

- (15) John D. Rosner, *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 133.
- (16) William R. Brashear, "Tennyson's Tragic Vitalism", *Victorian Poetry*, VI,1 (Spring 1968), 42.
- (17) Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p. 371.
- (18) Gerhard Joseph, p. 173.
- (19) Donald S. Hair, *Domestic and Heroic Tennyson's Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 216.
- (20) Kenneth Hopkins, *English Poetry: A Short History* (London: Phoenix House, 1962), p. 406.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 405.
- (22) E. D. H. Johnson, p. 591.

Notes

- (1) Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (London: Yale University Press), pp. 341-348.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 345 and 356.
- (3) Janis P. Stout, "The Fallen Woman and the Conflicted Author: Hawthorne and Hardy", *The American Transcendental Quarterly*, 1, 3 (1987), 233.
- (4) Robert Browning, "Pompilia", in *Browning: A Selection*, ed. W.E. William (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 296. Henceforth all references to Pompilia's speech will be to this edition and only page number will be parenthetically cited in the text. As to the speeches of the other characters, the references will be to James F. Loucks, ed., *Robert Browning's Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), and will be indicated by the numbers of book and lines within the text.
- (5) See Kay Austen, "Pompilia: Saint and Martyr Both", *Victorian Poetry*, XVIII, 4 (winter 1979), 290.
- (6) *Ibid.*, p. 291.
- (7) Joan M. Williams, *Browning* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1967), p. 133.
- (8) Donald S. Hair, *Browning's Experiments with Genre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 154.
- (9) William Clyde Devance, *A Browning Handbook* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 332.
- (10) Donald S. Hair, p. 154.
- (11) E. D. H. Johnson, "Robert Browning's Pluralist Universe" in James F. Loucks, ed., p. 580.
- (12) F. E. L. Priestley, "Tennyson's Idylls", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XIX (1949), 37.
- (13) Lord Tennyson, "Idylls of the King" in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman, 1969), p. 1470. All subsequent quotations are from this edition, henceforth cited parenthetically with the title of the idyll and the number of the line.
- (14) Gerhart Joseph, *Tennysonian Love: The Strange Diagonal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970,) p. 169.

husband. Her husband is the bane of her life, hence her escape with another man becomes an inevitable step for life and happiness. As to the sexual implication of the relationship with the other man, it is totally discarded; the emphasis is laid, instead, on the spiritual dimension which makes the bond between the two indivisible. As for Tennyson, he is more conventional in his attitude toward his fallen woman. He is known to be the poet of the queen and of the nation as well (20), hence he reflects the general social attitude toward that woman. All the *Idylls*, one critic says, "are told from an uncompromisingly Victorian viewpoint, ... epitomizing the Victorian outlook on habit, behaviour and morals"(21). Therefore, the fallen woman is labelled as sinful and her love as guilty.

The difference between the two poets' conceptions of the woman's fall is radical. Pompilia's fall is conceived as a manifestation of mental and spiritual growth, underlying an awareness and a daring defiance of the vileness in the husband and in the social system he represents, whereas Guinevere's fall is shown as an infectious disease that penetrates society, corrupting its moral system, eroding it from within and causing it to decay and collapse. The first is heroic; the second is subversive, for the first exposes and erodes an already rotten social system whereas the second topples down an ideal one, built upon principles of true religion and justice.

It is important to note here that Pompilia and Guinevere seem to end in the conventional manner which is socially allocated to the fallen woman: the first ends in death and the second in remorse and repentance, yet closer scrutiny shows that Pompilia's death has a larger and deeper meaning than what appears on the surface.

Paradoxically, her death is an affirmation of life: through her blood and the brutal and shocking manner in which she is slaughtered, she helps awaken the conscience of a great number of people, and the Pope in particular, on her plight. Her "role with regard to the Pope", one critic tells us, "is a restorer rather than a revealer of faith"(22). Hence, she rises in moral stature as a white angel while her husband sinks down as a black devil. This gives credit to her dying words "And I rise" (p.338).

