the church of the Pieve at Arezzo. He seems to have been, according to the records, a courageous and resolute man. It appears that despite his connection with a minor order of the Church, he enjoyed the life of a man about town; for, according to the story of Pompilia: 'And then because the Canon Caponsacchi, with other young men of the place, used to pass before our house and stop to talk with certain hussies, who were standing there in front.'

Pompilia appealed to Caponsacchi whom she had heard was contemplating a journey to Rome to escort her to her parents.

On the night of the last Sunday in April, 1697, or more

1. E.L., p. 92
2. E.L., p. 91
strictly, at one o'clock in the morning of Monday, April 29, 1697, Pompilia fled from her husband's house in the company of the young Canon. They traveled in a light, two-horse covered carriage called a Calesse. The couple reached Castelnuovo, a posting place about fifteen miles from Rome, at about seven in the evening of Tuesday, April 30. They had traveled, therefore, through two days of daylight and through one whole night. It appears from the records that Caponsacchi wished to continue on to Rome without stopping at the Inn at Castelnuovo; Pompilia, however, was too exhausted to continue the fatiguing journey, so the stop was made. 'Then because Francesca said that she was suffering some pain, and that she did not have the fortitude, to pursue the journey further without rest, she cast herself, upon a bed in a chamber there.'  

At dawn Guido overtook the fugitives and had the both of them arrested by the authorities who imprisoned them at Castelnuovo and from there they were removed to Rome and placed in Carceri Nuove, the New Prisons. They were charged with adultery because they had run away together.

'The prosecution then instituted was known as the Processus Fugea, or Prosecution for Elopement, and was tried in the court of the Governor of Rome, within whose jurisdiction the case lay, before Venturini, the Vice of Deputy Governor.'  

This Prosecution for Elopement, or Process of Flight as it is repeatedly referred to in 'The Old Yellow Book', continued all through the summer. It was for their defense in this case that Pompilia and Caponsacchi made their depositions, the affidavits

1. E.L., p. 97
2. E.L., p. 262
3. Gest, p. 10-11
giving their motives for the flight. These testimonies figure very prominently in 'The Old Yellow Book'. It was at this trial also that the prosecution, urged by Guido, offered as evidence certain reciprocal love-letters of Pompilia and Caponsacchi (their authenticity, however, in the subsequent murder-trial is a much disputed point, and is the subject of elaborate discussions by the opposing lawyers) which Guido claimed he found at the time the fugitives had been arrested at Castelnuovo.

On September 24, 1697 sentence was passed against Caponsacchi - banishment to Civita Vecchia for three years. The formal decree read: 'Joseph Maria Caponsacchi, of Arezzo, for complicity in flight and running away of Francesca Comparini, and for carnal knowledge of the same, has been banished for three years to Civita Vecchia.' Pompilia, on the other hand, was sent to the nunnery of the Scaletta, an institution for penitent women. On October 12, Pompilia was allowed to return to the home of her foster-parents, under bond of 300 scudi to keep it as her prison because of her approaching confinement. The whole judgment rendered by the court seems to have been indecisive; the charge of adultery was not proved. No sentence was issued against Pompilia; her removal to the Scaletta was a provision for her safekeeping and not a punishment; Caponsacchi's relegation to Civita Vecchia was 'a punishment commensurate with indiscretion rather than with crime.'

In the meanwhile Guido proceeded to take legal action in Arezzo against Pompilia, Gregorio Guillichini (a helper in the

1. E.L., p. 106
2. Hodell's introduction to E.L., p. xii
flight), and the driver, called Venerino or Borsi, of the carriage in which Pompilia had fled. His criminal prosecution charged Pompilia with dishonest amours with the Canon Caponsacchi and with Guillichini; and Pompilia and Guillichini with theft of numerous articles of clothing, jewelry, and money. The driver of the Calesse, Venerino, was charged with assisting in the flight. The criminal court at Arezzo condemned Guillichini to five years confinement at Portoferraro with the penalty of the galleys for the same length of time, and sentenced Pompilia to penal servitude for life in the Prison of the Stinche. Venerino was absolved after sweltering in prison all summer. The sentence passed on to the Chancery of the Criminal Court at Florence for confirmation, which court, on December 24, 1697, reduced the sentence of Guillichini to an indefinite period, and suspended sentence against Pompilia. From all appearances the trial seems to have been a farce. During the proceedings neither Pompilia nor Guillichini appeared nor were they represented. It is also a curious fact that Caponsacchi was not a party to the charges. Furthermore, according to the records of the 'Old Yellow Book' Guillichini had nothing to do with the flight.

On December 18, 1697, Pompilia gave birth to a son, Gaetano. Suspicion as to its paternity, coupled with the ignominy of the revealed base-born condition of his estranged wife, which the Comparini had published abroad, made Guido the laughing-stock of his townsfolk. These reasons probably motivated him on his subsequent course of action to seek revenge. Guido
appeared in Rome with four hired assassins on December 24, 1697. They secreted themselves in the environs of Rome for nine days in the Abate Paolo's vineyard, near the Ponte Milvio. On Thursday evening, January 2, Guido and his hired band of retainers went to the home of the Comparini. Guido left two of his companions on guard at the street door and knocked at the door. 'When he said that he brought a letter of Canon Caponsacchi from Civita Vecchia the door was opened to him. Immediately this cut-throat Franceschini, assisted by the other two criminals, leaped upon Violante who had opened it and struck her dead to the ground. Pietro was killed and Pompilia was barbarously slain with 22 wounds by the hand of her husband.' Pompilia survived by a miracle until January 6.

The five assassins fled on foot through the night and arrived at the lonely tavern of Merluzza, about fourteen miles from the walls of Rome. There they were apprehended by the police of Rome and conducted back to Rome where they were imprisoned in the Carceri Nuove, or New Prisons.

The trial of Guido and his companions lasted in Rome from January 1698 until the middle of February. It took place before the Governor of Rome, or more strictly, the Vice Governor, Marco Antonio Venturini. The Fisc or prosecution was represented by Francesco Gambi as Procurator and Giovanni Battista Bottini as Advocate. The prisoners were represented by Giacinto Arcangeli as Procurator of the Poor and Desiderio Spreti as Advocate of the Poor. According to the system of law in force during the last quarter of the seventeenth century in

1. E.L., p. 263
Rome the pleadings were made in writing in the form of 'Memorials' laid before the court. These Memorials would be answered by the opposing lawyers. Unlike modern judicial practice there were no speeches in court; all pleadings and testimony were made in writing.

As the fact of the killing was proved beyond a doubt both by the confessions of the assassins and by undeniable incriminating evidence, the defense tried to prove the justification of the motive of the crime. The defense appealed to the unwritten law, and they argued that the murders had been committed for honor's sake. The prosecution, on the other hand, argued that the crime was a premeditated, cold-blooded murder of three helpless people; Guido's motive, they claimed, was greed and malignant revenge. Furthermore, they argued, the claim that the crime was committed because of injured honor was baseless since the plea of adultery was unproved. Not only, said the prosecution, was the motive malicious, but the killing was attended by half a dozen aggravating circumstances, each of them punishable by death.

On February 18, 1698, sentence of death was passed on Guido and his four associates. An appeal was made by Guido's friends to the Pope on the ground of Guido's clericate. The appeal was dismissed and accordingly on February 22, 1698, sentence was carried out: death by beheading or hanging as befitted rank. Guido, allowed the privilege of his nobility, was permitted the executioner's axe; his four rustic confederates were hanged.
Within a month after the death of Pompilia the nunnery of the Convertites instituted a suit against one Domenico Tighetti, the executor of Pompilia's will, on the basis of their legal right to the property of all women of evil life who died in Rome. Antonius Lamparelli, Procurator of Charity, contested the claim and defended the memory of the dead Pompilia in the Criminal Court of the Governor of Rome. For this purpose Lamparelli obtained several affidavits from Celestino Angelo, an Augustinian friar, and other reputable persons who had been in attendance upon Pompilia in her dying hours, attesting to her dying declarations of innocence. These affidavits also figured in the murder-trial of Guido. The 'Definitive Sentence' of the court issued in September 1698 vindicated the innocence of Pompilia and cleared her memory in the eyes of the law.
Chapter II.

THE SOURCE OF 'THE RING AND THE BOOK'

1. A CRITICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENTS OF 'THE OLD YELLOW BOOK'

'The Old Yellow Book' is the name given by Browning to a bound collection of documents and manuscripts which he picked up by chance in an old book-stall in San Lorenzo Square, Florence, in June 1860. The name was evidently suggested to Browning by the soiled and worn 'crumpled vellum covers'. The Book was destined to be the primary source of his 'largest and most sustained achievement' - 'The Ring and the Book'. 'The Old Yellow Book' is for the most part a collection of pamphlets relating to the murder-trial of Count Guido Franceschini and his four accomplices (see page 10 of this thesis). The Book is by no means a published volume; it is a lawyer's file of documents and manuscripts bearing on the above-mentioned murder-trial.

'The Old Yellow Book' contains eighteen printed pamphlets. To these printed pamphlets the original collector, a certain Cencini, evidently added for his own interest certain manuscript pages in further elucidation of the case, viz., a title-page, a useful table of contents, three personal letters bearing on the case and reporting the execution of Count Guido, and a transcript of the confirmation by the Criminal Court of

1. I. 35
2. Dowden's introduction to 'The Ring and the Book', p. v
Florence of the sentence pronounced upon Pompilia by the Commissioner of Arezzo for her flight from her husband's home (see page 8 of this thesis).

Sixteen of the pamphlets are official and documentary; they were probably printed overnight or between sessions of court and bear the imprint - 'At Rome, in the type of the Reverend Apostolic Chamber.' So Browning says:

'Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,'

The remaining two pamphlets were privately and anonymously printed.

Fourteen of the sixteen official documents are directly concerned with the murder-trial; the remaining two pamphlets are concerned with the petition in court for the restoration of Pompilia's good name. The first of these is a 'memorial of fact' in which the Procurator of Charity, Lamparelli, applied to the Roman Court, after Guido's execution, for the reintegration of the fame and reputation of Pompilia; the second is an 'Instrument of Final Judgement' which granted the application and cleared the memory of Pompilia in the eyes of the law.

