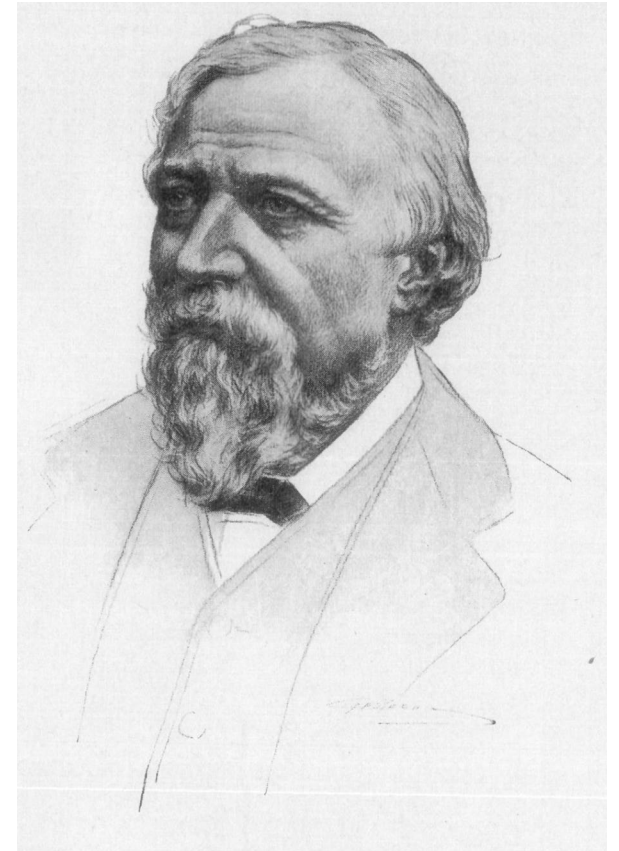


A Browning Anthology

*A selection of poems and
supporting materials for the study of
Robert Browning's poetry*



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Robert Browning

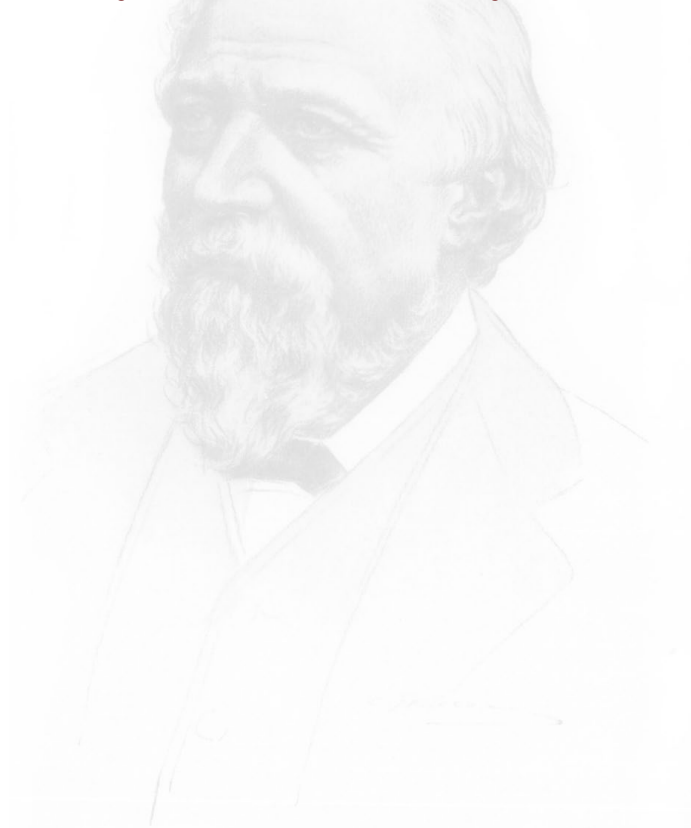
The Lost Leader

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
 Just for a riband to stick in his coat
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
 Lost all the others she lets us devote;
 They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver, 5
 So much was theirs who so little allowed:
 How all our copper had gone for his service!
 Rags were they purple, his heart had been proud!
 We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye, 10
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
 Made him our pattern to live and to die!
 Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
 Burns, Shelley, were with us, they watch from their graves!
 He alone breaks from the van and the freemen, 15
 He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

 We shall march prospering, not through his presence;
 Songs may inspirit us, not from his lyre;
 Deeds will be done, while he boasts his quiescence,
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire: 20
 Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
 One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
 One more triumph for devils and sorrow for angels,
 One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
 Life's night begins: let him never come back to us! 25
 There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
 Forced praise on our part the glimmer of twilight,
 Never glad confident morning again!
 Best fight on well, for we taught him, strike gallantly,
 Menace our heart ere we master his own; 30
 Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
 Pardoned in Heaven, the first by the throne!

The critic Robert Lynd writes: (Browning thought) 'that Wordsworth was a turncoat, a renegade – a poet who began as the champion of liberty and ended as its enemy. This is the general view, and it seems to me to be unassailable.'

Browning always made it clear that the poem was based on Wordsworth, but stopped short of saying that it was directly addressed to Wordsworth himself, instead saying that the portrait was 'purposely disguised a little, used in short as an artist uses a model, retaining certain characteristic traits, and discarding the rest'



Dubiety

Dubiety: noun, formal:

the state or quality of being doubtful; uncertainty.

This poem was first published posthumously.

I will be happy if but for once:
 Only help me, Autumn weather,
 Me and my cares to screen, ensconce
 In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!
 Sleep? Nay, comfort with just a cloud 5
 Suffusing day too clear and bright:
 Eve's essence, the single drop allowed
 To sully, like milk, Noon's water-white.
 Let gauziness shade, not shroud, adjust,
 Dim and not deaden, somehow sheathe 10
 Aught sharp in the rough world's busy thrust,
 If it reach me through dreaming's vapour-wreath.
 Be life so, all things ever the same!
 For, what has disarmed the world?
 Outside, Quiet and peace: inside, nor blame 15
 Nor want, nor wish whate'er betide.
 What is it like that has happened before?
 A dream? No dream, more real by much.
 A vision? But fanciful days of yore
 Brought many: mere musing seems not such. 20
 Perhaps but a memory, after all!
 Of what came once when a woman leant
 To feel for my brow where her kiss might fall.
 Truth ever, truth only the excellent!

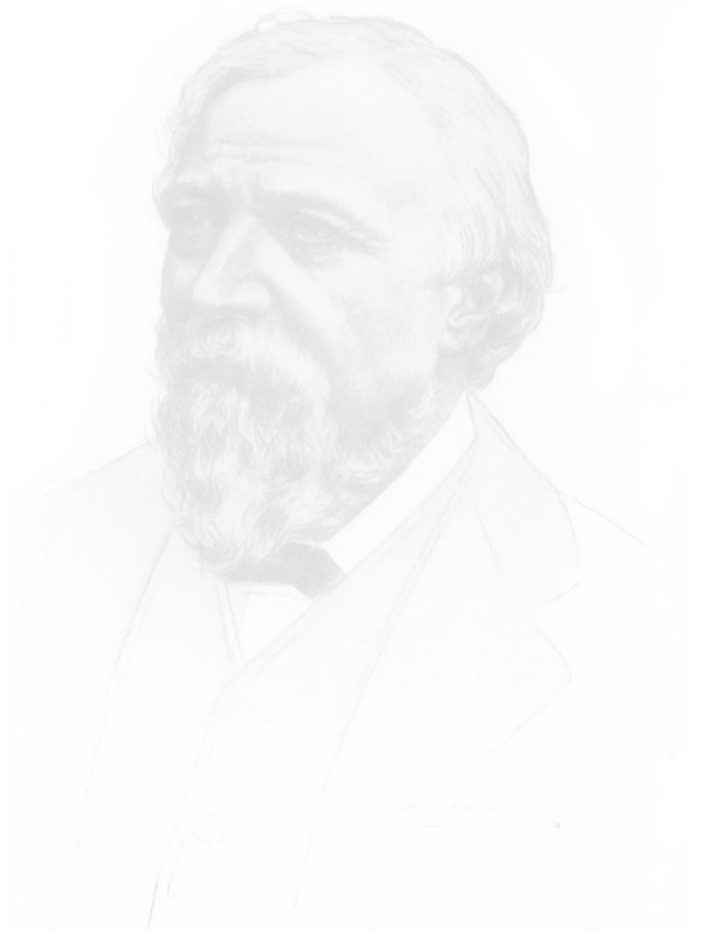
Robert Browning

Pictor Ignotus

Florence, 15-

I could have painted pictures like that youth's
 Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
 Stayed me — ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
 Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
 To outburst on your night with all my gift 5
 Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk
 From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
 And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
 To the centre, of an instant; or around 10
 Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
 The license and the limit, space and bound,
 Allowed to truth made visible in man.
 And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
 Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
 Each face obedient to its passion's law, 15
 Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
 Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
 A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
 Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
 Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place; 20
 Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
 And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved
 O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
 What did ye give me that I have not saved?
 Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!) 25
 Of going — I, in each new picture — forth,
 As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
 To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
 Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
 Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went, 30

The title is Latin for 'Painter Unknown' — a phrase given to an artist who does not become famous in his or her lifetime, or whose style is not distinctive enough to be identifiable.