IV

The fallen woman and her dilemma constitute the major concern in Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In each of these poems, the fallen woman plays an important part in shaping and activating the events by virtue of her strong and attractive character. Both poems present a detailed analysis of the circumstances that lead the woman to fall, and both emphasize the significant role the husband has in his wife's fall whether by his greed and cruelty (as in the first poem) or by his excessive honesty and inability to understand and satisfy her emotional needs (as in the second poem). Accordingly, the woman, in both poems, falls as a result of complex outside circumstances that create psychological barriers between her and her husband in a way that makes positive interaction between them impossible and this pushes her to seek in another man what she misses in her husband. Thus the woman's fall is not occasioned by a mere desire to satisfy the urges of the flesh, but rather to seek certain qualities that consummate her personality such as love, understanding, compassion, warmth and vigour. In this respect, it is worth noting that the two lovers are exact antitheses to the husbands: in Pompilia's case, the husband is a 50-year-old man, frigid and harsh, whereas the lover is young, handsome, vigorous and compassionate. Similarly, Guinevere's husband is idealistic, cold and psychologically distant, while the lover is warm, near and responsive. Because of this, both women find their self-fulfilment only when they meet their lovers, for they are made to feel they are women to be loved and desired.

In spite of the relative similarity in the unfavourable marital circumstances between Pompilia and Guinevere, the former arouses pity and the reader finds himself sympathizing whole-heartedly with her whereas the latter arouses no pity. Ostensibly, this discrepancy is related to the big differences in the personality of their husbands: the husband of the first woman is an ignoble man who has no moral principles or high ideals; he is only a fortune-hunter who looks upon money as the highest object of life. His cruelty turns him into a hateful, ruthless beast. On the contrary, the husband of the second woman is an ideal man who entertains great dreams for the redemption of the world.

The different attitudes of the two writers toward their fallen women play a significant part in this discrepancy. Browning shows unequivocal sympathy for his errant woman who falls a prey to the schemes of her

which is replete with moral lessons that reflect almost all the moral concerns of the Victorians. He starts his speech to her by a plain indictment: "The children born of thee are sword and fire, / Red ruin, and the breaking up of law" ("Guinevere", 422-3). He accuses her of spoiling "the purpose" of his life ("Guinevere", 450), and after lingering on the golden time he has lived with his men, he charges her with full responsibility for the corruption of his knights and the decline of his kingdom ("Guinevere" 484-90).

In the midst of his personal calamity, he does not forget to give advice to the married man not to tolerate his fallen wife or close his eyes to her sin for fear of shame or scandal. His reason is that:

She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.

("Guinevere", 515-9)

However, as he finds her cringing before him, he tells her that he loves her still, yet he cannot but loathe her as a symbol of pollution. At last he gives his final judgment which summarizes the conventional attitude of the society toward the fallen woman: "I leave thee, woman to thy shame / ... hither shall I never come again / Never lie by thy side; see thee no more — farewell" ("Guinevere", 508 and 575-7).

All this happens while Guinevere is silent, crawling near his feet choked with regret. And to complete her picture as a penitent, she is made to realize, after brief thinking following her husband's departure, his greatness and see him as better than all other men including Lancelot: thus we find her apostrophizing him:

I yearned for warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot — now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. ("Guinevere, 642-5)

To affirm her repentance, Guinevere decides to be a nun, spending the rest of her life in fasting, praying, and helping the poor and the sick, as a penance for her guilt.

The misery brought about by Guinevere's fall is more devastating in its effect on the society than on the two lovers, for it leads to the dissemination of vice and corruption among the knights of the Round Table and consequently to the gradual decline and fall of the Arthurian Kingdom. In Tennyson's view, "sexual immorality is the central evil (17), because from it spring all other evils: disloyalty, murder, deceit and atheism. Hence he insists that it is Guinevere's adultery more than any other factor that is responsible for the collapse of the Arthurian realm(18). It becomes an incentive to other knights to fall: Tristram elopes with Isolt and Merlin is entrapped and enslaved by Vivien. Balin, the savage who has turned a Christian at Arthur's hand, returns to his savageness after witnessing accidentally one of Guinevere's clandestine meetings with Lancelot, and later he kills his brother, Ealan, for his defence of the Queen. Sir Gawaine seduces Ettarre, the beloved of his friend, Pelleas, and when the latter sees his beloved sleeping with his friend, he loses faith in Arthur's order, turns against the king, and joins the rebels in the north.