The fourteen documents directly concerned with the proceedings of the trial are of two kinds. (1) Eleven of them present to us the legal battle of the trial; they are pleadings or arguments which pertain to the law and facts of the case. Of these, five are by the counsel for the prosecution, the 'Advocate' or the 'Procurator' of the Fisc (Bottini or Gambi); six are by the counsel for the defense, the 'Procurator' or the
### TABLE OF CONTENTS OF 'THE OLD YELLOW BOOK'

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<td>Concerning the murder-trial.</td>
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<td>Subsequent petition to clear Pompilia's reputation.</td>
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<td>3 summaries of evidence, pamphlets 4, 7, &amp; 11</td>
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<td>Lamparelli's argument, pamphlet 17.</td>
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<td>The final decree of Court, pamphlet 18.</td>
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<td>14 pamphlets</td>
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<td>2 pamphlets</td>
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<td>Subsequent petition to clear Pompilia's reputation.</td>
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<td>11 arguments as to the fact and law in the case.</td>
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<td>'An account of the facts and grounds, etc.,' pamphlet 10.</td>
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<td>2 unofficial pamphlets without imprint.</td>
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<td>'A response of the abovesaid account of fact etc.,' pamphlet 15.</td>
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'Advocate' of the Poor (Arcangeli or Spreti). Unlike modern judicial procedure no speeches were made in court; the pleadings were 'memorials' written by the lawyers in the conventional law-Latin, printed as described above, and distributed among the judges and others officially concerned. Evidently they were often written hurriedly and printed carelessly; the complaints of the lawyers attest to this fact. Thus Arcangeli concludes his opening argument: 'It has very justly been permitted that in defense of this noble man, I should deduce these matters, as they say, with galloping pen.' The Advocate of the Fisc likewise complains of the lack of time: 'I will attempt to show this ... so far as the excessive scantiness of time admits.'

Browning faithfully characterizes the eleven arguments as:

'Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five,'

These eleven pamphlets present a confusion of fact, or more strictly, alleged fact. The lawyers at no instance present a consecutive narrative; they devote their pleadings to the establishing or refutation of certain points of law. (2) The three other documents are called 'Summaries'; they are selections from evidence which was either given during the Process of Flight, i.e., the trial for adultery, and submitted to prove or disprove certain contentions of the rival lawyers, or else given in the course of the murder-trial itself.

These three pamphlets (Nos. 4, 7, and 11 in E.L.) are more

1. E.L., p. 23
2. E.L., p. 199
3. I. 145-47
interesting than the other official documents. They include affidavits, letters and other documents bearing on the case. They afford a welcome relief from the formal sophistries and intellectual casuistries of the lawyers, and present the principal actors and eye-witnesses of the tragedy. Among these depositions the most important are those of Pompilia and Caponsacchi; herein they give their sworn story of their reasons and motives for their perilous flight. Among other depositions we find that Angelica Battista, a former servant in the Franceschini household, testifies to the poverty of her employer, Count Guido, and the miseries suffered by the Comparini during their unhappy sojourn at the old Franceschini palace. Certain worthies of Arezzo attest to Pompilia's recourse to the Bishop and the Governor because of the cruelty of her husband. Fra Celestino, the barefooted Augustinian priest, and his fellow witnesses attest to the purity and Christian resignation of Pompilia in her dying hours. The letters of the Bishop and the Governor of Arezzo exonerate Guido from the rumors of his alleged mistreatment of the Comparini. Finally, we find in these summaries the much discussed Paolo-letters, alleged to have been written by Pompilia to her brother-in-law, the Abate Paolo, and the reciprocal love-letters which Guido claimed he had found at the Inn at Castelnuovo and which, he asserted, were written by Pompilia and Caponsacchi. Thus Browning characterizes these three summaries of evidence:

'... real summed-up circumstance,
Adduced in proof of these on either side,'

1. I. 146-147
The two unofficial pamphlets, written in the vernacular, present a distinctly prejudiced but lively account of the case. These two anonymous pamphlets were printed in Rome during the course of the trial in the interests of the defense and the prosecution respectively, and were addressed to the general public, the bar of public opinion. The pamphlets were evidently written, printed, and distributed by the lawyers in the case. The first of these 'An account of the facts and grounds etc.' attempted to stir public sentiment in behalf of Guido. The rejoinder, written in support of the prosecution, charges it with the attempt to 'insinuate into the dull heads of the crowd' a false impression. The latter pamphlet is of special interest since it discloses the malicious greed and the execrable craft of Guido. Of more importance is the fact that these two pamphlets evidently suggested to Browning his Books II. and III., 'Half-Rome' and 'The Other Half-Rome'.

The three manuscript letters included in the Book were sent by Roman lawyers immediately after the execution of Guido to a lawyer at Florence, one Cencini.

'And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died,'

These letters evidently suggested to Browning his Book XII., 'The Book and the Ring'. The first of these letters, from Arcangeli, the Procurator of the Poor, Browning incorporates into his poem and gives partly a literal translation and partly a somewhat amplified paraphrase of it. The other two letters

1. E.L., p. 209
2. I. 691-693
were written by Gaspero del Torto and Carlo Ugolinucci; they bear but slight correspondence to the second and third letters of the poem.

As Browning suggests:

'And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,
To stay the craving of a client there,
Who bound the same and so produced my book.'

'The Old Yellow Book' was evidently collected and bound by a certain Florentine lawyer, one Cencini. The basis for this conjecture is the fact that the three manuscript letters are addressed to him. Cencini was not only professionally interested in the fortunes of the Franceschini, but he was objectively interested in the case for the legal precedent it established. He arranged the pamphlets in chronological order and added, as I have said, a title-page and a table of contents. The manuscript title-page by Cencini reveals his professional interest in the trial and the standpoint from which he viewed the case, - 'A setting-forth of the entire Criminal Cause against Guido Franceschini, Nobleman of Arezzo, and his Bravoes, who were put to death in Rome, February 22, 1693. The first by beheading, the other four by the gallows. Roman Murder-Case. In which it is disputed whether and when a Husband may kill his Adulterous Wife without incurring the ordinary penalty.' Browning gives a faithful translation of the original manuscript title by Cencini in the first Book of his

1. I. 691-695
2. E.L., p. xix
poem;

"Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight:
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit."

'The Old Yellow Book' is essentially a unique volume. Needless to say, there could have been no duplicate of the manuscript portions, especially the letters. The official pamphlets were very few in number. They were printed by the official press in numbers merely enough for the judges, lawyers and recorders during the trial. By no means were they intended for public distribution. This unique volume lay unknown for two centuries until it fell into the curious hands of Robert Browning.

From the above description it is evident that 'The Old Yellow Book' presents a confusion, if not a chaos, of fact or alleged fact. Its component parts are from many different minds, each with a diverse attitude toward the patent facts of the case. In practically all instances every important fact or motive is subject to interpretation and counter-interpretation; the mere facts of the story are matters of dis-

l. I. 121-131
pute. The lawyers in the case took keen delight in displaying their professional skill; the mere truths of the case were lost in a deluge of sophistries and casuistries, so much so that Browning's contempt of the 'patent truth-extracting process' is richly deserved.

To the collector, Cencini, the collection of pamphlets and manuscripts merely illustrated the legal question as to whether and when a husband may kill his adulterous wife. Browning, on the other hand, had to supply from these ignoble and unromantic pamphlets the larger truth of the characters found in 'The Old Yellow Book'. He read into the actions of the characters motives springing from human weaknesses and strengths; and supplied a moral truth which is completely lacking in the records. From these sordid facts Browning created a human document; he humanized the prosaic arguments of the records into a living monument to the sovereignty of the truth of the individual soul.
2. MINOR ADDITIONAL SOURCE-MATERIAL

Although Browning speaks of 'The Old Yellow Book' as his one and only source, there was, however, another source. In or about the year 1864 a copy of an anonymous manuscript account of the case, probably written a few years after the trial, was found in London and sent to Browning by a friend who knew of his interest in the Italian murder story. The Italian pamphlet tells the whole story from a biased point of view; the anonymous writer evidently had a leaning towards Pompilia's side of the story. He recounts the story in a lively fashion and bases his facts upon his interpretation of Pompilia's deposition and the second anonymous pamphlet of 'The Old Yellow Book' which distinctly justifies Pompilia's actions in the light of Guido's cruel and abusive treatment of his wife. The story of this 'Secondary Source', as Hodell calls it, is substantially the same as the reconstruction of the story from 'The Old Yellow Book'. Its significance lies in the fact that it supplied Browning with a host of interesting descriptive details not found in the original records. Although the Secondary Source is not an official document, and is, therefore, less reliable as a source of information, Browning accepted its fact and freely used his information with the same credulity he attached to the records. The Secondary Source supplied Browning, among other things, with a description of the actual details of the murder, such as the twenty-two dagger wounds
Pompilia received from the hand of her assassin and an accurate description of the fatal weapon. It described in detail the flight and the pursuit of the murderers, the arrest, the trial and the exposure of the horribly disfigured bodies of the Comparini in the Church of San Lorenzo. It likewise supplied Browning with the name of Pompilia's child, - Gastano. Its concluding paragraphs give a vivid eye-witness description of the elaborate preparations that attended the final mass execution of the murderers in the Piazzo del Popolo; 'On February 22 was seen in the Piazzo del Popolo a great platform with mannaia, and two great gallows, which had been built for the execution of the criminals. Many stands were constructed for the accommodation of those curious to see such a terrible execution, and so great was the concourse of people that some windows brought as much as six dollars each.' These descriptions and a score of others Browning was quick to seize upon and weave into the pattern of his poem.

Of less importance are the two other fragments that fell into the hands of Browning and which he was not slow in utilizing. The first of these is a little pen sketch of Guido on a loose sheet of paper made shortly before his execution. It was bought among a bundle of miscellaneous papers in London and sent by the finder to Browning. The portrait is in harmony with the descriptions made by contemporaries of Guido's appearance and justifies Browning's uncomplimentary description of him;

1. E.L., p. 265
Hooked-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard, ¹

The other fragment is a description of the torture of the Vigil which Browning evidently took the pains to find in Farinacci, the eminent sixteenth century Roman jurist. The torture of the Vigil is mentioned but not described in the records of 'The Old Yellow Book'; it was used as a legal instrument to extract confessions of guilt from the murderers. It was standard equipment in the legal procedure of the time of 'The Old Yellow Book'. Browning, as Hodell has pointed out, took the trouble to hunt a reference made to the 'Quaestiones' ² of Farinacci by the Advocate of the Poor in the records and he put a part of what he found into the mouth of Arcangeli, the lawyer of his Book VIII. Browning's Arcangeli describes the effects of the torture of the Vigil in a translation from Farinacci;

"Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure
"That named Vigiliarum is the best -
"That is, the worst - to whoso has to bear:
"Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
"To ten, (beyond ten, we've no precedent;
"Certain have touched their ten but, bah, they died!)
"It does so efficaciously convince
"That, - speaking by much observation here, -
"Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
"Never I knew of patients beyond four
"Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six

1. VII. 394-396
2. O.Y.B., p. 335
"End by succumbing: only martyrs four,
"Of obstinate silence, guilty or no, - against
"Ninety-six full confessors, innocent
"Or otherwise, - so shrewd a tool have we!"  

The significance of this bit of research on the part of Browning is the fact, as Hodell observes, that it is the only instance of the Poet's having traveled beyond the Book for legal information.

