

Selected Revisions by Robert Browning to *The Ring and the Book*

Questions

How substantial are Browning's revisions? What difference do they make?

Even if they're small, what value is there in them? How do they improve the work?

(a) VII.673

Pompilia responds to the objections that she could have done more to make peace between Guido and her parents. Her response covers lines 665-76. Her anticipation of Guido's charge against her (677-80) and her insistence that the charge is false (680-82) are also critical. Given the context of Pompilia defending her innocence, what difference is made by the changed word ('open' to 'straight')?

Your open for the irregular	Your straight for the irregular
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(b) VII. 755

Pompilia describes a night when Guido demands sex with her (741-46), and she runs in terror to the Archbishop, requesting to be accepted into a convent (747-54). The Archbishop's response begins on line 755.

What did he answer? "Folly of ignorance?"	What did he answer? "Folly of ignorance!"
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(c) VII.860

The Archbishop has sent Pompilia home to 'do her duty' to Guido, and she recognizes that he will give her no protection either from her husband's violent temper or her brother-in-law's advances. She then turns to God for guidance, and decides to flee with Caponsacchi, regardless of how she may be slandered (847-62).

So, when I made the effort, saved myself,	So, when I made the effort, freed myself,
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(d) VII.1099

The maid Margherita has advised Pompilia to warn Caponsacchi that Guido may seek to kill him (1088-92). Pompilia responds on lines 1093-1103. What difference does the change make to line 1099 (course>cause>help)?

This is no other cause , or we should craze,	This is no other help , or we should craze,
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(e) XII.536-38

Fra Celestino, the Augustinian monk, delivers his sermon, warning contemporary Romans to guard against a pagan hostility toward Christianity, characterized by 1st century Roman society. He rhetorically asks his audience if they will revert to the worship of ancient Roman deities in lines 535-40.

In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there, is screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds Of Juno's mantle, lo , a cockatrice!	In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there, Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds Of Juno's mantle lurks a cockatrice !	In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there, Lies screened a scorpion: housed amid the folds Of Juno's mantle lurks a centipede !
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(f) XII.559-61

Celestino has just described the scene of the murder. In lines 557-61, he gives a parenthetical contemplation on the nature of sin.

Would thenceforth make the sinning soul secure From all foes save itself, that's truest foe,— For egg turned to snake needs fear no serpentry,—	Which thenceforth makes the sinning soul secure From all foes save itself, soul's truest foe,— Since egg turned to snake needs fear no serpentry,—
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Rare Item Presentation: *Ring and the Book*

(Browning's own copy w/ hand-written corrections)

Part of a personal gift to RB from Browning Societies

Presentation page: “To Robert Browning on his Seventieth Birthday, May 7, 1882, from some members of the Browning Societies of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Bradford, *Cornell*,¹ Cheltenham and Philadelphia, with heartfelt wishes for his long life and happiness.

“These members, having ascertained [sic] that the Works of a great modern Poet are never in Robert Browning’s House when need is to refer to them, beg him to accept a set of these Works, which they assure him will be found worthy of his most serious attention.”

Commentary on Browning’s Revision process: “Throughout his life Browning continually revised his poetry. He did more than correct printer’s errors and clarify previously intended meanings; his texts themselves remained fluid, subject to continuous alteration. As the manuscript which he submitted to his publisher was no doubt already a product of revision, so each subsequent edition under his control reflects the results of an ongoing process of creating, revising, and correcting.”²

Browning’s Letter to his publisher, George Smith (May 8, 1888): “By what seems like an hallucination, I have corrected my own copy of the Ring and the Book,—and put it back on the shelf! When the sheets of the four volumes were sent with the others, I forgot what I had done,—supposed that I had sent the books with those preceding,—and the Printers had made a mistake in giving me work to do I had already done. As it is—I need only copy the corrections already made,—so that you will receive the sheets in very few days.”³

Michael Meredith’s commentary: “Presumably this is what happened, but as Browning’s copy of *The Ring and the Book*, purchased by Sotheran in the 1913 sale, has been lost, we can never be sure.”⁴

¹ ‘Cornell’ is a handwritten addition to the presentation page.

² Roma A. King, Jr. and Susan Crowl. Preface. *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*. Athens and Waco: Ohio UP and Baylor UP, 1989. Vol. 9. Pg. ix.

³ Quoted in Michael Meredith’s article. See next.

⁴ Michael Meredith. “A Botche Job: Publication of The Ring and the Book.” *Studies of Browning and His Circle* 15 (1988): 50.