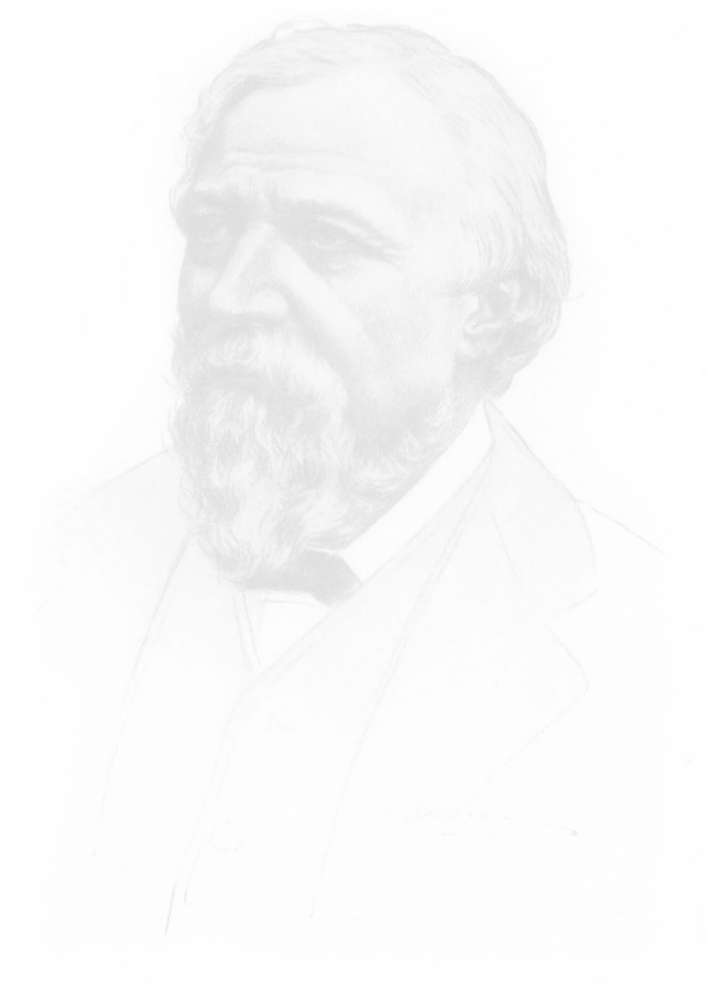
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
 Through old streets named afresh from the event,
 Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
 My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
 Above his hair, lie learning at my feet! 35
 Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
 With love about, and praise, till life should end,
 And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
 Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend
 The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear! 40
 But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
 Have scared me, like the revels through a door
 Of some strange house of idols at its rites!
 This world seemed not the world it was before:
 Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped 45
 ... Who summoned those cold faces that begun
 To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped
 Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
 They drew me forth, and spite of me ... enough!
 These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, 50
 Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
 And where they live needs must our pictures live
 And see their faces, listen to their prate,
 Partakers of their daily pettiness,
 Discussed of "This I love, or this I hate, 55
 This like me more, and this affects me less!"
 Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
 These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
 With the same series. Virgin, Babe and Saint, 60
 With the same cold calm beautiful regard
 At least no merchant traffics in my heart;
 The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
 Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart;

Robert Browning

Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
O youth, men praise so holds their praise its worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

65

70



Prospice is Latin, meaning to examine the future, or look toward the future.

Martin Garrett says:

'Robert Browning certainly saw himself as 'a fighter'. He was daunted neither by critical neglect nor by Elizabeth Barrett's initial reluctance to marry. And after her death in 1861 he worked on determinedly. The title 'Prospice' can be translated as 'look forward', and in this poem, published in 1864, Browning is looking forward to death, when he expects 'I will clasp thee again'. Such optimism seems to contrast markedly with the religious doubt or searching of many Victorian writers. But the poet does not claim that there is anything easy about facing death. Instead he shows one way of coping. He gives the 'Arch Fear' a 'visible form' so that he can imagine taking him on in one last fight. ('Barriers' and 'guerdon' suggest a tournament.) He continues to deploy the poet's weapons of metaphor, rhyme and rhetoric. If that will carry him through to the beloved, never mind the details of theology: 'And with God be the rest!'

Robert Browning

Prospice

Fear death? to feel the fog in my throat, The mist in my face, When the snows begin, and the blasts denote I am nearing the place, The power of the night, the press of the storm, The post of the foe;	5
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form, Yet the strong man must go: For the journey is done and the summit attained, And the barriers fall,	10
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained, The reward of it all. I was ever a fighter, so one fight more, The best and the last!	15
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore, And bade me creep past. No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers The heroes of old, Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears Of pain, darkness and cold.	20
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave, The black minute's at end, And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave, Shall dwindle, shall blend, Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain, Then a light, then thy breast,	25
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again, And with God be the rest!	

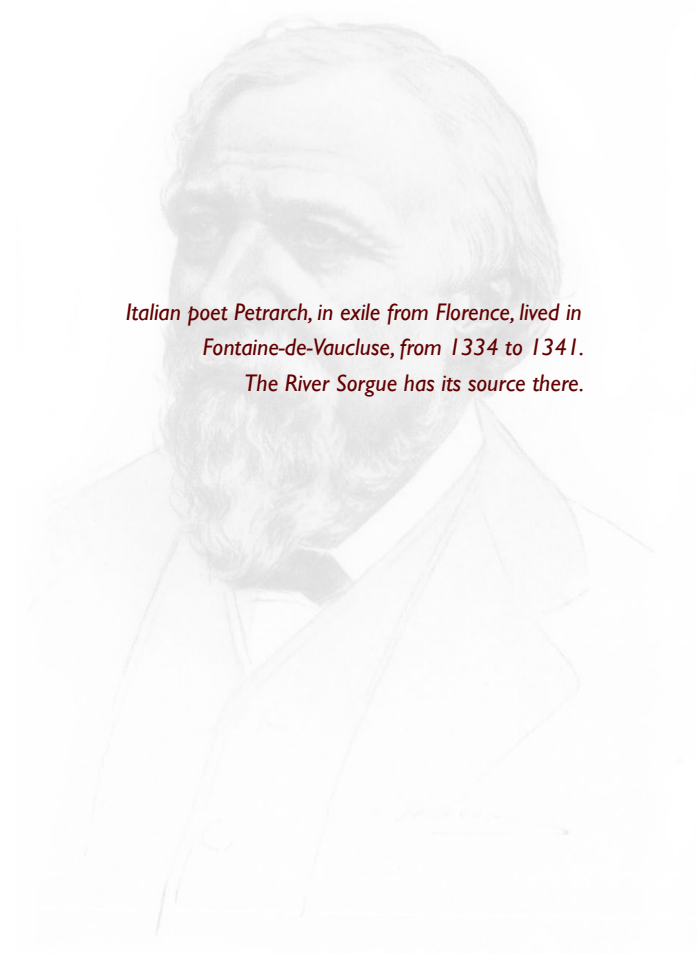
Apparent Failure

‘We shall soon lose a celebrated building.’
 – *Paris Newspaper*.

No, for I'll save it! Seven years since
 I passed through Paris, stopped a day
 To see the baptism of your Prince,
 Saw, made my bow, and went my way:
 Walking the heat and headache off, 5
 I took the Seine-side, you surmise,
 Thought of the Congress, Gortschakoff,
 Cavour's appeal and Buol's replies,
 So sauntered till what met my eyes?

Only the Doric little Morgue! 10
 The dead-house where you show your drowned:
 Petrarch's Vaucluse makes proud the Sorgue,
 Your Morgue has made the Seine renowned.
 One pays one's debt in such a case;
 I plucked up heart and entered, stalked, 15
 Keeping a tolerable face
 Compared with some whose cheeks were chalked:
 Let them! No Briton's to be balked!

First came the silent gazers; next,
 A screen of glass, we're thankful for; 20
 Last, the sight's self, the sermon's text,
 The three men who did most abhor
 Their life in Paris yesterday,
 So killed themselves: and now, enthroned
 Each on his copper couch, they lay 25
 Fronting me, waiting to be owned.
 I thought, and think, their sin's atoned.