1. VIII. 330-344
2. O.Y.B., p. 258
Chapter III.
THE RELATION OF THE POEM TO ITS SOURCE

1. BROWNING'S MANNER OF USING HIS CHANCE-FOUND SOURCE-MATERIAL

'The poet's study of that book (i.e., 'The Old Yellow Book') was constant and most searching. He read it, he told somebody, eight times through; it became his 'four-years'-intimate'; he found a use for even its most trivial minutiae; he declared that the story as he told it was the story of the book, and maintained that the facts which he found there entirely justified his interpretation of conduct and motive.'

The reading of 'The Ring and the Book' side by side with 'The Old Yellow Book' reveals scores of examples of Browning's minute and accurate use of the records. From his source Browning literally squeezed every bit of available information and wove what he found into the pattern of his tragedy. In the poem there is a host of trivial detail, such as names of characters, dates, events, situations and motives; each is drawn from the facts of the records. The prosaic facts of the records, however, are distinctly contrary to the purposes of art. They present no continuous narrative of the mere incidents given, they do not present character in its fullness, nor do they embody a fundamental moral truth. It was necessary for the creative genius of Browning to read into these ignoble matters of fact the spiritual meaning of the tragedy, and this is what he essentially did. The facts of 'The Old Yellow Book' supplied,

1. Cook, p. 35
in the most disorderly fashion conceivable, the mere skeleton of events and motives; 'The Ring and the Book', Browning's conception and imaginative interpretation of what lay behind these records, stands as a monument to his creative genius.

Unlike many artists, Browning adhered scrupulously to the limitations that were designated by the facts; he practiced no serious perversion of fact for the sake of poetic effect. He chose and altered with consummate skill, amplified and expanded incident and conduct, but rarely transgressed the limits of fact.

In the matter of the time-scheme of the tragedy, Browning is scrupulously accurate to the records. Happily, the incidents of the story in 'The Old Yellow Book' are definitely dated in most of its detail, but the chronology of events in the records cannot be ascertained until there has been a complete reconstruction of the events in logical order. As Hodell points out, Browning is studiously accurate whenever he mentions in his narrative the time of day, the days of the week, the seasons of the year, intervals of time, or ages of persons. In only one instance is there an obvious discrepancy between the corresponding dates. Of this particular instance I shall speak later in this chapter.

A remarkable example of Browning's strict adherence to the ages of persons as he found them in the records is Pompilia's description of her own age in the opening lines of her monologue.

'I am just seventeen years and five months old,

1. O.Y.B., p. 255
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
'T is writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
- Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Pompilia Comparini,'¹

Pompilia's roundabout description of her age is calculated accurately by Browning. She was born, as evidenced by her baptismal certificate, on July 17, 1680; the day of her death was January 6, 1698. The sonorous names of Pompilia are not of Browning's invention; he found them in Pompilia's certificate of baptism which appears in one of the summaries of the Fisc.

The setting of 'The Ring and the Book', such as, the names of places, of streets (especially the street of the Comparini: the Via Vittoria), of buildings, of institutions (especially the names of the criminal courts and prisons) were found by Browning in his source-material. In many instances, where he saw fit, he added to the mere names of places abundant and descriptive details based upon his first-hand knowledge of the particular places. In place designations Browning rarely relies upon his own imagination. For example, his faithful description of the line of march to Guido's execution is literally translated from the Secondary Source.

¹ "Then the procession started, took the way
"From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim Street,
"The Street of the Governo, Pasquin's Street,

1. VII. 1-7
"The place Navona, the Pantheon's Place,
Place of the Column, last the Corso's length,
And so debauched thence at Mannaia's foot
"I' the Place o' the People."  

The line of march according to the anonymous author of the Secondary Source reads: 'They left the Prison and followed the Pilgrims Street, the Street of the Governor, of Pasquini, Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, Piazza Colonna, and the Corso.'

As of setting, so of names; in every instance the names of the actors in the poem are found in the source.

In the monologues of the lawyers, Arcangeli and Bottini, Books VIII. and IX., Browning is especially indebted to the records. In many instances he has transcribed the law-Latin as he found it directly in the speeches of the two lawyers. (Happily, however, Browning also gives an accurate translation in such passages).

The poem also affords several instances of Browning's use of the speech of one of his characters practically as it had come to him from the records. Such literal transcriptions are, however, discriminately excised from their context and invested by Browning with a new meaning by virtue of the vitalizing force of his dramatic style. A notable example of such a transcription is found in Pompilia's monologue. She, on her death bed, tells her account of the story and, among other things, Guido's unwarranted jealousy aroused by the innocent confetti-throwing incident at the public play. She cites the

1. XII. 138-146
2. E.L., p. 265-266
terms with which he arraigned her after they had reached home and his final exclamation:

"O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?"

Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust."

This dramatic exclamation is taken almost word for word from Pompilia's deposition; she says: 'At the time of the affair of the play told above, as soon as we had returned home, he pointed a pistol at my breast saying: "Oh, Christ! What hinders me from laying you out here?"

Books VIII. and XII. of the poem are especially indebted to the records for this manner of Browning's use of his source-material. There are a hundred lines in Book VIII. spoken by the poet's Arcangeli which are based almost word for word on the real Arcangeli's rhetorical and impassioned peroration in one of his arguments. Both the lines from Browning and from the peroration are too many to quote; however, one citation from the poem compared to the corresponding terms of the peroration will serve to show the manner in which Browning makes these word for word borrowings. Thus the Arcangeli of 'The Old Yellow Book' speaks: 'He killed them, finally, that either he might live honourably among men, or at least fall the pitied victim of his own offended honour.' Browning's Arcangeli says: (I omit the Latin terms in the monologue since Browning gives an accurate translation of them. As Hodell points out, the law-Latin of Book VIII. and elsewhere is not invented by Browning, but is taken almost entirely from the records.4)

'killed her in a word'

1. VII. 129-131
2. E.L., p. 92
3. E.L., p. 130
4. O.Y.B., p. 257
That he, please God, might creditably live,

but if fate willed otherwise,

by Mannaja, if you please,

The pitiable victim he shall fall! ¹

In Book XII. Browning includes partly a literal and partly a somewhat amplified paraphrase of Arcangeli's real letter which was sent to the Florentine lawyer, Cencini.

In the presentation of his story Browning is true to the descriptive details he found in the records. He uses these details to vitalize mere incidents and creates a vivid setting for the action. The slightest descriptive details are avidly incorporated into the poem. When 'Half-Rome' describes the murderous weapon with which Guido inflicted the twenty-two mortal wounds upon the defenseless body of Pompilia;

'I mind its make,

"Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,

"Armed with those little hook-teeth on the edge

"To open in the flesh nor shut again! " ²

the vivid description of the dagger is based upon the account of the anonymous author of the Secondary Source. 'Franceschini's dagger was of a Genoese pattern, triangular, and with certain hooks made in such a way that in wounding they could not be drawn from the wound without such laceration as to render the wound incurable.' ³

In 'The Ring and the Book' there are innumerable examples

1. VIII. 1720-27
2. II. 146-149
3. E.L., p. 264
of Browning's use of the trifling facts and details that he found in his source. In Browning's conception of the story many of these facts, however, do not bear the same weight as they do in the records. The name of Pompilia's child, Gaetano is used repeatedly in the poem, especially by Pompilia in her monologue. In 'The Old Yellow Book' the name appears only once, and that in the Secondary Source. 'After that Pompilia bore a son, whom she named Gaetano, after the saint to whom she made her vows.'

1. E.L., p. 263
2. BROWNING'S CHANGE OF DATE OF THE FLIGHT

Browning took the liberty to expand the facts as he found them with the power of his imaginative interpretation, always, however, containing himself within the limits of truth or alleged truth that he found in the records. I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter only one instance where Browning definitely transgressed the fact as he found it, and this he did for purely artistic reasons. The transgression was committed for the purpose of raising very considerably in his poem the significance of an incident found in the records. This transgression was a departure from the chronological order of the events in 'The Old Yellow Book'. Browning changed the date of the flight of the fugitives from Arezzo from April 29, 1697 to April 23. The true and exact date of the flight is fixed by both the depositions of Pompilia and of Caponsacchi. Caponsacchi speaks in his testimony of the flight as beginning on 'the last Sunday of the past month of April,' i.e., April 28, or more strictly, in the early morning of Monday, April 29. Further in his deposition Caponsacchi says: 'we reached Castelnuovo on Tuesday evening, the last day of the said month of April.' Thus the actual flight lasted from the early Monday morning of April 29, till the evening of April 30. Browning, however, discards this chronology of events fixed beyond dispute by the fugitives and for purposes of art substitutes April 23 as the date of the flight. Thus when the

1. E.L., p. 96
2. E.L., p. 97
servant of the Caponsacchi in the poem says to him on the eve of the flight:

"This being last Monday in the month but one
"And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George," \(^1\)

we learn why Browning intentionally made the substitution. All through the poem Caponsacchi is represented as a Saint George, the famous English ideal of Christian Knightliness. To Pompilia he is her soldier-saint;

'O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,' \(^2\)
he carries her off in the manner of legendary knights;

'As, in a glory of armour like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest Bearing away the lady in his arms,' \(^3\)

Thus it was more fitting and artistic that Caponsacchi should be made to rescue Pompilia from Guido on Saint George's day, April 23, rather than in the following week.

The change of date of the flight was undoubtedly not due to carelessness on the part of Browning. As Cook observes, Browning took infinite care to be correct in all such matters of his time-scheme. In a letter to a friend, Lord Courtney, Browning says: 'in order to be quite sure of the age of the moon on the occasion of Pompilia's flight, I procured De Morgan's register of lunar risings and settings for the last- I forget how many hundred years.' It is therefore evident that Browning intentionally made the change for artistic reasons; - to associate his soldier-saint with Saint George.

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1. VII. 1110-11
2. VII. 1786
3. I. 585-88
4. Cook, p. 64
3. BROWNING'S EXPANSION OF THE THEATRE-INCIDENT

A very notable illustration of Browning's practice of raising an incident in the poem to a significance it does not enjoy in the records is his treatment of the confetti-throwing incident described in very few words by Pompilia in her deposition. In her affidavit given during the Process of Flight Pompilia says: 'His (i.e., Guido's) suspicion increased all the more because, while we were in a great crowd at the play one evening, Canon Conti, the brother of the husband of my sister-in-law, threw me some confetti. My husband, who was near me, took offence at it - not against Conti, but against Caponsacchi, who was sitting by the side of the said Conti.' This is the only mention of the theatre-incident in the records; from Pompilia's statement we gather that the incident was trivial in itself, it merely increased Guido's suspicions of Caponsacchi. The significance which the incident enjoys in the poem, however, is of Browning's own invention. It is the turning-point in Caponsacchi's life and the beginning of Browning's romance. According to the poem, but not the records, Caponsacchi's youth up to the moment of this critical turning-point was a life spent in a worldly and irresponsible way. As an official of the Church, in one of its minor orders, he was encouraged merely to adorn it. He bid fair, as he says, to become a fribble, a coxcomb and a fool, until the path of his careless life was changed by one mere glance at the theatre;

1. E.L., p. 91
Then she turned,

Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.'