As part of the conventional way of dealing with the fallen woman which insists on ending her life either in death or remorse and repentance Tennyson leads Guinevere to end in remorse, overpowered by a strong feeling of shame and guilt. Amid the upheaval caused by her fall, she begins to realize the dangers inherent in her reckless behaviour, and spends long nights having horrible dreams of "a setting sun" and of something ghastly swallowing "all the land" ("Guinevere", 67-81). Hence she has one last meeting with her lover to put an end to their relationship. Modred, King Arthur's wicked nephew who is intent on destroying the realm to seize power, brings his followers for testimony, shouting "Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last" ("Guinevere", 105). Lancelot is obliged to hurl him headlong and leaves him stunned. After this public disgrace, Lancelot suggests to Guinevere that they run away together to his castle where he can defend her well, but she refuses his suggestion preferring to take refuge in a nunnery.

In the nunnery, Guinevere lives conscience-smitten, and her sorrow is aggravated by the news of the war waged by King Arthur against Lancelot in which a lot of knights are killed. On the King's appearance in the sanctuary, she is reduced to a grovelling creature, kneeling at his feet unable to speak a word. In this climatic scene which takes us "into the world of Victorian melodrama"(19), the King delivers a long, poignant speech

Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King ...
 He never spake word of reproach to me,
 He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
 He cares not for me

This last pitiful sentence, which summarizes her dilemma with her husband, leads her to the conclusion: "He is all fault who hath no fault at all: For who loves me must have a touch of earth" ("Lancelot and Elaine", 121-6 and 132-3).

Nevertheless, these unfavourable marital circumstances, in Tennyson's opinion, do not legitimize her passionate relationship with Lancelot. For him, this is lust rather than love, hence it is referred to, on several occasions, as "guilty love". For example, in "The Marriage of Geraint", Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot is referred to as "her guilty love for Lancelot" (l.25) and in "Lancelot and Elaine", Lancelot's love is called "The great and guilty love he bare the Queen" (l. 244). Consequently, happiness, in this sinful, furtive love, is only ephemeral or even illusory; and with it, comfort, peace and security become a mirage. Thus, jealousy and petty quarrels are conspicuous characteristics of their relationship. Just one rumour, for instance, about Lancelot's love for the Lady of Astolat throws Guinevere into a fit of anger and uncontrollable passion. When she hears of the rumour, "she choked", "shrieked out 'Traitor'" and "flashed into wild tears" ("Lancelot and Elaine", 106-10). When Lancelot arrives later, she quarrels with him and flings the eight diamonds he has fought hard to win for her into the sea. On the other hand, the two lovers, throughout their relationship, keep suffering from a guilty feeling, though Lancelot's suffering is more intense than Guinevere's owing to his better understanding of the King's greatness and the nobility of his dreams. The death of the Lady of Astolat and Arthur's continued trust in him intensify his inner suffering and turn his love for the Queen into a tormenting feeling of self-loathsomeness that alienates him from himself and creates in him a strong desire for death:

May God,
 I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
 To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
 And fling me deep in that forgotten mire,
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.
 ("Lancelot and Elaine", 1413-6)

age, then, lies in that if she meets another man who can capture her heart, this may lead to her fall and the break down of her marriage. She finds that man soon in Sir Lancelot, the brave warrior whom Arthur loves and honours most.

From the first time she sees him when he fetches her to her husband, Guinevere finds Lancelot vigorous, warm, and pleasant. By his sweet conversation, the long journey is made short and happy, hence she admires him a great deal. In contrast, when, on arrival, she meets her husband, she immediately feels him "cold, high, self-contained, and passionless, not like ... Lancelot" ("Guinevere", 402-4). Thus, the wife's heart turns away from her husband from the start. The marriage, then, is born dead.