*Italian poet Petrarch, in exile from Florence, lived in
 Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, from 1334 to 1341.
 The River Sorgue has its source there.*

Poor men, God made, and all for that!
 The reverence struck me; o'er each head
 Religiously was hung its hat, 30
 Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,
 Sacred from touch: each had his berth,
 His bounds, his proper place of rest,
 Who last night tenanted on earth
 Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast, 35
 Unless the plain asphalt seemed best.

How did it happen, my poor boy?
 You wanted to be Buonaparte
 And have the Tuileries for toy,
 And could not, so it broke your heart? 40
 You, old one by his side, I judge,
 Were, red as blood, a socialist,
 A leveller! Does the Empire grudge
 You've gained what no Republic missed?
 Be quiet, and unclench your fist! 45

And this why, he was red in vain,
 Or black, poor fellow that is blue!
 What fancy was it, turned your brain?
 Oh, women were the prize for you!
 Money gets women, cards and dice 50
 Get money, and ill-luck gets just
 The copper couch and one clear nice
 Cool squirt of water o'er your bust,
 The right thing to extinguish lust!

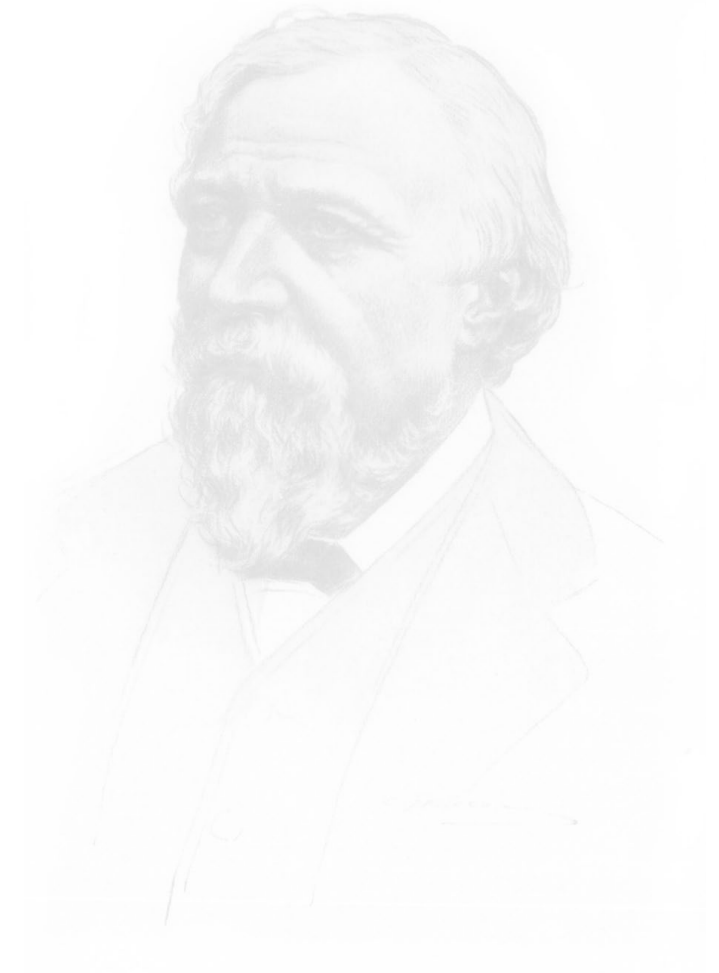
cont...

Robert Browning

It's wiser being good than bad;
It's safer being meek than fierce:
It's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after Last, returns the First,
Tho' a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

55

60



One approach to what has been a vexing problem of interpretation in Robert Browning's 'A Grammarian's Funeral' questions whether the evidence provided by the poem alone enables its readers to decide between the extreme possibilities that the grammarian wasted his life in dry-as-dust scholarship or that his pursuit of human knowledge and perfection makes his life fully admirable.

Read more at:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/monteiro1.html>

Sepulture: the act of interment; burial.

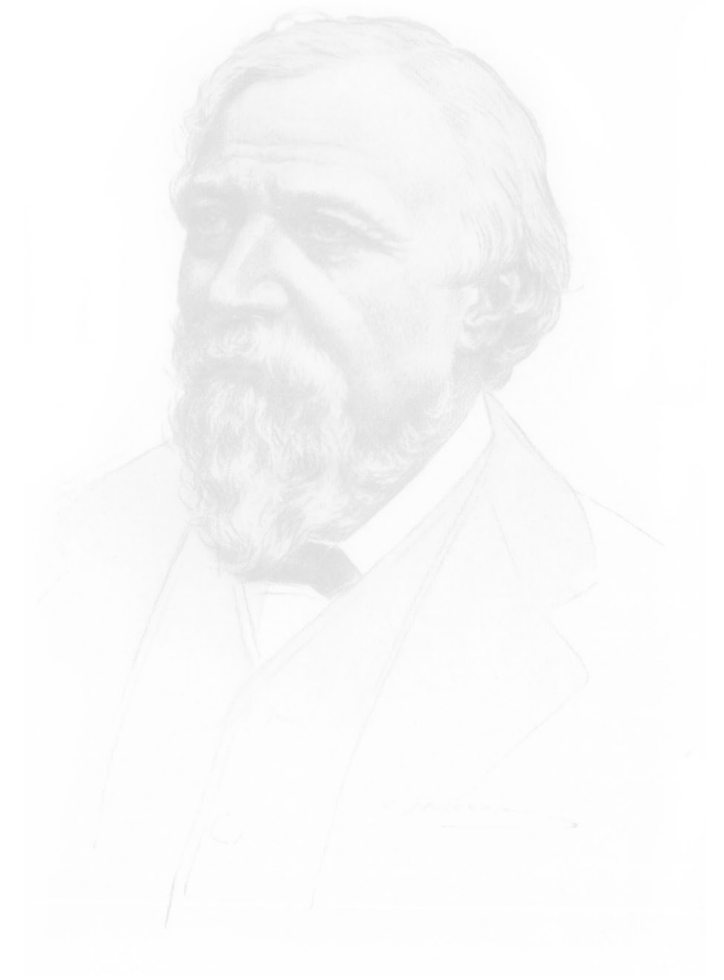
Robert Browning

A Grammarian's Funeral

Shortly After the Revival of Learning in Europe

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
 Singing together.
 Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
 Each in its tether
 Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain, 5
 Cared-for till cock-crow:
 Look out if yonder be not day again
 Rimming the rock-row!
 That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought, 10
 Rarer, intenser,
 Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
 Chafes in the censer.
 Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop:
 Seek we sepulture 15
 On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
 Crowded with culture!
 All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
 Clouds overcome it;
 No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's 20
 Circling its summit.
 Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights;
 Wait ye the warning?
 Our low life was the level's and the night's;
 He's for the morning.
 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head, 25
 'Ware the beholders!
 This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
 Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
 Safe from the weather! 30
 He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
 Singing together,
 He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo!
 Long he lived nameless: how should Spring take note 35
 Winter would follow?
 Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
 Cramped and diminished,
 Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
 My dance is finished?" 40
 No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountainside,
 Make for the city!)
 He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity;
 Left play for work, and grappled with the world 45
 Bent on escaping:
 "What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furred?
 Show me their shaping,
 Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,
 Give!" So, he gowned him, 50
 Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
 Learned, we found him.
 Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
 Accents uncertain:
 "Time to taste life," another would have said, 55
 "Up with the curtain!"
 This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
 Patience a moment!
 Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
 Still there's the comment. 60
 Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
 Painful or easy!