That night and the next day,

'. . . did the gaze endure,

Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,

And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.'

The incident is treated by the poet as of supreme importance; his Caponsacchi looks into his heart and at that moment the frivolity and fatuity of his former life are thrown off and he emerges a Man. He feels the urge of aspiration, the impulse to achievement curiously intermingled with a spiritual, at the same time almost earthly love for Pompilia. This metamorphosis in the character of Caponsacchi is purely a product of Browning's own imagination. There is practically nothing in 'The Old Yellow Bock' to suggest Browning's presentation of the frivolous youth of his hero. The only possible hint in the records of Caponsacchi's youthful activities is found in Pompilia's deposition given during the Process of Flight. She says, in describing Guido's unwarranted suspicions of Caponsacchi:

'And then because the Canon Caponsacchi, with other young men, used to pass before our house and stop to talk with certain hussies, . . . my husband began to fume with anger against me. . .' 

Hardly less important to Pompilia, in the poem, is the confetti-throwing incident. For her it also marks the beginning of her almost mystical devotion to Caponsacchi;

'. . . the other, silent grave,

1. VI. 411
2. VI. 434-436
3. E.L., p. 91
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.'

She recognized in the solemn face her saviour, her soldier-saint. From that moment their two lives were, thrown together in a maelstrom of misfortune illumed only by the saving grace of their spiritual love for one another.
Chapter IV.
THE POMPILIA OF 'THE OLD YELLOW BOOK' CONTRASTED WITH
THE POMPILIA OF 'THE RING AND THE BOOK'

1. THE BASIS FOR BROWNING'S CONCEPTION OF THE CHARACTER
OF POMPILIA

The Pompilia created by Browning's genius, that is, the
heroine of the sordid story told in the poem and who speaks in
Book VII. of 'The Ring and the Book' has won universal admir-
ation from critics and readers alike. Nowhere else has Brown-
ing portrayed a woman of more sweetness, innocence and goodness;
and displayed a more tender understanding of women. Pompilia
shines forth as a lovely example of feminine purity and woman-
ly devotion to the ideal of spiritual love.

We may ask ourselves how much Browning is indebted to the
prototype of Pompilia as revealed in 'The Old Yellow Book'.
It may be stated at the outset that the principal personages of
'The Old Yellow Book' never at any time emerge in their proper
and complete fullness; their characteristics and motives are
merely hotly disputed points of contention in the legal records.
Paradoxically enough, when Gest disparages Browning on the
ground that: 'So far as concerns the personages of the story we
shall find that Browning has failed also to reproduce their
characters as they really were,' he fails to recognize that the
personages of 'The Old Yellow Book' are characterless; they be-
come real only when Browning humanizes them with the breath of
his creative genius.

1. Gest, p. 623
While the facts of the story that surround the real Pompilia are fairly clear, there are only the barest hints of her character, and these, at best, are confusedly and vaguely revealed. In championing the cause of Pompilia, Browning avidly amplifies, intensifies and vitalizes these cold, prosaic hints and suggestions. From the records we gather that Pompilia is merely an 'innocent, ignorant, bewildered, scared and purely passive' pawn in the game of deceit and greed. In Browning's treatment of her character, however, she is exalted as the symbol of purity of heart and saintly suffering. The entity of Pompilia's character was created by Browning from merely certain statements and happenings in the pamphlets of 'The Old Yellow Book'. From these empty statements in the records Browning created a woman and a soul.

The Rev. John W. Chadwick reported a conversation with Browning, - 'I asked him if it did not make him very happy to have created such a woman as Pompilia; and he said, "I assure you I found her in the book just as she speaks and acts in my poem."' An examination of 'The Old Yellow Book', however, will reveal the fact that Browning found in the records just what he desired and wished to find. In spite of the fact that in the poem Browning emphatically states that though his fancy might play upon the facts of 'The Old Yellow Book', he accepted the facts as he found them:

'Fancy with fact is just one fact the more;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thrided and so thrown fast the facts else free,'

1. Henry James, p. 310
2. O.Y.B., p. 282
3. I. 464-467
the Pompilia of 'The Ring and the Book' is not the same person as the Pompilia of 'The Old Yellow Book'.

In conformity to his own design whereby each of the chief actors of the tragedy should tell his story Browning invented an occasion for Pompilia to speak;

'Pompilia tells the story of her life.'

The occasion for Pompilia's monologue was suggested in the records by the attestation of Fra Celestino Angelo, barefooted Augustinian priest, and other worthy persons who were in attendance upon Pompilia during her dying hours. This attestation is dated January 10, only four days after the death of Pompilia; it was introduced by the prosecution during the murder-trial as evidence of Pompilia's innocence. These sworn statements attesting to her goodness and purity are a very important piece of evidence, and the lawyers cited them repeatedly during the trial. The attestation vouches for her honesty and confirms her declaration that she had never violated her conjugal faith. As Hodell notes: 'Almost the sole fact basis for Browning's conception of her character lies in the sworn testimony of Fra Celestino and his associates, who were her spiritual guides in death.' I might add, however, that this testimony coupled with Pompilia's own deposition given during the Process of Flight are practically the source of all of Browning's information concerning his conception of the innocence and saintly patience of the character of Pompilia. An examination of the attestation will reveal ample evidence of the saintly spirit of Pompilia's last hours on earth. 'I, the undersigned, barefooted Augustinian

1. I. 1086
2. O.Y.B., p. 283
priest, pledge my faith that inasmuch as I was present, helping
Signora Francesca Comparini from the first instant of her pit­
tiable case, even to the very end of her life, I say and attest
on my priestly oath, in the presence of the God who must judge
me, that to my own confusion I have discovered and marvelled at
an innocent and saintly conscience in that ever-blessed child.
During the four days she survived, when exhorted by me to par­
don her husband, she replied with tears in her eyes and with a
placid and passionate voice: "My Jesus pardon him, as I have
already done with all my heart." You should there­
fore say that this girl was all goodness and modesty, since
with all ease and gladness she performed virtuous amd modest
deeds even at the very end of her life. Moreover, she died with
a strong love for God, and with the admiration of
all bystanders, who blessed her as a saint.¹

In her monologue Pompilia speaks in a tone that echoes her
spirit of saintly forgiveness as described by the worthy persona
in attendance upon her; her monologue is voiced in one key, her
serenity remains unshattered and she is at peace with God and
with man.

'Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
No more now: I withdraw from earth and man
To my own soul, compose myself for God.'²

1. E.L., p. 57-58
2. VII. 1768-1770
2. THE APPEARANCE OF POMPILIA

Browning not only created a woman from the mere sordid and ignoble facts of the records but he created a woman beautiful in form and face. In Browning's conception, however, her physical beauty is overshadowed by her spiritual beauty. Hers is the beauty that emanates from the Madonna. There is little suggestion of Pompilia's appearance in 'The Old Yellow Book', in fact, in only three places in the pamphlets do we find casual references to the physical characteristics of Pompilia's features and only one reference to her complexion. These accidental hints, however, were enough to stimulate in Browning's mind a conception of the spiritual beauty of Pompilia's face.

Browning represents his heroine as black-eyed and black-haired with a frequency enough to question the basis for his portrait. Guido says of her:

'She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,'

Again, 'Half-Rome' describes her as:

'. . . . . this grown girl

With the great eyes and bounty of black hair.'

In 'Tertium Quid's description of Pompilia, she is:

'. . . . . the tall young girl,

With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big

As yon pomander to make freckles fly,'

Even Guido in his excited utterances takes offence at the placid beauty of Pompilia that sets off his own evil:

'Had I enjoined 'Cut off the hair!' - why, snap

1. XI. 977
2. II. 274-276
3. IV. 455-458
The scissors, and at once a yard or so
Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor;
But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
To be an eyesore past dishevelment!  

All these references, and others, in the poem to Pompilia's
dark complexion are based on only one hint in 'The Old Yellow
Book', and even the authenticity of the statement is question-
able since it comes from one of the love-letters alleged to have
been written by Pompilia, and which the defense in the murder-
trial claimed were forgeries from the hand of Guido. 'She is
bursting because she cannot say, as you tell me here, that she
is white as milk, and that you are darker than I.'

In the poem Pompilia is represented as a woman beautiful
in form and face. When Browning has the artist Maratta exclaim
authoritively of Pompilia:

' "A lovelier face is not in Rome," '  

the basis for this statement is found in only three places in
the records. Arcangeli, lawyer for the defense, in quoting a
legal authority to prove a point he was making, says in casual
reference to Pompilia: 'And Dondeus, Sanfelicius, . . . hold
that it is quite enough if the couple be found alone in some
retreat; and No. 3 says especially if the wife be beautiful.'

Bottini, chief counsel for the prosecution, says of Pompilia:
'And this was probably arranged in good faith to conceal him-
self and to avert scandal, which might be conceived at seeing a

1. XI. 1364-71
2. E.L., p. 104
3. E.L., p. 63
4. E.L., p. 229
priest with a woman in the flower of her age and, as I have
heard, of no small reputation for beauty. . . . Even Lam-
parelli, the defender of Pompilia's good name in the litigation
instituted by the claim of the nunnery of the Convertites,
mentions the physical attractiveness of Pompilia: 'And although
it may be very difficult for a beautiful woman to preserve the
decorum of her honour while journeying in the company of a
young lover,. . . .' The opposing lawyers in the murder-trial
found differences of opinion in every crucial point of the case;
on one point, however, they were agreed, - Pompilia was a
beautiful woman. Browning, in harmony with the statements of
'The Old Yellow Book', portrays his heroine as a physically
attractive young woman.

1. E.L., p. 186
2. E.L., p. 246
3. BROWNING'S GLORIFICATION OF POMPILIA'S MOTHERHOOD

A. THE POET'S EXALTATION OF HER MOTIVE FOR FLIGHT

In her deposition given during the Process of Flight, Pompilia gave as her motive for flight from the home of her husband in the company of a young priest the fear of physical violence; she said, in part: 'And so as I was a stranger in that city and did not know how to free myself from these perils and abuses, and as I feared that if Guido did not slay me with weapons he might poison me, I planned to run away and go back to Rome to my father and mother.' Browning, it appears, was dissatisfied with any such selfish motive on the part of his heroine. In 'The Ring and the Book' he definitely, but not seriously, steps beyond the limits of fact as he found them in 'The Old Yellow Book' and invests his Pompilia with a motive for flight which has no factual basis in his source. For the selfish motive that prompted the real Pompilia Browning substitutes a motive that is completely selfless. When we realize that Browning was intent upon elevating the character of Pompilia beyond the sphere of common womanhood, we can see in his elevation of the motive the conformity to his purpose in delineating the character of Pompilia.