Guinevere's admiration for Lancelot develops into a mutual love relationship as an immediate consequence of the carelessness of the husband who immediately after marriage devotes all his time and energy to form his Round Table and then enters into a long series of battles against the heathens to make a realm and reign ("The Coming of Arthur", 514-8). The first time we hear of that love is when a rumour arises in the city about it, and when we are told that she forgets to accompany her husband on a hunting trip because her mind is lost "in sweet dreams ... of her love/ For Lancelot" ("The Marriage of Geraint", 24-5 and 158-9). But the first time we see the two lovers is in a beautiful garden. She is walking alone when he passes without noticing her. She speaks to him in adoration and coquery: "Art thou so little loyal to the Queen,/ As pass without good morrow to thy Queen" ("Balin and Balan", 246-7). The way they speak to and look at each other shows mutual attraction; his sexual desire for her is also clear:

... Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue
Changed at his gaze ... ("Balin and Balan", 271-3)

The King hears the rumours, yet he keeps aloof, for his trust in the fidelity of his wife and knight is perfect, and he is too good to stoop to hearsay. In fact, it is this excessive probity and perfection of the husband (a Victorian question) that Guinevere finds repulsive, for it makes him spiritually remote, inaccessible and superhuman, whereas Lancelot's imperfection makes him "more human", hence warmer and more attractive in her eyes(16). Thus, in a meeting with her lover, she says in reply to his question whether King Arthur has spoken with her about their relationship:

III

In *Idylls of the King*, the woman is driven to fall in sin as a result of her husband's pre-occupation with conquests and dreams of glory. She seeks love, warmth, and understanding in another man because of the spiritual remoteness of her husband and his negligence of her emotional needs. However, in spite of these extenuating circumstances it seems that Tennyson does not intend to mitigate her culpability, for he depicts her adultery as the source of all the evils that arise in the realm and lead to its disintegration in the end. In so doing, the poet reflects his age's fear of the woman's fall and its dangers. He makes that fall 'an allegory of the collapse of society, of nation, and of individual'(12).

Guinevere, the only daughter of the king of Camelard, is a young, beautiful, and passionate girl(13). She is married to King Arthur, a Christ figure or as one critic says a "God-surrogate", (14), who is resolved upon extirpating all evil, disseminating the Christian doctrines and founding a purely spiritual society on the highest moral ideals. In this sense, she represents the flesh, while he stands for the spirit.

The marriage of Guinevere and King Arthur does not happen as a result of a mutual love relationship or even prior acquaintance. King Arthur who has achieved great victories in the battles against the heathens finds it necessary to marry Guinevere, whom he describes as 'the fairest under heaven' ("The Coming of Arthur", 85) to crown all his triumphs; he feels that without her he will be impotent. Thus he soliloquizes on his way to battle: "Saving I be joined/ To her ... I seem as nothing in the mighty world/ And cannot ... make myself in my realm/ Victor and lord" ("The Coming of Arthur", 84-9) He chooses her, then, "less as wife than as medium through which he can enhance his will in the world(15). As for Guinevere, she has never seen him before marriage except for one foggy, unclear sight on his coronation. The marriage comes as an agreement between Guinevere's father and King Arthur. The father accepts the offer of marriage on the basis that the King is the valiant fighter who has saved Camelard from the savages. The father and suitor take it for granted that Guinevere will accept the hero, hence no one thinks of asking her opinion.

These factors, evidently, foreshadow the failure of this marriage. Arthur's probity and lofty ideals, alone, cannot secure the faithfulness of his wife if he fails to win her emotions. The precariousness of the marr-

persecutor, Guido: "For that most woeful man my husband once/ I pardon him" (p. 334). She even finds some meaning in his cruelty, for it is through the fire of his torment that she is purified and saved: "I am saved through him/ so as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell!" (p. 335). This latter quality invests her with dignity and magnanimity, as it reveals her spiritual nobility and mental maturity. Thus she rises morally above her murderer who tries to gain public opinion by claiming that he has killed her to defend his wounded honour.