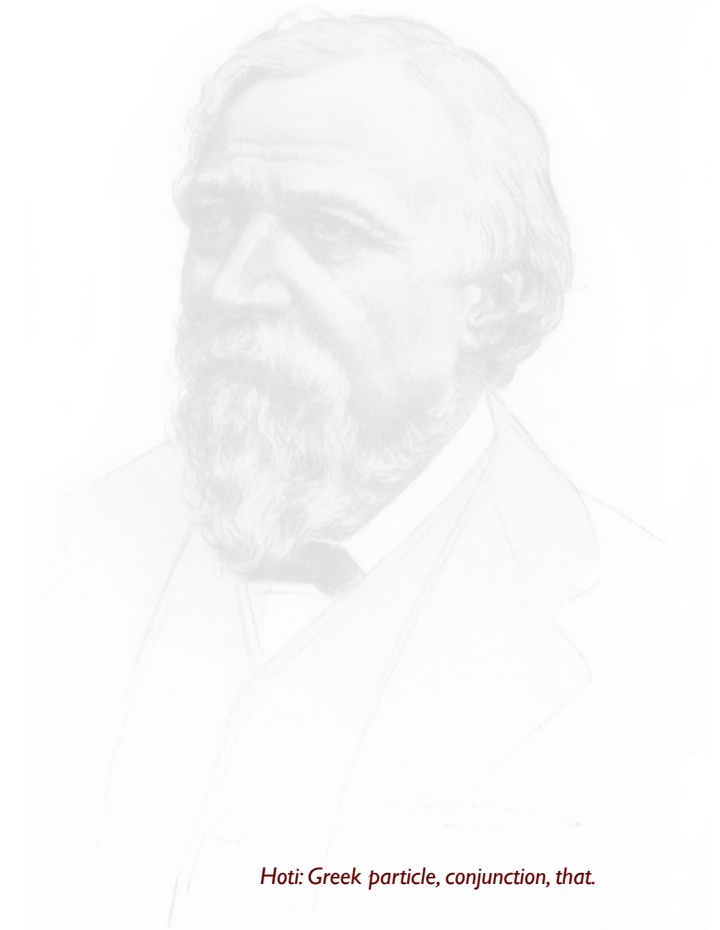
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
 Ay, nor feel queasy."
 Oh, such a life as he resolved to live, 65
 When he had learned it,
 When he had gathered all books had to give!
 Sooner, he spurned it.
 Image the whole, then execute the parts
 Fancy the fabric 70
 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
 Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
 Gaping before us.)
 Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace 75
 (Hearten our chorus!)
 That before living he'd learn how to live
 No end to learning:
 Earn the means first God surely will contrive
 Use for our earning. 80
 Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes:
 Live now or never!"
 He said, "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
 Man has Forever."
 Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head: 85
 Calculus racked him:
 Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
 Tussis attacked him.
 "Now, master, take a little rest!" not he!
 (Caution redoubled, 90
 Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
 Not a whit troubled,
 Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
 Fierce as a dragon
 He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst) 95

Robert Browning

Tussis: (Medicine / Pathology) the technical name for a cough.

Sucked at the flagon.
 Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
 Heedless of far gain,
 Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
 Bad is our bargain! 100
 Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
 (He loves the burthen)
 God's task to make the heavenly period
 Perfect the earthen?
 Did not he magnify the mind, show clear 105
 Just what it all meant?
 He would not discount life, as fools do here,
 Paid by instalment.
 He ventured neck or nothing heaven's success
 Found, or earth's failure: 110
 "Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes!
 Hence with life's pale lure!"
 That low man seeks a little thing to do,
 Sees it and does it:
 This high man, with a great thing to pursue, 115
 Dies ere he knows it.
 That low man goes on adding one to one,
 His hundred's soon hit:
 This high man, aiming at a million,
 Misses an unit. 120
 That, has the world here should he need the next,
 Let the world mind him!
 This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
 Seeking shall find him.
 So, with the throttling hands of death at strife, 125
 Ground he at grammar;
 Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
 While he could stammer
 He settled *Hoti's* business let it be!



Hoti: Greek particle, conjunction, that.

Oun: Greek particle, then, now then.

Enclitic De: Greek, concerning which Browning wrote to the Editor of *The News*, London, Nov. 21, 1874: 'In a clever article you speak of 'the doctrine of the enclitic *De* – which, with all deference to Mr Browning, in point of fact, does not exist.' No, not to Mr Browning, but pray defer to Herr Buttman, whose fifth list of 'enclitics' ends with the inseparable *De*;'— or to Curtius, whose fifth list ends also with *De* (meaning 'towards' and as a demonstrative appendage). That this is not to be confounded with the accentuated '*De*, meaning but,' was the 'Doctrine' which the Grammarian bequeathed to those capable of receiving it'

Properly based *Oun* 130
 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
 Dead from the waist down.
 Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
 Hail to your purlieus,
 All ye highfliers of the feathered race, 135
 Swallows and curlews!
 Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
 Live, for they can, there:
 This man decided not to Live but Know
 Bury this man there? 140
 Here here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
 Lightnings are loosened,
 Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
 Peace let the dew send!
 Lofty designs must close in like effects: 145
 Loftily lying,
 Leave him still loftier than the world suspects,
 Living and dying.

Robert Browning

Two in the Campagna

*Campagna: a low-lying area surrounding Rome
in the Lazio region of central Italy*

I

I wonder do you feel today
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

5

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know
Has tantalised me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

10

III

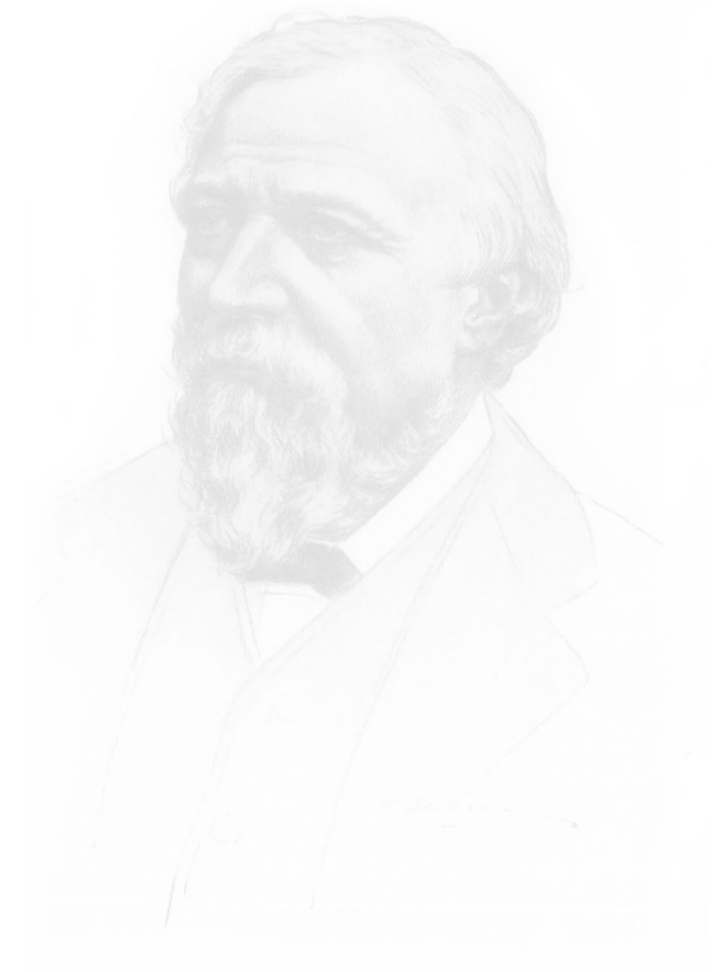
Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

15

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles, blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

20



V

The champaign with its endless fleece
 Of feathery grasses everywhere!
 Silence and passion, joy and peace,
 An everlasting wash of air
 Rome's ghost since her decease. 25

VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
 Such miracles performed in play,
 Such primal naked forms of flowers,
 Such letting nature have her way
 While heaven looks from its towers! 30

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
 Let us be unashamed of soul,
 As earth lies bare to heaven above!
 How is it under our control
 To love, or not to love? 35

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
 You that are just so much, no more,
 Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
 Where does the fault lie? What the core
 O' the wound, since wound must be? 40

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
 See with your eyes, and set my heart
 Beating by yours, and drink my fill
 At your soul's springs, your part my part
 In life, for good or ill. 45

Robert Browning

X

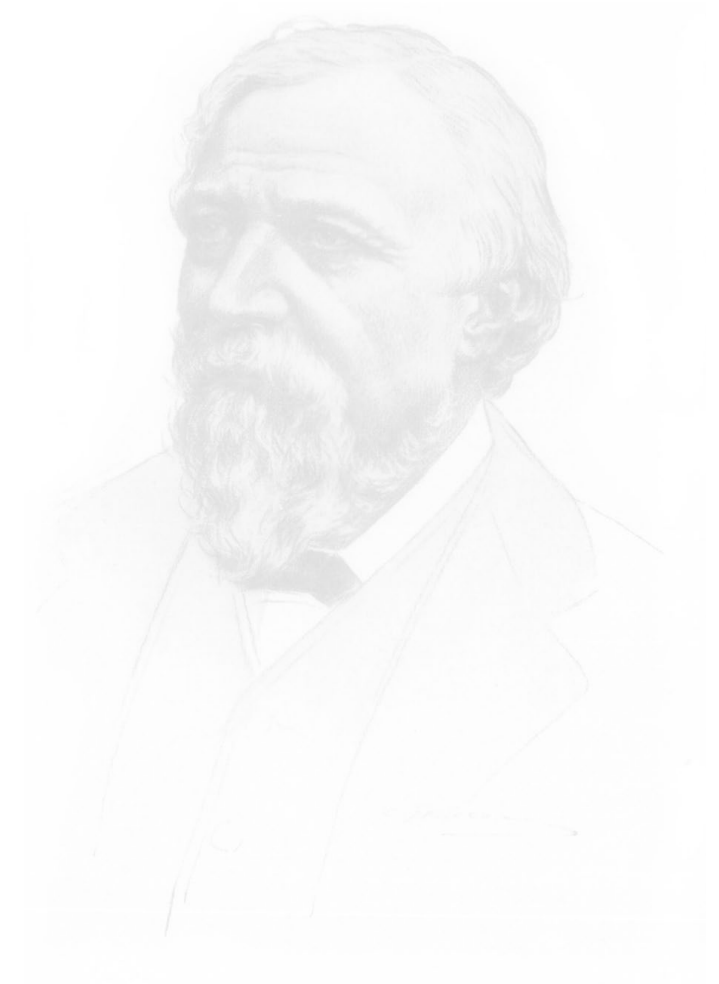
No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
 Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
 Catch your soul's warmth, I pluck the rose
 And love it more than tongue can speak
 Then the good minute goes. 50