Browning invents an important feature of Pompilia's characterization, when in the poem she attributes her motive for flight to the security and welfare of her unborn child. Hodell has noticed this invention, for he says: 'In the Book there is

1. E.L., p. 92
not a hint of Pompilia's sense of motherhood, which according to the poet was the real motive of Pompilia's flight from Arezzo, and was the quickener of her new trust in God, that came with the impulse to save her babe. In her monologue this sense of motherhood is one of the tenderest human traits of Pompilia as her motherly faith and motherly solicitude dwell on the thought of the little Gaetano.' This observation is well borne out by the Pompilia of the poem. In recounting the first words that she spoke to Caponsacchi she tells of urging his protection in the flight to Rome for the protection of her unborn son:

"Since a long while now, I am in course of being put to death: While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike, Now I imperil something more, it seems, Something that's truer me than this myself, Something I trust in God and you to save. You go to Rome, they tell me: take me there, Put me back with my people!" 2

That knew me first and thus made me know him, That had his right of life and claim on mine, And would not let me die till he was born, But pricked me at the heart to save us both, Saying "Have you the will? Leave God the way!" And the way was Caponsacchi - "mine," thank God!

1. O.Y. B., p. 283
2. VII. 1434-43
He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine. The sudden dawning of an ecstatic sense of maternity gives Pompilia a new desire to live and a new impulse to self-protection. In the poem she resigns herself passively to the inevitable and longed for death that will release her from her suffering. The promise of her child that suddenly thrills through her body transforms the passive creature into a vibrant woman through whose soul is suffused God's message of the glory of motherhood.

"Done, another day!"

How good to sleep and so get nearer death!"

When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,

Light in me, light without me, everywhere Change! 

Nowhere in the facts do we find this maternal instinct motivating the child-wife to flight and self-protection for the sake of her unborn child. Browning's imagination, exercised within the limits of interpreted fact, has added an important feature to the characterization of Pompilia.

B. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF POMPILIA'S CHILD

There is also another element in Browning's characterization of Pompilia for which he was not indebted to the facts of 'The Old Yellow Book'. In her monologue Pompilia hints of the immaculate conception of her child with a frequency and emphasis that cannot escape notice. At the beginning of her monologue, concerning her son, Gaetano, she says:

1. VII. 1450-58
2. VII. 1220-26
'No father that he ever knew at all,
Nor ever had - no, never had, I say!
That is the truth.'  1

Again, she says:
'This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers.'  2

And further on in her monologue;
'My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all -
Only his mother's, born of love not hate!'  3

These words, however, must not be taken too literally; they imply no more than the sudden rapturous sense of motherhood. We must remember the circumstances wherein these words are uttered. Pompilia, pierced with twenty-two dagger wounds, speaks them on her death bed. Her reminiscences have lost the substance of reality; they appear to her as dreamy fancies, thus she speaks in a disorderly fashion. She is aware of one reality, her joy and pride in her motherhood, God's gift to her midst all her suffering. In her happiness she feels like the Virgin Mary. Thus Browning enriches the sentiment of motherhood and idealizes the soul of poor Pompilia.

1. VII. 91-93
2. VII. 1692-93
3. VII. 1762-64
4. POMPILIA'S SPIRITUAL LOVE FOR CAPONSACCHI

In 'The Ring and the Book' the spiritual love of Pompilia for Caponsacchi finds no factual basis in 'The Old Yellow Book'; it is purely Browning's own creation. Indeed, there is no proof in the records of her love; the only evidence that love may have been experienced by the elopers rests in the alleged mutual love-letters that Guido claimed were found at the Castelnuevo Inn. The authenticity of these letters, however, is a disputed point in the pamphlets, and, as we shall see, there is every reason to believe that they were forged by the pen of Guido. The fact that Pompilia fled in the company of a young sub-deacon of the Church seemed compromising enough to the lawyers in the case. The prosecution against Guido even inferred that Pompilia deliberately made love to Caponsacchi for the sake of enlisting his aid in her perilous flight. However, in spite of these accusations and inferences and the forged love-letters between Pompilia and Caponsacchi, there is no suggestion in the records of a mutual feeling of love between these two.

As Boas observes: 'one finds in her (Pompilia) the embodiment of Browning's philosophy of pure love.' In Browning's conception, the love that Pompilia entertains towards Caponsacchi is far removed from earthly passion. Hers is an exalted spiritual love that borders on worship for the man who had been a saviour in her distress, and rescued not only her body but her soul. Pompilia's love is the worship of the

1. Boas, p. 8
heavenly and ideal as embodied in her soldier-saint, Caponsacchi. Browning does not hesitate to make his hero and heroine in love with each other; but the love that he conceives is far removed from the conventional idea that the term of love implies.

In the poem both Pompilia and Caponsacchi acknowledge love, a love that rests in a heavenly plane, a blending of two souls. The love of Pompilia has developed from gratitude into a mystical devotion to Caponsacchi. Her monologue ends with an invocation which expresses her exalted fervour, her earthly tenderness towards Caponsacchi.

'O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,' The love that did not come to her on earth will find consummation in heaven;

'Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit, Mere imitation of the inimitable: In heaven we have the real and true and sure.'

Just as Pompilia worshipped Caponsacchi as her soldier-saint, so Caponsacchi worshipped her as his suffering-saint. The love of Caponsacchi for Pompilia is that of a devotee at the shrine of the Madonna.

'. . . there at the window stood, Framed in its black square length, with a lamp in hand, Pompilia; the same great, grave, grievful air As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know, Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell, Our Lady of all the Sorrows.'

1. VII. 1786
2. VII. 1824-26
3. VI. 702-707
5. COULD POMPILIA WRITE?

According to the records of 'The Old Yellow Book' Guido claimed that after the arrest of the fugitives, Caponsacchi and Pompilia, he discovered hidden in the Inn at Castelnuovo certain compromising mutual love-letters asserted to have been written by the elopers. There were twenty-one such letters offered as evidence in the murder-trial, three of them allegedly written by Caponsacchi. Guido had offered these letters in court during the Process of Flight, as a proof of adultery in his wife. The letters constitute one of the most elaborately discussed pieces of evidence in 'The Old Yellow Book'. If it is true that Pompilia could write, we are faced with the question whether the real Pompilia is as noble, innocent and truthful as Browning's heroine. Browning, of course, maintained that Pompilia could not write and that the love-letters were forgeries from the pen of Guido. Thus Caponsacchi in his monologue says of Guido:

"So, he not only forged the words for her
But words for me, made letters he called mine:
What I sent, he retained, gave these in place,
All by the mistress-messenger!" ¹

If we can find good reason for believing Pompilia's declaration on oath in May 1697 that she could not write, she is cleared at once from the incriminating evidence of the love-letters composed in the spring of 1697, and the letters sent to the Abate Paolo in the summer of 1694. On the other hand, if we

¹. VI. 928-31
can find good reason for disbelieving her statement, we are not
necessarily forced to the conclusion that she wrote those letters, but the
greatest suspicions of inveracity are strengthened.

Confining our attention to 'The Old Yellow Book' in an
effort to find the answer to the question, 'Could Pompilia
write? we find the following evidence. In her examination in
the Process of Flight, on May 13, 1697, Pompilia deposed:
'About a month ago I went to confession to an Augustinian Father,
whom they call Romano (at Arezzo). I told him all my distresses
imploring him to write to my father in my name, as I do not
know how to write, and to tell him that I was desperate.'

On May 21, 1697, Pompilia testified in the same trial:
'While I was at Arezzo I wrote at the instance of my husband
(in June 1694), to my brother-in-law Abate Franceschini here in
Rome; but as I did not know how to write, my husband formed the
letters with a pencil and then he made me trace it with a pen
and ink it with my own hand. . . . This happened two or
three times.'

Again, on May 21, she deposed: 'The said Caponsacchi, be-
fore the said affair (i.e., before the flight), did not send me
any letter, because I do not know how to read manuscript, and
do not know how to write. Before the said affair, I did not at
all send a letter of any sort to the said Caponsacchi.'

In a letter dated May 3, 1697, written by Pompilia from
the prison at Castelnuovo to her foster-parents at Rome, wherein
she informs her parents that she is imprisoned at Castelnuovo
for having fled from the house of her husband because she feared

1. E.L., p. 92
2. E.L., p. 55
3. E.L., p. 94
for her life, and she urges her parents to come to Castelnuovo, she says: 'I sent you word of them on purpose, but you did not believe the letters sent you were in my own hand. But I declare that I finished learning how to write in Arezzo. Let me tell you that the one who carries this was moved by pity and provided me with the paper and what I needed. So as soon as you have read this letter of mine come here to Castelnuovo.' There is no doubt concerning the authenticity of this letter. It was submitted as evidence by the anti-Guido lawyers as damaging to Guido and its genuineness is not disputed by the opposing lawyers.

Guido's lawyers were bound to maintain, of course, the authenticity of the love-letters, and they stigmatized Pompilia's declaration that she was unable to write as a perjury. Arcangeli, in proving her perjury, cites the fact that Pompilia recognized her own signature appended to her marriage agreement at the command of the court; he says: '... she stands most clearly convicted of falsehood by her signature, which was recognized by herself at the command of the court while she was in prison, as we find in the prosecution for flight. She also stands convicted of falsehood by the signature of her marriage agreement, concerning the truth of which it would be ill to doubt, both because there is along with it the signature of one of the Lord Cardinals,...

The lawyers for the defense, who, it should be remembered were not necessarily the defenders of Pompilia's good name, do not seriously argue that she could not write. The Fisc's contention that the mutual love-letters were not proved to be

1. E.L., p. 160
2. E.L., p. 112
in Pompilia's handwriting is purely a technical argument. As Gest observes, the love-letters had been offered as evidence by the Fisc or prosecution against Pompilia in the Process of Flight, and 'The excuse made for them (in the subsequent murder-trial) was merely the specious one that Pompilia feigned her love to the Canon in order to attract him to her assistance.' Bottini's case against the love-letters is very weak: he contends that if even if she wrote them they are consistent with her innocence. 'The objection that Pompilia did not know how to write was urged only in connection with her letter to the Abate Paolo, which she claimed had been traced by Guido in pencil and inked over by her at his command.'

The above is the gist of the evidence in 'The Old Yellow Book' pertaining to the question, 'Could Pompilia write? We cannot place any faith in the statements of Guido's lawyers. 'They were bound to maintain that the Arezzo letters were genuine, and the only proof they offer of their authenticity is that Pompilia could sign her name, but you cannot necessarily write letters because you can do that.'