Pompilia's noble qualities make the Pope stand on her side against Guido. This stance is significant to the meaning of the whole case, for the Pope is the voice of reason in the poem, and is generally considered as representing the poet himself⁽¹¹⁾. The Pope's judgment is not taken easily because he has been subjected to strong pressures from the Italian aristocracy and the public who want Guido free, for they find in Pompilia's deed a subversive act which may undermine the very foundation upon which the social system stands. Thus we find the Pope reasoning:

The man is noble, backed by nobler friends!
 Nay, they so wish him well, the city's self
 Makes common cause with who——house-magistrate,
 Patron of hearth and home, domestic lord——
 ... Die?
 He 'll bribe a gailor or break prison first!
 Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
 Hint to the mob to batle wall, burn gate,
 And bid the favourite malefactor march. (X. 307-14)

After much cogitation, the Pope gives his verdict that Pompilia is "perfect in whiteness" (X. 1005), and a flower to be gathered "for the breast of God" (X. 1046-7), whereas Guido is declared a demon who has always been motivated by "the lust for money" (X. 542), and who believes in nothing but "the vile of life" (X. 511), hence he deserves execution for murdering his wife.

Obviously, the Pope's decision in Pompilia's favour inverts the whole balance religiously and socially. Guido, the man who is thought socially a victim of his wife's betrayal and a real man who has defended his honour, is condemned as a villain, whereas his fallen wife is considered pure and noble. Thus it is Guido who undergoes the poem's real fall.

she apostrophizes him as "O lover of my life, O soldier-saint" (p. 336), she is thinking of him in a purely spiritual manner, as a symbol of that soldier-saint who is present in every age to fight the wrong and defend the weak(8). Hence, in her eyes he transcends time in his presence: "He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine" (p. 326). And even in romantic adventures, such as the flight, the poet is so careful as to discard the sexual implications. He renders this adventure with warmth and pathos which several critics attribute to its association in his mind with his own elopement with Elizabeth Barret to Italy in his youth(9). To symbolize the flight as a spiritual union, Browning deliberately changes the original date of the elopement to April 23, St. George's Day. Thus he establishes Caponsacchi's role as another St. George, the knight who, according to the romance, kills the dragon and sets the princess free from her prison. Though in the romance spiritual love is mixed with physical love, for the rescue culminates in a marriage between the rescued and rescuer, Browning makes the spiritual aspect of the relationship over-ride any sexual concern(10). This can be noticed better in a more memorable scene in which physical contact is strongly implied, that is the inn episode where Pompilia spends a night with Caponsacchi in a room while on their way to Rome, and where they are arrested by Guido and his men. Since Browning's purpose is to present Pompilia as an innocent victim imprisoned and tortured by a monster and her escape as an indispensable step toward spiritual wholesomeness, it becomes imperative for him to emphasize her purity in body and mind.

Pompilia's mental purity is also shown through two other instances: her maternal love for her child and her forgiveness of those who have harmed her. On her baby's birth, she feels that her life has become meaningful, for, like all mothers, she finds that she has got a purpose to fulfil: "I too have something I must care about/ .. I have my purpose and my motive too" (p. 319). With her child, she also sees herself like the Madonna: "... I felt like Mary, had my baby/ Lying a little on my breast like hers" (p. 333). Though her life is short, she feels she is happier than all childless women who may live twice her age because she has enjoyed the bliss of motherhood (p. 333). The deadly wounds inflicted upon her by Guido do not cause much pain mainly because her child is not harmed: "My child is safe, there seems not so much pain" (p. 291). As for her forgiveness of those who have caused her downfall, it includes even her

lia resorts tells her, "Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth/ A formidabler foe than I dare fret" (p. 331).

All these miseries are clearly intended to arouse pity for her and to make any step she takes seem legitimate. Therefore, when Caponsacchi, a young handsome priest, appears in her life and love begins to bind their hearts, sympathy has already been secured for her. She meets him in Spring, the season of life, youth and change. Suddenly, she finds herself overwhelmed with light, and for the first time in her life after marriage she is awakened from her spiritual death:

Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth ... (pp. 318-9)

Because they find their true selves with each other, Pompilia and Caponsacchi feel, from the beginning of their relationship, that their meeting is arranged by a divine will. Consequently, she sees him as the light that will dispel the darkness in which her life is enveloped(7), and he sees her as a manifestation of truth and a source of enlightenment. The flight to Rome comes as a bold attempt to break through Pompilia's prison-hell and achieve selffulfilment. It is noteworthy that the two lovers do not see their flight as a violation of social or religious conventions. Caponsacchi looks upon it as a religious task: "Duty to God is duty to her" (VI. 1030), whereas Pompilia considers it an avenue to freedom and happiness.