XI

Already how am I so far
 Out of that minute? Must I go
 Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
 Onward, wherever light winds blow
 Fixed by no friendly star? 55

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
 Where is the thread now? Off again!
 The old trick! Only I discern
 Infinite passion, and the pain
 Of finite hearts that yearn. 60



This is one of the most allusive of Browning's poems, relying on the reader's knowledge of Eve in the final stanza, of the concept of the Virgin Mary as the 'rose without a thorn' and on some awareness of the Medieval French text 'The Romaunce of the Rose' and its influential imagery.

Women and Roses

I.

I dream of a red-rose tree.
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

II.

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go 5
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day.
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens, 10
Beauties yet unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

III.

Dear rose, thy term is reached,
Thy leaf hangs loose and bleached:
Bees pass it unimpeached. 15

IV.

Stay then, stoop, since I cannot climb,
You, great shapes of the antique time!
How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,
Break my heart at your feet to please you?
Oh, to possess and be possessed! 20
Hearts that beat 'neath each pallid breast!
Once but of love, the poesy, the passion,
Drink but once and die! In vain, the same fashion,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

Robert Browning

V.

Dear rose, thy joy's undimmed,
 Thy cup is ruby-rimmed,
 Thy cup's heart nectar-brimmed.

25

VI.

Deep, as drops from a statue's plinth
 The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
 So will I bury me while burning,
 Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
 Eyes in your eyes, lips on your lips!
 Fold me fast where the cincture slips,
 Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure,
 Girdle me for once! But no the old measure,
 They circle their rose on my rose tree.

30

35

VII.

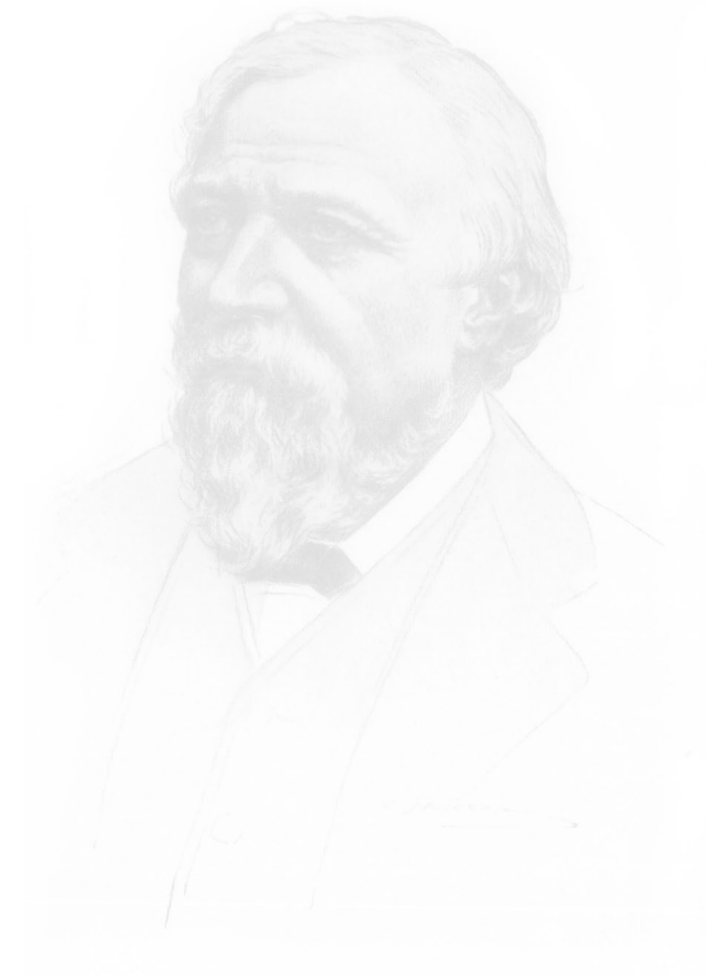
Dear rose without a thorn,
 Thy bud's the babe unborn:
 First streak of a new morn.

VIII.

Wings, lend wings for the cold, the clear!
 What is far conquers what is near.
 Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
 Sprung from the dust where our flesh moulders.
 What shall arrive with the cycle's change?
 A novel grace and a beauty strange.
 I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her,
 Shaped her to his mind! Alas! in like manner
 They circle their rose on my rose tree.

40

45



Love in a Life

I
 Room after room,
 I hunt the house through
 We inhabit together.
 Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her
 Next time, herself! not the trouble behind her 5
 Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
 As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:
 Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II
 Yet the day wears,
 And door succeeds door; 10
 I try the fresh fortune
 Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
 Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
 Spend my whole day in the quest, who cares?
 But 'tis twilight, you see, with such suites to explore, 15
 Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

Robert Browning

Life in a Love

Escape me?
 Never
 Beloved! 5
 While I am I, and you are you,
 So long as the world contains us both,
 Me the loving and you the loth
 While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
 My life is a fault at last, I fear:
 It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
 Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed. 10
 But what if I fail of my purpose here?
 It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
 To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
 And, baffled, get up and begin again,
 So the chace takes up one's life, that's all. 15
 While, look but once from your farthest bound
 At me so deep in the dust and dark,
 No sooner the old hope goes to ground
 Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
 I shape me 20
 Ever
 Removed!

A Toccata of Galuppi's

Oh Galuppi, Baldassare, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings, 5
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

Ay, because the sea's the street there, and 'tis arched by ... what you call
... Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival:
I was never out of England it's as if I saw it all.

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May? 10
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head? 15

Well, and it was graceful of them they'd break talk off and afford
She, to bite her mask's black velvet he, to finger on his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions "Must we die?" 20
Those commiserating sevenths "Life might last! we can but try!"

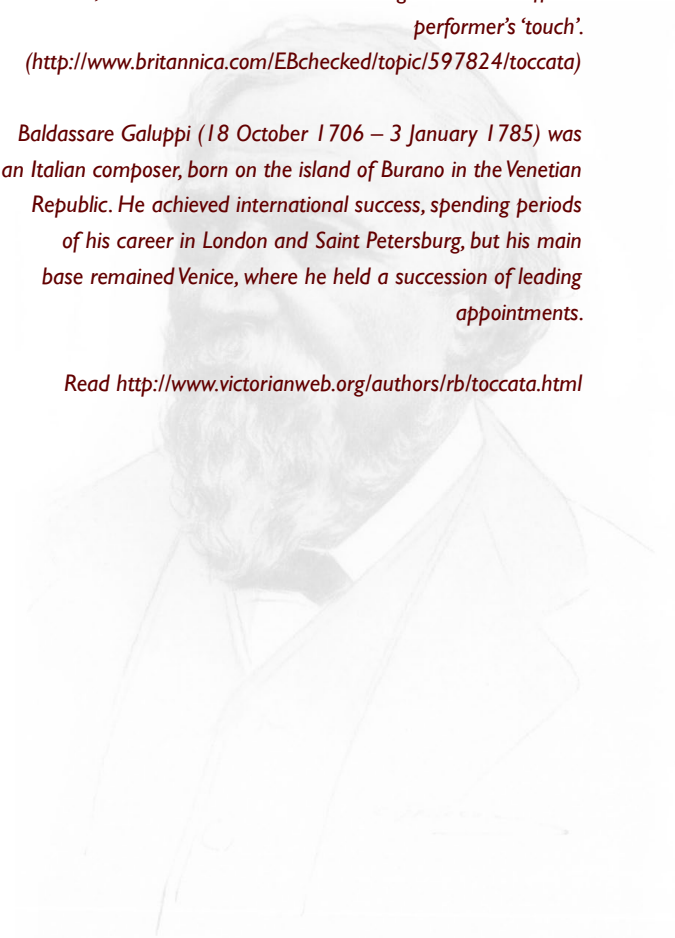
"Were you happy?" "Yes." "And are you still as happy?" "Yes. And you?"
"Then, more kisses!" "Did I stop them, when a million seemed so few?"
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

Take a look at this *hypermedia* edition of the poem from the
University of Toronto:
<http://faculty.stonehill.edu/geverett/rb/galuppi.html>

*Toccata: musical form for keyboard instruments, written in a
free style that is characterized by full chords, rapid runs, high
harmonies, and other virtuoso elements designed to show off the
performer's 'touch'.*
(<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/597824/toccata>)

Baldassare Galuppi (18 October 1706 – 3 January 1785) was
an Italian composer, born on the island of Burano in the Venetian
Republic. He achieved international success, spending periods
of his career in London and Saint Petersburg, but his main
base remained Venice, where he held a succession of leading
appointments.