It is significant and strange that Pompilia's lawyer, Bottini, did not firmly maintain that Pompilia was illiterate. No doubt, he would have taken such a stand if it had really been incontrovertible.

The only real basis for an answer to the question rests in Pompilia's statements. Although she testified that she could not write in 1694, her asserted inability to write in 1697 is not established. On May 13, and May 21, 1697, as we have seen,

1. Gest, p. 604
2. Ibid, p. 605
3. Cook, p. 288
Pompilia testified that she could not write, yet a few months later, in January or February 1698 (after Pompilia's death), a letter signed by her, the genuiness of which was undisputed, was produced in court by the anti-Guido lawyers. This letter written from the prison at Castelnuovo bears the date of May 3, 1697. Thus it was written several days earlier than the dates of her depositions wherein she testified she could not write. Since Pompilia left Arezzo on the night of April 29, 1697, and since she states in her letter to her parents that she had finished learning how to write before she left Arezzo, we are forced to the conclusion that Pompilia was guilty of perjury.

In spite of this conclusive evidence Browning makes his Pompilia profess illiteracy on her death bed;

'I was glad
Then, for the first time, that I could not write.'

The genuiness of the Castelnuovo letter cannot be doubted. The prosecution in the murder-trial submitted the letter as evidence against Guido. They would hardly have done so if the letter contained any damaging evidence against Pompilia. According to Bottini the letter was found 'among Pompilia's private papers after her death.' That Guido may have forged the letter is highly impossible; he could not have done so before the arrest of the fugitives at Castelnuovo, for the letter assumes that unforeseen incident, nor did he have an opportunity afterwards to insert anything among Pompilia's private papers. In any event, Guido would not have forged such a letter, for its contents plainly state that Pompilia fled

1. VII. 1490
2. E.L., p. 180
from Arezzo because of her fear that her husband desired her
death.

Although the records of 'The Old Yellow Book' prove that
the real Pompilia was not as spotlessly truthful as Browning's
Pompilia, it does not necessarily follow that the real Pompilia
composed the compromising love-letters to Caponsacchi and the
two incriminating letters to the Abate Paolo. There is every
reason to believe, as Browning does, that Guido forged both
sets of letters.

An examination of the two Paolo-letters will show that, in
all probability, their contents were written in the manner
described by Pompilia; traced in pencil by Guido and inked over
by Pompilia at his command. Their contents are inconsistent
with Pompilia's subsequent actions. She fled from Arezzo to
escape the threat of physical violence, yet in the alleged
Paolo-letter she says, among other things; 'I wish by this letter
to pay my respects to you, and to thank you for your efforts
in placing me in this home, where, far removed from my parents,
I live now a tranquil life and enjoy perfect safety, not having
them around me, ... And they left me at their departure
their express command, by my obligation to obey them, that I
should kill my husband, give poison to my brothers-in-law and
my mother-in-law, burn the house and break the vases and other
things, ... And finally at their departure, they left me,
as a parting command, that I should choose for myself a young
man to my taste, and with him should run away to Rome, and many
other matters which I omit for blushing.' This letter was

1 E.L., p. 56-57
submitted as evidence by the prosecution as damaging, not to Pompilia, but to Guido. Guido's motive for composing these letters in Pompilia's name is expressed by Lamparelli: 'And indeed such excessive cunning in extorting the said letter from the wife plainly proves Guido's craft, and the fact that the letter was obtained by false pretence, in order that he might quiet the mind of the same Abate, his brother, For the latter had been harassed by continual complaints on account of ill treatment of the wife, and had not ceased to criticize Guido daily for them.'

The authenticity of the love-letters attributed to Pompilia is also very doubtful. It is highly improbable that the unsophisticated and illiterate Pompilia could have composed letters in the affected and stilted style that the letters are written. The letters display a surprising knowledge of classical literature and prove the writer to be well versed in love-literature. In one of the letters attributed to Pompilia, she says: 'I do not know what name to give myself, whether Vienna, or Amarillis, or Dorinda, or Lilla, but I wish to call myself Ariadne, . . . I wish to call myself such, only you are not a Theseus, but a chaste Joseph, or a dear Narcissus, or an Ilago, or a Fedore. Adonis indeed took pity on Venus, but I am none such, but even a Medusa. If you have read Tasso, you will know who this was, . . . '  

From what we know of the life of Pompilia such letter writing was far beyond her capacity. As the Pope says:

'It was not given Pompilia to know much.'

1. E.L., p. 245
2. E.L., p. 104
3. X. 1019
Caponacchi, in his deposition, denied all knowledge of the love-letters and declared that one assigned to him was not in his handwriting. Moreover, Guido's account of their discovery does not carry conviction; it can hardly be believed that the fugitives would both have carried out with them to Castelnuovo, and been so careless with the alleged letters of such incriminating nature.

Guido's motive for the forgeries seems to have been prompted by malicious greed. If he could establish the fact that his wife was guilty of adultery, he could then kill her with impunity and in nowise lose the considerable dowry that came with Pompilia. It was probably for this reason that Guido had instituted the criminal charge of adultery against Pompilia before the Commissioner of Arezzo in the fall of 1697 (see page 8 of this thesis). Guido secured the condemnation of Pompilia simply on the basis of his political influence and not on the basis of proof, for the several defendants did not appear at the trial nor were they represented. Under the security of the established fact of adultery in his wife, confirmed by the court, Guido then proceeded safely with the assassination of his innocent wife.
6. THE CHARGE OF ADULTERY AGAINST POMPILIA IN THE MURDER-TRIAL

A. THE LIE ABOUT THE TIME OF ARRIVAL AT THE INN AT CASTELNUOVO

In the pamphlets of 'The Old Yellow Book' the pro-Guido lawyers maintained throughout that Guido committed the homicides 'ex causa honoris'. The justification for this plea turned, of course, on the innocence or guilt of Pompilia, which may naturally be regarded as the central fact of the case. The defense built up an elaborate case against Pompilia and maintained that she had committed adultery on the following grounds:

1) The fact that she fled from her husbands's home with the young Canon Caponsacchi.

2) The incriminating evidence of the reciprocal love-letters.

3) The fact that she and Caponsacchi had been seen kissing one another in the carriage on the way to Perugia.

4) The fact that they had occupied the same room at the Inn at Castelnuovo.

5) The sentence of the court in the Process of Flight upon the elopers after their arrest at Castelnuovo.

The Fisc, or the prosecution against Guido, attempted to prove that these grounds were baseless; they said in answer:

1) Pompilia fled because her life was in danger. She could not travel alone, so she enlisted the aid of
There was no evidence of any intimacy between Pompilia and Caponsacchi.

2) The alleged love-letters were not written by Pompilia since she could not write, and Caponsacchi's letters were proven to be forgeries.

3) The source of this information was unreliable and the evidence was extorted by duress.

4) Not one particle of evidence was adduced to support the suggestion that any impropriety took place at the Inn at Castelnuovo.

5) The charge of adultery was not proved.

We have seen in the preceding pages that the love-letters were indeed forgeries. Let us turn our attention now to charge No. 4.

The prosecution was right in maintaining that there was no proof that any impropriety took place at the Inn. The case against Pompilia was built upon the flimsy structure of circumstantial evidence.

An examination of the records reveals the fact that in her affidavit given during the Process of Flight Pompilia deposed just a fortnight after the flight itself that she and Caponsacchi arrived at Castelnuovo at dawn, and she reaffirmed her statement: 'In all truth, I arrived at Castelnuovo at the blush of dawn.' The records however, prove that this was not the case.

Her assertion was contradicted by Caponsacchi who deposed in the same trial: '. . . we reached Castelnuovo on Tuesday

1 E.L., p. 94
evening, the last day of the said month of April.' The true time of the arrival as evidenced by witnesses and Caponsacchi was about half-past seven on the Tuesday evening of April 30, 1697. Pompilia's statements concerning the time of arrival at Castelnuovo are unquestionably false. Her mendacity is acknowledged both by her lawyer, Bottini, and the defender of her good name after her death, Lamparelli. Both, however, insisted that in spite of the lie there was no proof that her conjugal faith had been violated. The excuses they invented for the lie are quite plausible. Bottini declared: 'And although Francesca Pompilia in her cross-examination, tried to conceal a longer stay at the said inn by asserting that they had arrived there at dawn, yet no proof of adultery may be drawn from the said lie for she made that assertion to avoid the suspicion of violated modesty, which might be conceived from a longer delay and more convenient opportunity.' Lamparelli echoes the same thought: 'Very slightly does it stand in the way that Francesca Pompilia, in her cross-examination, concealed this delay by asserting that she had arrived at the tavern at dawn. For she was very well aware of the credulousness of her husband, and possibly asserted this to avert further suspicion of violated honour, which certainly might have arisen if she had confessed that she had spent a longer time in the tavern.'

It is highly improbable that Pompilia made a mistake about the exact time of arrival at Castelnuovo. The event that she misrepresented was too recent for her to forget the precise incidents that took place. Her lawyers admitted that her state-

1. E.L., p. 97
2. E.L., p. 187
3. E.L., p. 250
ment was a lie, but they justified it on the ground that it was prompted by an innocent motive. Browning, on the other hand, invents an excuse that does not carry as much conviction as the pleas of the lawyers. Browning was of course dissatisfied with any halting vindication of his heroine, and some words... from her deposition ('at the blush of dawn') suggested to his resourceful mind a means of clearing her memory of the imputation of falsehood. Worn out, he conceived, by her distresses and her fatigue, she mistook "the reddening white" of sunset for "the whitening red" of sunrise. Browning thus maintains that Pompilia's incorrect statement about the time of her arrival at Castelnuovo was not a falsehood, but an innocent and natural mistake.

'so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came:
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead-asleep, unaware as a corpse.'

Browning's ingenious invention, however, is not convincing in view of the fact that Pompilia not only is incorrect in her assertion about the time of arrival but she gives a clear account in her deposition of what transpired in the Inn during the time spent there, which is quite inconsistent with Browning's alleg-

1. Cook, p.157
2. III. 1187-95
theory of unconsciousness. On this point Pompilia's deposition is also at variance with Caponsacchi's testimony which was proved to be the true story of the precise manner in which the time at the Inn was spent. Pompilia asserted that she did not lie down at the Inn: 'We shut ourselves in there at the tavern of Castelnuovo for the space of more than an hour. During that time we stayed in a room upstairs. ... I did not go to sleep, nor lie down to rest. ... during the time I stopped there.' Caponsacchi's deposition, given at the same time, clearly contradicts Pompilia's assertion; 'Then because Francesca said that she was suffering some pain, and that she did not have the fortitude to pursue the journey further without rest, she cast herself, still clothed, upon a bed in a chamber there, and I, likewise clothed, placed myself on another bed in the same chamber. I told the host to call us after three or four hours for resuming our journey.'

