



# The Ring and the Book

*Robert Browning*

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## **The Ring and the Book** Robert Browning

Centered around the scene of a murder trial, the story of The Ring and the Book is narrated in the form of multi-character monologues. The ambitious 21,000 line poem is sure to captivate today's reader just as much as its unconventional form surprised those who first rummaged through its pages when it was first published.

## **The Ring and the Book Details**

Date : Published August 27th 2001 by Broadview Press Inc (first published 1869)

ISBN : 9781551113722

Author : Robert Browning

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Genre : Poetry, Classics, Fiction, Historical, Victorian, Literature, Historical Fiction

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# From Reader Review The Ring and the Book for online ebook

## Jim O'Loughlin says

Do I get to add this to my list if I never finished it and have no plans to finish it?

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## Erica says

Like Collins before him, Browning turns to individual testimony to re-create an historical trial in Italy in which the court debates the merits of the case of Guido's murder of his wife Pompilia and her adopted parents. Pompilia, a very young wife, had complained of her husband beating her to a priest, who helped her escape. Guido was convinced she was cheating, claims to have caught them in the act and murdered her and her parents for it later. He murdered the parents too because they had married him to their daughter, only to take away her dowry by later admitting that she was adopted and not their true daughter. Pompilia had just borne a baby son to Guido, but the son is named after the priest--unclear whether the priest is actually the father. Pompilia testifies and later dies of her wounds. Guido is hung for his crime. Different witnesses and participants testify throughout this long, serialized narrative poem. The poet speaker speaks in the beginning and the end, calling the testimony a "ring" that unites Britain and Italy long ago. Shows the falsity of human report, and the "truth" that only art can portray.

"If precious be the soul of man to man  
So, British Public, who may like me yet,  
(Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence  
Of many which whatever lives should teach:  
That lesson, that our human speech is naught,  
Our human testimony false, our fame  
And human estimation words and wind.  
Why take the artistic way to prove so much?  
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,  
That Art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least." (lines 830-840)

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## anthony wheeler says

### The Publisher's computer has no idea what poetry should look like

When you feed a text into your eBook generating machine, you do need to check the results afterwards -- especially if the text is poetry. Just a glance at any one page of this poem would have been enough to see how badly mangled it was. The poem is correctly formatted in this publisher's edition of Browning's complete works, so look for that instead.

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## **Liam Guilar says**

This Shearsman edition is another one of their "classics" series. It's the second I've read, their 'Tottle' is marvelous. I like the simple layout, the poem on the page, one column in a decent sized font, with decent margins, and an absence of footnotes or other clutter. There's a brief intro which provides the necessary background to the case, and a small glossary of specific names and latin terms. But the text is allowed space and reading is a pleasure.

I have nothing new to say about this book, except having read it I'm going to have to reread it. There's a point where I suspect most readers will give up, but my advice is stick with it.

Browning had mastered the Interior monologue to the point where he could take one over 2,000 lines and bring the speaker alive, creating character not just in what is said, but by running self interest or self deception against the literal meaning of the words to create something so much more than "A Speech". The book raises the question of what is truth. And resolutely refuses to answer for the reader.

The "facts" seem simple. A triple murder is committed. The question is not, 'who dunnit', but who is guilty, and was the murder justified. Arguing the case reveals a mess. A elderly man (Guido) married a young wife (Pompilia) for money. His In-laws lied, they married their daughter for a title, found the title empty and then disowned the daughter (then took her back). A young wife who may or may not have been unfaithful, runs away with a priest who was dressed in civilian clothing and who may or may have been her lover. Letters that may or may not have been forged, though if forged why? A legal system that conspicuously fails at each step of the story to impose itself until it is too late and a church that fails to do its task of caring for the weak.

The book is divided into 12 parts, in the first and last Browning addresses the reader, each of the other is one person speaking their version of events. Guido the husband is allowed two speeches. By about book six you've read five versions of the same story and it all starts to blur, and then Browning skillfully slips sideways by introducing the dying wife, Pompilia's version.

The two lawyers who follow her are fine creations: Browning lets the creation of character take over from the content which he's now established, and then they are followed by the Pope's monologue, which has been called a masterpiece. His thoughtful movement towards the point where he signs the death sentence is then juxtaposed against the explosion of Guido's second monologue, an extended howl of outrage and defiance, which collapses as he's taken out to be executed.

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## **Keith says**

Has ever a native speaker of English more marred his mother tongue? Made more difficult the mundane? Made reading less pleasurable? Every time I read Browning, I swear it's the last time. Then, for some reason, I forget just how awful the experience was and I decide to read a different work. This time I thought I'd read The Ring and Book.