Read <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/toccata.html>



So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say! 25
 “Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!
 I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!”

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time, one by one,
 Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
 Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun. 30

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor swerve,
 While I triumph o’er a secret wrung from nature’s close reserve,
 In you come with your cold music till I creep through every nerve.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:
 “Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned. 35
 The soul, doubtless, is immortal where a soul can be discerned.

“Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
 Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
 Butterflies may dread extinction, you’ll not die, it cannot be!

“As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop, 40
 Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
 What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

“Dust and ashes!” So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
 Dear dear women, with such hair, too what’s become of all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old. 45

Robert Browning

A Woman's Last Word

I.
Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
Only sleep!

II.
What so wild as words are? 5
I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

III.
See the creature stalking
While we speak! 10
Hush and hide the talking,
Cheek on cheek!

IV.
What so false as truth is,
False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is 15
Shun the tree

V.
Where the apple reddens
Never pry
Lest we lose our Edens,
Eve and I. 20

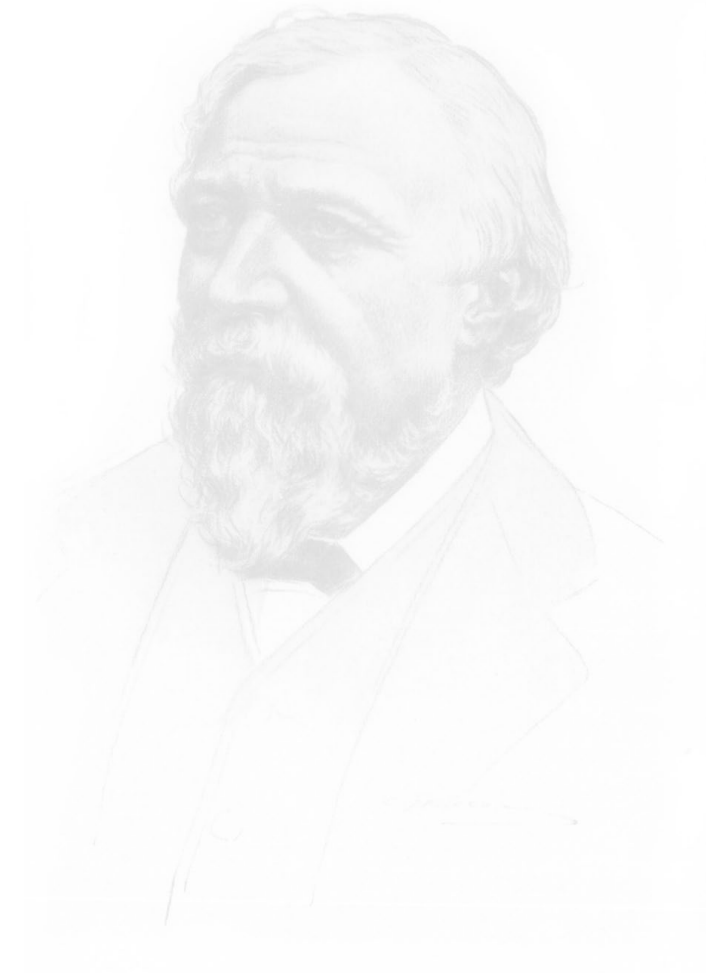
VI.
Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!

VII.
Teach me, only teach, Love 25
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought

VIII.
Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands, 30
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.

IX.
That shall be to-morrow
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow 35
Out of sight:

X
Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee. 40



Up at a Villa Down in the City

(As Distinguished by an Italian Person of Quality)

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

5

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!

I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned wool.

10

But the city, oh the city the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries by;
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

15

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights:
You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.

20

Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

25

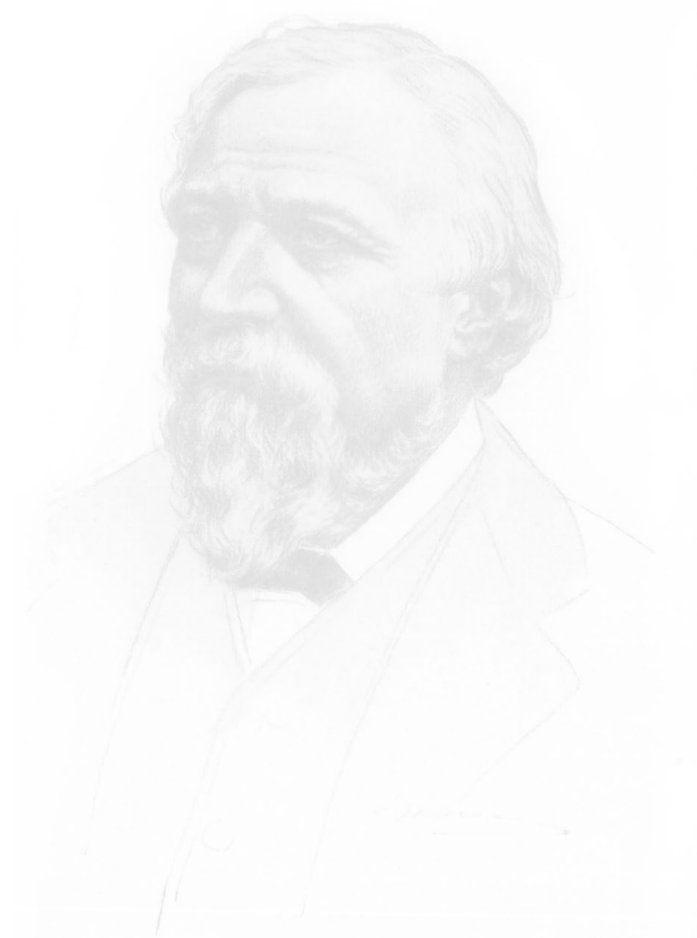
Robert Browning

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout and splash!
 In the shade it sings and springs: in the shine such foambows flash
 On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash
 Round the lady atop in her conch fifty gazers do not abash,
 Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash. 30

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
 Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
 Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix in the corn and mingle,
 Or thrud the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
 Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill, 35
 And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on the hill.
 Enough of the seasons, I spare you the months of the fever and chill.

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells begin:
 No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
 You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin. 40
 By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets blood, draws teeth;
 Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.
 At the post-office such a scene-picture the new play, piping hot!
 And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were shot.

Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes, 45
 And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of the Duke's!
 Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and so,
 Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome and Cicero,
 "And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of Saint Paul has reached,
 Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than ever he preached." 50
 Noon strikes, here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne smiling and smart
 With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck in her heart!
 Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife.
 No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure in life.



But bless you, it's dear it's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate. 55
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate
It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still ah, the pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts a-holding the yellow candles; 60
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles.
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife;
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

Robert Browning

Love Among the Ruins

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles, Miles and miles On the solitary pastures where our sheep Half-asleep Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop As they crop Was the site once of a city great and gay, (So they say) Of our country's very capital, its prince Ages since Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far Peace or war.	5
Now the country does not even boast a tree, As you see, To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills From the hills Intersect and give a name to, (else they run Into one) Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires Up like fires O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall Bounding all Made of marble, men might march on nor be prest Twelve abreast.	10 15 20
And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass Never was! Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'er-spreads And embeds Every vestige of the city, guessed alone, Stock or stone	25 30

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
 Long ago;
 Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
 Struck them tame;
 And that glory and that shame alike, the gold 35
 Bought and sold.