When Pompilia in her monologue declares that she was unconscious from the moment of her arrival in the 'tragical red eve' till 'the other red of morning',

'As in his arms he caught me and, you say
Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
And laid me where I next returned to life
In the other red of morning, two red plates
That crushed together, crushed the time between,
And are since then a solid fire to me.'

we know from uncontrovertible fact that such was not the case.

Her poet, however, defends her integrity where her lawyers

1. E.L., p. 94-95
2. E.L., p. 97
3. VII. 1580-85
lamentably failed to do so. It is a tribute to Browning's genius that he so evokes our sympathy and credulity that we would fain believe the words of his Pompilia rather the the facts. That the real Pompilia lied for the sake of modesty is highly tenable; such an assumption is supported by the facts of the records, for Caponsacchi, in his deposition, says of Pompilia: 'she was a modest young woman.'

Coming back to our original point, however, Pompilia's lie about the time of arrival at the Inn at Castelnuovo does not necessarily prove that any impropriety took place there, for, as we have seen, the lie was stimulated by an innocent motive.

B. THE CHARGE OF ADULTERY AGAINST POMPILIA IN THE PROCESS OF FLIGHT

As stated at the beginning of this section the pro-Guido advocates maintained in justification of Guido's homicides that Pompilia was guilty of adultery on the basis of five grounds, one of which was the sentence of the Court of the Governor of Rome in the prosecution against the fugitives after their arrest at Castelnuovo (charge No. 5 of our catalogue). This prosecution was known as the Process of Flight; it lasted in Rome all through the summer of 1697. Sentence was passed against the fugitives on September 24, 1697 (see p. 7 of this thesis). The anti-Guido lawyers, in the subsequent murder-trial, maintained, of course, that the charge of adultery against Pompilia had not been proved during the Process of Flight. In 'The Ring and the Book' Browning, as would naturally be expected, sided 1.E.L., p. 98
with the assertion of the anti-Guido advocates and his Caponsacchi declares that the sentence of the court in the Process of Flight was nowise indicative of the proof of the alleged charge:

'Then, here's another point involving law:
I use this argument to show you meant
No calumny against us by that title
O' the sentence, - liars try to twist it so;
What penalty it bore, I had to pay
Till further proof should follow of innocence -
Probationis ob defectum, - proof?
How could you get proof without trying us?
You went through the preliminary form,
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase, - as when we say of you
"Charged with injustice" - which may either be
Or not be, - 't is a name that sticks meanwhile.'

An examination of the facts of 'The Old Yellow Book' will reveal that Caponsacchi's statement is substantially correct. At the close of the trial of the Process of Flight no actual sentence, because of lack of proof, was decreed against Pompilia. True, she was removed to the nunnery of the Scalette, but that was a provision for her safekeeping pending further investigation and not a punishment.
The terms of the decree of banishment issued against Caponsacchi in the Process of Flight and its subsequent changes were a hotly disputed point between the opposing lawyers in the murder-trial, and subject, also, to diverse interpretations by modern critics. It would do well, therefore, to examine the terms of the decree, for if Caponsacchi's banishment was a punishment for carnal knowledge of Pompilia, then we must naturally conclude that Pompilia was unfaithful to her husband.

In its original form in 'The Old Yellow Book' the terms of the relegation read: 'Joseph, Maria Caponsaccius de Aretio pro complicatate in fuga, et deviatione Francisca Comparinae, et cognitione carnali eiusdem relegatus per triennium in Civitate Vetula.' Hodell translates this decree: 'Joseph Maria Caponsacchi, of Aregzo, for complicity in flight and running away of Francesca Comparini, and for carnal knowledge of the same, has been banished for three years to Civita Vecchia.'

Gest, on the other hand, translates and interprets the terms of the decree differently. He asserts that Caponsacchi was found guilty of three offenses, viz., 'for complicity in the elopement or flight, and for seduction of Francesca Comparini and for carnal knowledge of her, not as Browning (and Hodell) would translate the decree "for complicity in flight and running away with Francesca Comparini, and for carnal knowledge of the same, etc." The error is important. The 'deviatio' was not Pompilia's running away, but Caponsacchi's taking her away, or leading her astray, seduction in short, and of this he was found guilty as well as of the two other charges.'

1. O.Y.B., p, xcix
2. E.L., p, 106
3. Gest, p, 11
Gest, I believe, is mistaken in his version of the decree in view of the subsequent facts of the case. It was generally admitted by the lawyers in the case that the wording of the decree was loosely and ambiguously phrased by the court. At the instance of the Procurator of the Poor (i.e., Lamparelli, the lawyer who defended the fugitives in the Process of Flight) a correction was decreed by the judges in the Process of Flight who afterwards substituted the general title 'Pro causa de qua in actis' for 'pro complicitate in fuga, et deviantione Francesae Companiae, et cognitione carnali eiusdem' (i.e., for the reason with which the proceedings were concerned). The change had been made with the knowledge and consent of Abate Paolo who was acting for Guido by power of attorney. Thus no objection was raised by Guido in the change of title. In the murder-trial Guido's lawyers contended that the substitution had practically no significance. The change, they claimed, was made 'For the purpose of giving some little indulgence to the still asserted honour of the wife and to the decorum of the said Canon, for which the Procurator of the Poor, their defender, kept sharply and incessantly urging, . . . "Pro causa de qua in actis."' These words do not imply the correction of the preceding words, but indeed the virtual insertion of all the acts, and consequently of this same decree also.

The fallacy of this argument is apparent. The defense in the murder-trial was reading into the changed decree precisely what had been removed. The prosecution rejoined, moreover, that the original title had been corrected because it was untrue.
and was not in accord with the proofs; it stated the grounds on which the charge was based (i.e., it was merely a general title) not the reasons for the sentence, and thus it was corrected accordingly. Browning makes his Bottini epitomize this point in a happy phrase;

'Title is one thing, - arbitration's self, 
Probatio, quite another possibly.'

Bottini, in the records, asserted, furthermore, that the changed form of the decree proved that Caponsacchi was banished for one reason only and that was his complicity in the flight (not as Gest insists, for three reasons, viz., for complicity in flight, for seduction of Pompilia and for carnal knowledge of her). As Bottini says, the use of the singular 'causa' does not agree with the three causes stated in the original title. He goes on, in his argument, to preclude the possibility of the 'causa' applying to the cause of 'carnal knowledge' since it was not proved and Caponsacchi could not be condemned for that charge while Pompilia was unheard and undefended. Therefore, the amended expression applies only to complicity in flight and running away, and to the graver charge of adultery.

The prosecution maintained, moreover, that Caponsacchi's mild penalty was not commensurate with the usual severity of the penalty for adultery. Therefore, for lack of proof and 'for the purpose of giving some satisfaction to the Franceschini brothers in their strong insistence, rather than because of the obligations of justice,' Caponsacchi had been banished to Civita Vecchia for three years, a punishment commensurate with

1. IX. 1527-29
2. E.L., p. 176
3. E.L., p. 217
indiscretion unbecoming to a Canon rather than with crime.

Browning, in the words of Caponsacchi, above-quoted, clears his heroine from the imputation of misconduct that the pro-Guido lawyers sought to charge her with. His vindication of his heroines's honor is, as we have seen, based upon the actual facts of the legal records that comprised the source of his information. These facts, when weighed one against the other, definitely reveal that Browning, the champion of Pompilia's cause, did not transgress the limits of fact to exonerate an innocent, though weak, victim from the meshes of circumstantial evidence.

While it is true that the Pompilia of 'The Old Yellow Bock' is not the same person as the Pompilia of 'The Ring and the Book', we cannot fail to see that in 'The Old Yellow Book' as well as in 'The Ring and the Book' the two shared one important point in common, - both were innocent of the alleged charge of misconduct.

The exoneration of Pompilia from the charge of adultery, and the justification for her poet's rigid belief in her innocence are not yet complete, however.

There remains to be refuted the two remaining arguments of the pro-Guido lawyers against Pompilia: The fact (charge No. 1 of our catalogue) that Pompilia fled from her husband's home in the company of a young Canon does not necessarily establish the proof of the charge of adultery. She fled, as she says in her deposition given during the Process of Flight, because she feared that her husband intended her death. She chose the Canon Caponsacchi because she had heard that he was going to Rome.
The reason for her flight is therefore highly credible and we dismiss this particular argument of the defense as baseless.

The final basis (charge No. 3 of our catalogue) for the charge of adultery against Pompilia rests in the alleged fact that she and Caponsacchi had been seen kissing one another in the carriage that carried them to Castelnuovo. This information came from the driver of the carriage, Venerino or Borsi. The prosecution in the murder-trial effectively demonstrated the unreliability of the evidence. They pointed out that the proof was too slight, and the testimony came from a single witness of the lowest class. Furthermore, the witness 'swears to matters that are quite improbable, because he had to drive the carriage with such rapidity. ... it was almost impossible for him to look backward, or to see what they were doing inside of that covered carriage.' They also pointed out the improbability of his testimony owing to the fact that, in such a swift journey as the fugitives undertook in the light, uncomfortable carriage over rough roads, the jolting of the carriage might cause their faces to meet accidently and casually, and this might seem like kissing to the driver.

Not only was the testimony of Venerino unreliable, but it was prejudiced. When Browning's lawyer, Bottini, says:

'... what the driver testifies,
Borsi, called Venerino, the mere tool
Of Guido and his friend the Governor, -
The avowal I proved wrung from out the wretch,
After long rotting in imprisonment,

l. E.L., p. 222
As price of liberty and favour: long

They tempted, he at last succumbed, and lo

Counted them out full tale each kiss required,

"The journey was one long embrace," quoth he.

1. E.L., 683-91
2. E.L., p. 249
7. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR BROWNING'S INTERPRETATION
OF THE CHARACTER OF POMPILIA

The above examination of the character of Pompilia will serve to show, in a measure, that the Pompilia of 'The Ring and the Book' is not the same person as the Pompilia of 'The Old Yellow Book'; nevertheless, a reader of the records, I believe, cannot fail to arrive at the same conclusion that Browning did concerning the innocence of the two principal actors in his poem, Pompilia and Caponsacchi. Browning's steadfast belief in the purity of conduct of his heroine is supported by the evidence he found in his source. These facts, however, are at every stage of the case counterbalanced by equally convincing arguments spun by the sophistries of the pro-Guido lawyers. The evidence, in fact, appears so equally balanced that the charge of alleged misconduct brought against Pompilia is likewise supported by a mass of evidence. As Modell observes: 'We may remark by the way of caution that practically every statement in the Book as regards any of the three (i.e., characters) is biased - some of these statements are utterly false - and the student must not merely cite the words given, but like the judge must also weigh the evidence offered as to their characters.'