I recognize the words (well, most of them) as English. The syntax, though, has been so tortured and contorted as to be unrecognizable. The music, if there ever was any, has been lost beneath a din of

incomprehensibility. Browning has taken a salacious tale and rendered into a baffling spume of words and sounds. I defy anyone to try diagramming some of the sentences in this book. I can make more sense of Chaucer's Middle English than Browning's contemporary English.

I only finished Book I. If I ever try to read more of this, please schedule an intervention for me.

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### **J. Clayton Rogers says**

An absolutely amazing novel...I mean poem. Nothing short of astonishing--light years ahead of its time. I might be wrong, but I believe his wife, Elizabeth, died shortly before he wrote this. If only we all could convert our sorrow into acts of genius. His Pope is one of the great all time characters--well, they all are, so well drawn you can walk up and greet them. Multi-points of view, relativism galore, and above all FUNNY. I'm amazed at how often I laughed out loud while reading this. Put some time aside and read this.

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### **Abigail says**

A huge achievement. While some of the monologues (particularly Pompilia's and Guido's second) gripped me more than others (the lawyers'), I greatly admired what Browning did here.

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### **Mauberley says**

Robert Browning's version of 'In Cold Blood'. I read this over Christmas and and fell deeply in love with it. By this point in his career, Browning had mastered the monologue and with his discovery of the story of this sensational murder and subsequent trial, he crafted his masterwork. Pompilia, Pope Innocent XII, and Guido are particularly acute - the first for her heart, the second for the gentle authority and understanding with which he signs the death warrant, and the third for the drugstore Nietzsche pose which ultimately collapses into fear and panic. The narrative framing that opens and ends the poem is incisive and humane as are the insightful explorations on the meaning of 'truth' - 'Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?/ The somehow may be thishow' (I, 706-707).

By the way, I read R. Altick's edition the Yale Press 'English Poets' series. The binding split irreparably when I was approximately half-way finished. It is shameful that a school with Yale's reputation could not publish a more durable book. The very same thing happened to my edition of 'The Prelude' from the same series.

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### **Michel Vanderby says**

Robert Browning's magnum opus. If you like 750 page epic poems that retell the same story from different perspective over and over again with one chapter nearly all in Latin, then this is for you. This is a daunting read but not nearly as painful as Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus". It truly is a fantastic poem but if it's not your

thing, fear not as Dante Gabriel Rossetti didn't think much of it either...

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### **Katie Winkler says**

Difficult to read but well-worth it. Shakespearean in use of language, Browning proves he is the creator and master of dramatic monologue. This work could be studied for a lifetime and not exhausted.

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### **David Cain says**

I first read the Ring and the Book when I was young, about thirty. Rereading the poetic novel again at fifty proved to be a very different experience. The journey of my life illuminated far too many of the episodes that make up the variety of tellings of the horrible tragedy. I found myself disturbed almost constantly by memories of my own experiences touched by this tale. The poetry is marvelous. The variety of narratives create an amazing tapestry of truth and untruth. The structure is fascinating. The plot and characters are just awful, in a delightful way. The humanity is undeniable. Few novels reach this level of artistry. Browning is always incredible.

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### **Laura says**

I did not think I would like this poem at all, and I was astonished at how into it I got. The plot is fantastic and so unlikely - like a telenovela, but TRUE! I'm not a huge fan of dramatic monologues, but I think because in this book they're all talking about the same thing, and a little more of the story is revealed with each one, I really liked them. A great read for anyone who is a fan of Robert Browning.

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### **Dominick says**

Browning's epic murder story, narrated from multiple perspectives in a series of dramatic monologues, is heavy going but dense, complex, brilliant poetry. Browning adopts the twelve book structure and other trappings of epic but employs an innovative narrative approach, retelling the story from the perspective of various characters in each book. Plot is less important (and progressively so as the poem proceeds) than the dense interplay of thematic interests, allusions, and metaphors.

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### **Diana says**

This book originally purchased by a Maude Chudleigh on 30th December 1910; I purchased it second hand at Higgs Books Sydney for \$2.50 around 1975, or very close to. Mostly I bought it for the cover, blue on blue embossed spirals of plants surround an archway of sorts. Spine has same spirals in gold. I just love the craftsmanship involved, including that it's survived a hundred years with only the flypaper turning sepia. So sorry this isn't a "proper" review, just a mad bibliophile raving about how a book never read is still a "favourite" in my collection.

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**Rose O'Keefe says**

This book was referred to in Edith Wharton's introduction to "Ethan Frome." Even though the idea of a story told from 12 points of view is intriguing,I gave it a good shot, but couldn't handle the long-winded old-fashioned style.

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