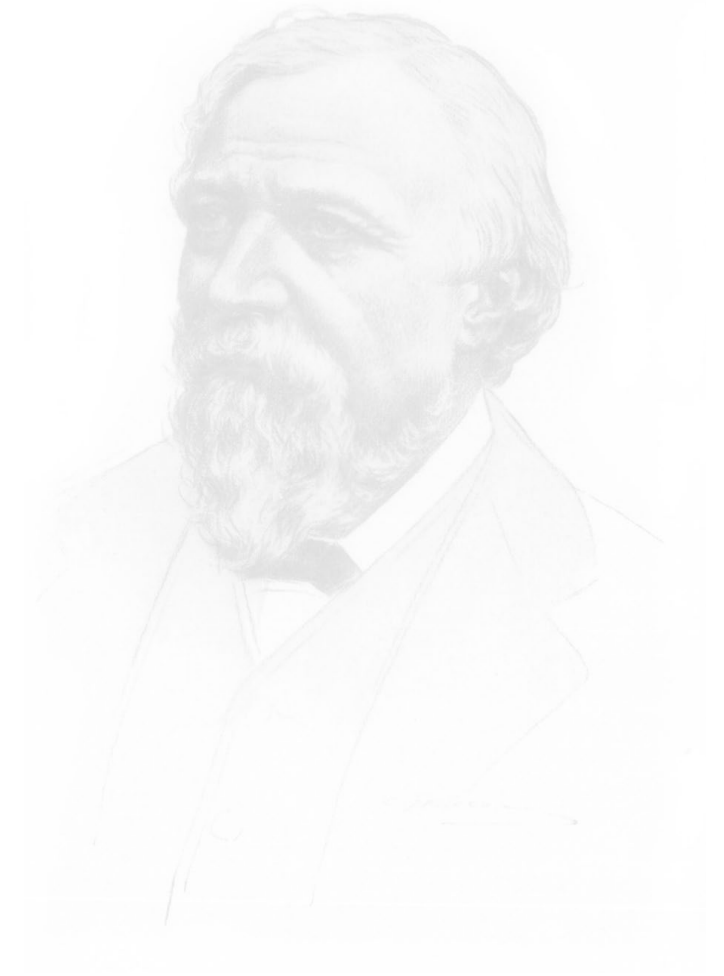
Now the single little turret that remains
 On the plains,
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd 40
 Overscored,
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
 Through the chinks
 Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
 Sprang sublime,
 And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced 45
 As they raced,
 And the monarch and his minions and his dames
 Viewed the games.

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
 Smiles to leave 50
 To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
 And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
 Melt away
 That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair 55
 Waits me there
 In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal,
 When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
 Till I come. 60

Robert Browning

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts, and then 65
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face, 70
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high 75
As the sky
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force
Gold, of course.
O heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns 80
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.



Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

I.

Gr-r-r there go, my heart's abhorrence!
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5
 Oh, that rose has prior claims
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

II.

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear 10
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,
 Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for 'parsley'? 15
 What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

III.

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
 Laid with care on our own shelf!
 With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
 And a goblet for ourself, 20
 Rinsed like something sacrificial
 Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps
 Marked with L. for our initial!
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

Robert Browning

IV.

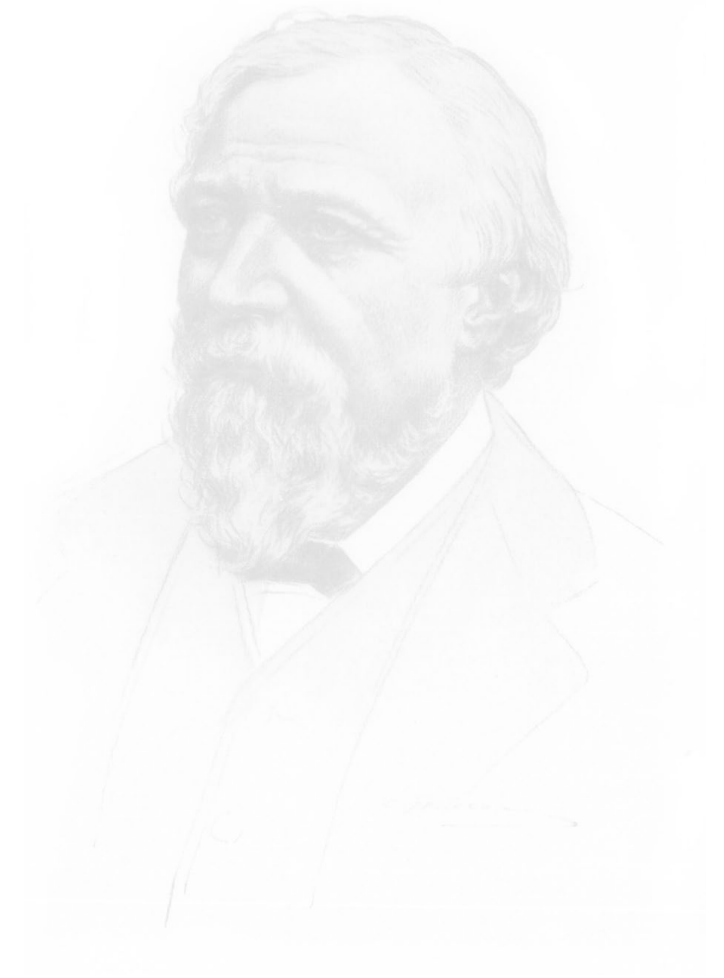
Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores 25
 Squats outside the Convent bank
 With Sanchicha, telling stories,
 Steeping tresses in the tank,
 Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
 Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30
 Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
 (That is, if he'd let it show!)

V.

When he finishes refection,
 Knife and fork he never lays
 Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35
 As do I, in Jesu's praise.
 I the Trinity illustrate,
 Drinking watered orange-pulp
 In three sips the Arian frustrate;
 While he drains his at one gulp. 40

VI.

Oh, those melons? If he's able
 We're to have a feast! so nice!
 One goes to the Abbot's table,
 All of us get each a slice.
 How go on your flowers? None double 45
 Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
 Strange! And I, too, at such trouble,
 Keep them close-nipped on the sly!



*Manichee: an adherent of Manichaeism, an ancient religion,
considered heretical by Christianity.*

VII.

There's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails 50
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying 55
Off to hell, a Manichee?

VIII.

Or, my scrofulous French novel
On grey paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

IX.

Or, there's Satan! one might venture 65
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine* ...
'St, there's Vespers! *Plena grati* 70
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r you swine!

Robert Browning

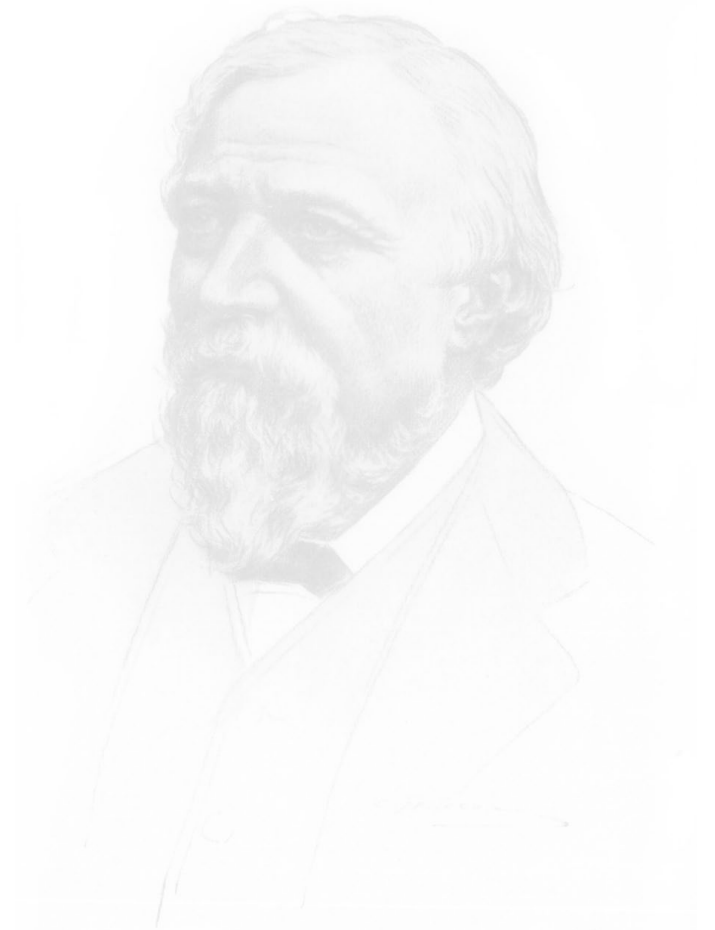
The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church