It is evident that Pompilia's escape from home is presented as an act of rebellion against persecution; it is the revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor. Equally evident is that this escape is a genuine development in Pompilia's character from a weak, , submissive girl who accepts tyranny to a woman of strong resolution who rejects that tyranny by the only possible way available. In a world of hypocrites, she has no other alternative to affirm her right to live but this flight which becomes an important factor in exposing social cant and brutality. The subsequent social outcry should have been aroused against the cruelty of the husband who has left no option for his wife but this act.

In this respect, it is significant to mention that Browning tries his best to avoid any sexual implication in the relationship between Caponsacchi and Pompilia. Their love is shown as purely spiritual. Thus, when

encirclement(6). The first image stresses the hellish nature of her life with him, in which all hope of peace and happiness is burned:

I found I had become Count Guido's wife:
Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
Into a fury of fire, if once he was
Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,
He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
All joy, all hope, and last all fear away. (VI. 772-7)

The second image emphasizes Pompilia's imprisonment and loneliness in the world, for, with Guido, she finds herself alone, surrounded by an inimical society, without a friend or supporter. Therefore, the house, Arezzo, and the town itself become a prison from which there is no way out:

I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world ...
Tightened itself about me with no break,-
As if the town would turn Arezzo's self,-
The husband there,-the friends my enemies,
All ranged against me, not an avenue
To try, but be blocked and drive me back. (p. 329)

Besides all these domestic difficulties, Pompilia is made to suffer from another form of misery caused by the refusal of the religious and political authorities to protect her against Guido's cruelty. She appeals to the archbishop, the governor, a local clergyman and some other acquaintances but they all turn her down, urging her to obey her husband despite his cruelty. The archbishop tells her: "Since your husband bids/ Swallow the burning coal he proffers you" (p. 303). This refusal does not only expose the inadequacy of the conventional religious and secular law, but also the hypocrisy of people and the hollowness of the social values that make the men of authority cajole the strong and cadge their favour at the expense of the weak without regard to righteousness. They know Guido's tyranny, yet they refrain from offering help to his wife not merely because religion and social norms call upon the wife to be submissive to her husband but also because they fear to arouse Guido's anger. Guido, as a nobleman, is the pillar of home, church and state, hence he is an influential figure whom people fear to oppose. As one of those to whom Pompilia resorts tells her, "Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth /A formidabler foe than I dare fret" (p.331).

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The Fallen Woman in Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*

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In the Victorian Age, the woman's fall is viewed as a catastrophe that wrecks domestic felicity and endangers the very foundation upon which social life rests. In one of its aspects, this view reflects the instinctive fear of the female sexual power and its ability to seduce men from their homes and social norms, but it also reveals the great importance the Victorians lay on the woman and her role at home and in society at large. For them, the home is not only a peaceful haven where man can find warmth and comfort, but also a sacred temple which stores all the spiritual and moral values that shelter man from the anxieties of life and help him realize his longings(1). If the home is a temple, the wife is its priestess that makes it bright, serene, restful and joyful. Hence, sexual fidelity to the husband becomes the supreme virtue and adultery is the worst of sins(2). It goes without saying that the woman's fall becomes a social horror, as it wrecks havoc, not only on the woman herself, but also on her home and society.

This social concern for the woman's moral state is reflected in the literature of the period, where the fallen woman is usually portrayed as an evil temptress, condemned to live as an outcast whose life ends in an ignominious death or at best in bitter repentance. And even when some writers show pity for her, that pity is always mingled with condemnation(3). Of the Victorian poems that deal with the question of the fallen woman, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868) and Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1888) are the most ambitious attempts at analysing the character of that woman with the depth and seriousness appropriate for the importance of the issue. Both poems present a detailed account of the woman's plight and the concomitant circumstances that lead to her fall, but the resultant portraits are disparate: in *The Ring*, she is depicted as a victim of social evils, whereas in the *Idylls* she appears