Whether, indeed, Pompilia was innocent or guilty of misconduct will depend in every case, I believe, on the individual interpretation of the facts. For example, such a careful critic as Gest is convinced of the guilt of Pompilia, and he

1. O.Y.B., p. 274
brings forth a mass of evidence gleaned from the pamphlets to prove his conviction. He says: 'Upon all the facts as thus developed, it seems quite clearly established that Pompilia was guilty of adultery with Caponsacchi.' It must be remembered, above all, that there was no demonstrative evidence to prove the charge against Pompilia. It must also be remembered that the fact that Guido was found guilty of the homicides did not perforce clear the memory of Pompilia from the imputation of dishonor in the eyes of the court. Guido was found guilty not because he killed an innocent wife, but because the homicides were attended by five accessory crimes, each one punishable by death. Even Pompilia's lawyers did not seriously seek to demonstrate the innocence of the victim. What they sought, and sought successfully, was to prove to the court that Guido and his accomplices deserved death, because, among other things, Guido had taken vengeance after an illegitimate delay. Even if Pompilia were guilty of the charge of adultery, the lawyers granted for the sake of argument, the homicides were, nevertheless, committed 'ex intervallo', that is, after an interval of time has elapsed between the insult to one's honor and the taking of vengeance. If the murder had been committed 'incontinenti' that is, immediately after the insult, there would be some justification for the murder done in honor's sake. When murder is committed 'ex intervallo', they argued, it becomes premeditated and it is not justifiable on the ground of excusable heat of passion at an insult.

In all probability if Guido did murder his wife and her

1. Gest, p. 610
2. E.L., p. 287
alleged lover at the moment he surprised them at the Inn at Castelnuovo, the prosecution would not have contested the alleged fact that the wife was unfaithful; the honesty or dishonesty of the wife would not have been an issue. Nevertheless, they would still demand the death penalty on the basis of the attendant crimes. It would not be amiss at this time to enumerate the accessory crimes charged to Guido.

1. The assembling of armed men; i.e., Guido’s four accomplices.
2. Carrying prohibited arms; Guido carried a sword of prohibited length.
3. Violation of the sanctity of the home; the Comparini had been murdered in their own home.
4. Pompilia had been murdered while she was under the protection of the court (see p. 8 of this thesis).
5. The commission of crime under cover of disguise.

Gest supports his conviction of Pompilia’s guilt, among other things, upon the fact that Pompilia, despite her own declarations to the contrary, could write at the time she asserted in court that she could not; also upon the fact that Pompilia evidently lied about the time of the arrival at the Inn at Castelnuovo and the length of her stay. However, the fact that she was guilty of perjury on two counts does not of a consequence prove the graver charge against her, viz., the charge of adultery.

If we take into consideration all of the unfortunate events that surrounded the life of the real Pompilia, we shall be will-
ing, I believe, to accept the fact that the motives which inspired her to mendacity sprang from fear and timidity, and not from the desire to conceal a clandestine amour. We must remember that Pompilia was but a child, cast into marriage as a pawn in the game of greed and deceit. She found herself suddenly under a strange roof amongst people that proved to be her enemies instead of her friends. Her very life was in danger. (We have ample evidence of this fact both from her own deposition wherein she declares that her husband constantly threatened her life, and from the attesations of several respectable citizens of Arezzo who speak of Guido's ill treatment of his wife as notorious. 'Signora Francesca Pompilia Comparini, wife of Signor Franceschini, has many and many a time fled from home and hastened now to Monsignor the Bishop, and again to the Governor, . . because of the continual scolding and ill-treatment which she has suffered at the hands of Count Guido her husband, Signora Beatrice her mother-in-law, . . We know this from having met her when she was fleeing above, and from the public talk and notoriety of it throughout. . Arezzo. ) In her affliction Pompilia could turn to no one. She fled to the Bishop of Arezzo and flung herself at his feet for succor; as a friend of the Franceschini he deigned to lift her up and send her home with the admonition to be a good wife. As a last resort she seized upon the dangerous expedient of fleeing from her husband's home, and she was crushed by the miscarriage of the flight.

I have above that fear and timidity betrayed Pompilia into
falsehood. There is every reason to believe that her asseverations of illiteracy and her misrepresentation of what took place at the Inn at Castelnuovo were inspired by fear and a false sense of 
modesty. She lied, I believe, to avoid what she considered embarrassing explanations and the possibility that her actions might be misconstrued. Like a child she glibly lied to disengage herself from the false suspicions attached to her actions, and about her memory fell the suffocating web of circumstantial evidence. Pompilia did not live to defend her honesty, and the restoration of her good name was left to the hands of others and especially to the creative genius of Robert Browning. 'The real glory of Pompilia's character has been created by the Poet in expanding the partial truth of fact as he found it into one of the most masterly portraits of the suffering saint in all literature.'

As I have shown, despite Browning's statement to the contrary the poet's Pompilia and the real Pompilia are two different persons sharing one thing in common, - honesty. The real Pompilia, however, is merely the center of fiery discussions, never does she emerge in the fullness of her own character. For whatever is noble and fine in the character of Pompilia she owes to the imaginative interpretation of her poet.

1. O.Y.B., p. 285
Chapter V. SUMMARY

'The Old Yellow Book', the source of Browning's 'The Ring and the Book' presents, in the logical reconstruction of the events it is concerned with, a sordid and ignoble story. Pompilia Comparini, a child of 13 when the story opens, brought up as the reputed daughter and heir of Pietro and Violante Comparini, was given in marriage by her parents to a certain Count Guido Franceschini, a Florentine nobleman of depleted fortune and empty title. The marriage was not a love match; it was arranged in accordance with the customs and conventions of the times. Guido had married Pompilia because she was heir to considerable property; Pompilia had consented to the marriage in compliance with the ambitions of her mother who wished to see her established in a home of good name.

The marriage was destined to be a failure from the start. The two mothers-in-law immediately strove for the hegemony after the Comparini and Pompilia had come to live with Guido in his palace at Arezzo. Unable to endure the harsh and malicious treatment the Franceschini had subjected them to in their new home, the Comparini returned to Rome and published abroad the report that Pompilia was not their child, that Violante had purchased her as a baby from a disreputable mother. On this ground Pietro brought suit against Guido to recover the marriage dowry. The case, won by Guido, was appealed and remained undecided.
Because of the constant threat to her life by her husband Pompilia enlisted the aid of a certain Guiseppe Caponsacchi, a Canon in the church, and fled with him from her husband's home to her parents in Rome, - on April 29, 1697. They arrived on the following evening at Castelnuovo, a hamlet about fifteen miles from Rome, and stayed all night at the Inn, where they were overtaken by Guido the next morning. On his complaint the fugitives were arrested and taken to Rome for trial on the charge of adultery. The charge of adultery against the fugitives was not proved; Pompilia was sent to a nunnery as a provision for her safekeeping and Caponsacchi was relegated to Civita Vecchia, a penalty commensurate with indiscretion rather than with crime. Under security of bond Pompilia was allowed to go to the home of her foster-parents because of her approaching confinement. Pompilia gave birth to a son on December 18, 1698. On the night of January 2, 1698, Guido and his four accomplices appeared in Rome. The five assassins gained entrance to the house of the Comparini and murdered Pietro and Violante and left Pompilia for dead; she survived by a miracle until January 6. The murderers were caught, tried and sentenced to be executed. Sentence was carried out on February 22, 1698.

'The Old Yellow Book' is for the most part a collection of pamphlets relating to the murder-trial of Count Guido and his four accomplices. Besides the official and documentary pleadings and summaries of evidence of the lawyers in the case the Book contains certain manuscript portions which the original
collector, a certain Cencini, a Florentine lawyer and friend to Guido, had added to the official arguments. The Book presents a confusion, if not a chaos, of fact or alleged fact. Its component parts are from different minds, each with a diverse attitude toward the patent facts of the case. Browning had to supply from these ignoble and unromantic pamphlets the larger truth of the characters found in 'The Old Yellow Book', and read into the motives of the principal personages a fundamental moral truth which is completely lacking in the records.

Browning wove into the pattern of his poem every bit of available information he could find in his source. He vitalized the cold, prosaid fact of the Book with the spiritual meaning of the tragedy. In presenting a human story Browning adhered studiously to the limitations that were designated by the facts; he practiced no serious perversion of fact for the sake of poetic effect. He chose and altered with consummate skill, amplified and expanded motive and conduct, but rarely transgressed the limits of fact. In the poem there are many instances of word for word borrowings that Browning made from the records of his source. Such literal transcriptions are invested by Browning with a new meaning by virtue of the vitalizing force of his dramatic style.

Despite Browning's statements to the contrary the Pompilia of 'The Old Yellow Book' is not the same person as the Pompilia of 'The Ring and the Book'. From the records Browning received merely certain hints and suggestions of the character of Pompilia; from these statements the genius of Browning created
a woman and a soul.

In the poem Browning invented an occasion for Pompilia to tell her story. The occasion was suggested in the records by the attestation of Fra Celestino Angelo, Pompilia's confessor in her dying hours. The attestation vouches for her innocence and saintly spirit.

Browning invented an important feature of Pompilia's characterization when in the poem she attributes her motive for flight to the security and welfare of her unborn child. There is no evidence of this fact in the records. In glorifying the motherhood of Pompilia Browning definitely elevates her motive for flight. Another important feature of the character of Pompilia invented by the creative genius of Browning is Pompilia's spiritual love for Caponsacchi; the facts do not bear out such an assumption.

Despite Browning's opinion to the contrary the facts of 'The Old Yellow Book' prove definitely that Pompilia was able to write at the time she asserted on oath that she could not. The records prove that the real Pompilia is not as spotlessly truthful as Browning's heroine. Nevertheless, her mendacity was inspired by an innocent motive, - to avert false suspicion of violated honesty. She is cleared from the compromising evidence of the alleged love-letters and from the incriminating evidence of the Paolo-letters since these sets of letters were undoubtedly forged by Guido.

Browning's rigid belief in the innocence of his heroine is supported by an examination of the evidence of the records.
He was convinced that the charge of adultery brought against Pompilia in the murder-trial was a false charge deliberately concocted upon false evidence. In the pamphlets Pompilia evidently lied about the true time of the arrival at the Inn at Castelnuovo and the precise manner in which the time at the Inn was spent. The lie was probably stimulated by an innocent motive, - to avert false suspicion that might be attached to her actions. Browning's ingenious excuse for the lie, however, does not carry conviction in view of the facts of 'The Old Yellow Book'. Fear and timidity betrayed the real Pompilia into subterfuge and falsehood. In spite of all the evidence concocted by the pro-Guido lawyers to prove her guilty of adultery the facts of the records support Browning's belief in her innocence.

The Pompilia of 'The Old Yellow Book' is a non-entity. The fullness of her character was created by the imaginative interpretation of her poet. For whatever is noble and pure in her character she owes to the creative genius of Robert Browning.
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