Rome, 15–

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
 Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
 Nephews sons mine ... ah God, I know not! Well
 She, men would have to be your mother once,
 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! 5
 What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
 And as she died so must we die ourselves,
 And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie 10
 In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
 Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
 "Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
 Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
 And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought 15
 With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
 Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
 Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
 He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
 Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence 20
 One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
 And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
 And up into the very dome where live
 The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
 And I shall fill my slab of basalt there, 25
 And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
 With those nine columns round me, two and two,
 The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
 Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
 As fresh poured red wine of a mighty pulse 30
 Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,

For critical essays on this poem, see:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/bishop/index.html>

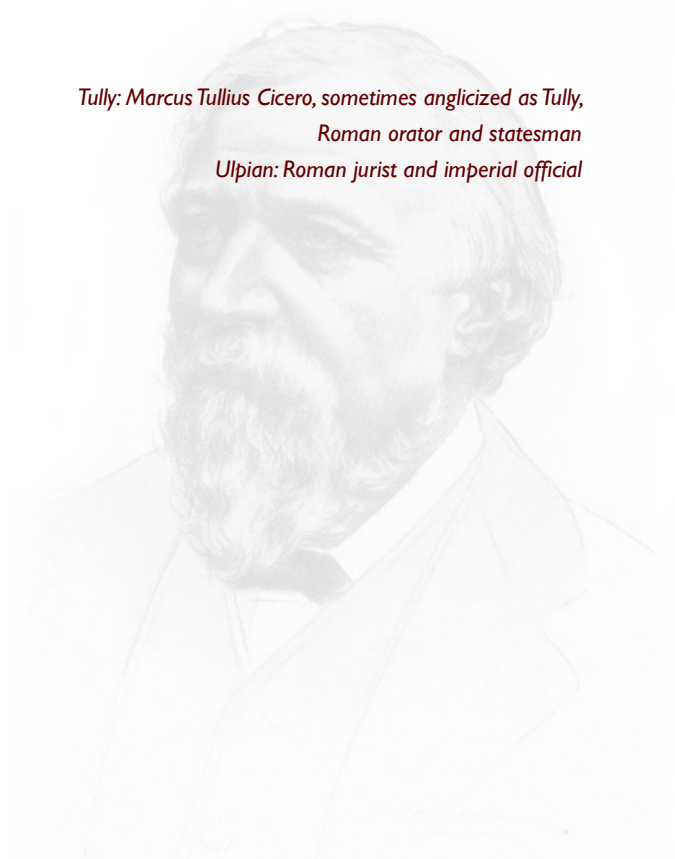


Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
 Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
 Draw close: that conflagration of my church
 What then? So much was saved if aught were missed! 35
 My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
 The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
 Drop water gently till the surface sink,
 And if ye find ... Ah God, I know not, I! ...
 Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft, 40
 And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
 Some lump, ah God, of lapis lazuli,
 Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
 Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast
 Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all, 45
 That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
 So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
 Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
 Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
 For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst! 50
 Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
 Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
 Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black
 'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
 Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath? 55
 The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me.
 Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
 Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
 The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
 Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan 60
 Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
 And Moses with the tables ... but I know
 Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
 Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
 To revel down my villas while I gasp 65

Robert Browning
thyrsus: (Mythology) A staff tipped with a pine cone and twined
with ivy, carried by Dionysus, Dionysian revellers, and satyrs

Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
 Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
 Nay, boys, ye love me all of jasper, then!
 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
 My bath must needs be left behind, alas! 70
 One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
 There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world
 And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
 Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
 And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs? 75
 That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
 Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
 No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line
 Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
 And then how I shall lie through centuries, 80
 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
 And see God made and eaten all day long,
 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night, 85
 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's work: 90
 And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
 About the life before I lived this life,
 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount, 95
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
 Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?

*Tully: Marcus Tullius Cicero, sometimes anglicized as Tully,
 Roman orator and statesman
 Ulpian: Roman jurist and imperial official*



*Elucescebat: he was illustrious; formed from elucesco,
 an inceptive verb from eluceo: in post classic Latin.*



Typical medieval tomb carving, commemorating the deceased.

No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!	100
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.	
All lapis, all, sons! Else I give the Pope	
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?	
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,	
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,	105
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,	
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase	
With grapes, and add a visor and a Term,	
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx	
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,	110
To comfort me on my entablature	
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask	
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!	
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude	
To death ye wish it God, ye wish it! Stone	115
Gritstone, a crumble! Clammy squares which sweat	
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through	
And no more lapis to delight the world!	
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,	
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs	120
Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,	
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,	
That I may watch at leisure if he leers	
Old Gandolf at me, from his onion-stone,	
As still he envied me, so fair she was!	125

Robert Browning - a Short Biography

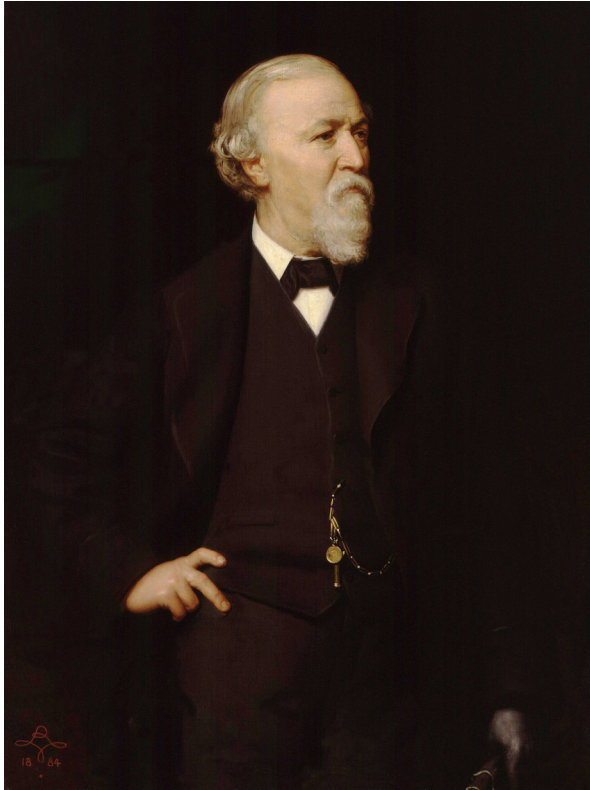
Robert Browning was born on 7 May 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was also an artist, scholar, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. His rare book collection of more than 6,000 volumes included works in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. Much of Browning's education came from his well-read father. It is believed that he was already proficient at reading and writing by the age of five. A bright and anxious student, Browning learned Latin, Greek, and French by the time he was fourteen. From fourteen to sixteen he was educated at home, attended to by various tutors in music, drawing, dancing, and horsemanship. At the age of twelve he wrote a volume of Byronic verse entitled *Incondita*, which his parents attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published. In 1825, a cousin gave Browning a collection of Shelley's poetry; Browning was so taken with the book that he asked for the rest of Shelley's works for his thirteenth birthday, and declared himself a vegetarian and an atheist in emulation of the poet. Despite this early passion, he apparently wrote no poems between the ages of thirteen and twenty. In 1828, Browning enrolled at the University of London, but he soon left, anxious to read and learn at his own pace. The random nature of his education later surfaced in his writing, leading to criticism of his poems' obscurities.

In 1833, Browning anonymously published his first major published work, *Pauline*, and in 1840 he published *Sordello*, which was widely regarded as a failure. He also tried his hand at drama, but his plays, including *Strafford*, which ran for five nights in 1837, and the *Bells and Pomegranates* series, were for the most part unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the techniques he developed through his dramatic monologues – especially his use of diction, rhythm, and symbol – are regarded as his most important contribution to poetry, influencing such major poets of the twentieth century as Ezra Pound, TS Eliot, and Robert Frost.

After reading Elizabeth Barrett's *Poems* (1844) and corresponding with her for a few months, Browning met her in 1845. They were married in 1846, against the wishes of Barrett's father. The couple moved to Pisa and then Florence, where they continued to write. They had a son, Robert "Pen" Browning, in 1849, the same year his *Collected Poems* was published. Elizabeth inspired Robert's collection of poems *Men and Women* (1855), which he dedicated to her. Now regarded as one of Browning's best works, the book was received with little notice at the time; its author was then primarily known as Elizabeth Barrett's husband.

A portrait of the younger Browning (below) and as a more mature man (right)





Robert Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861, and Robert and Pen Browning soon moved to London. Browning went on to publish *Dramatis Personae* (1863), and *The Ring and the Book* (1868). The latter, based on a seventeenth-century Italian murder trial, received wide critical acclaim, finally earning a twilight of renown and respect in Browning's career. The Browning Society was founded while he still lived, in 1881, and he was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford University in 1882 and the University of Edinburgh in 1884. Robert Browning died on the same day that his final volume of verse, *Asolando*, was published, in 1889.

<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/182>



How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of being and ideal grace.
 I love thee to the level of every day's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
 I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

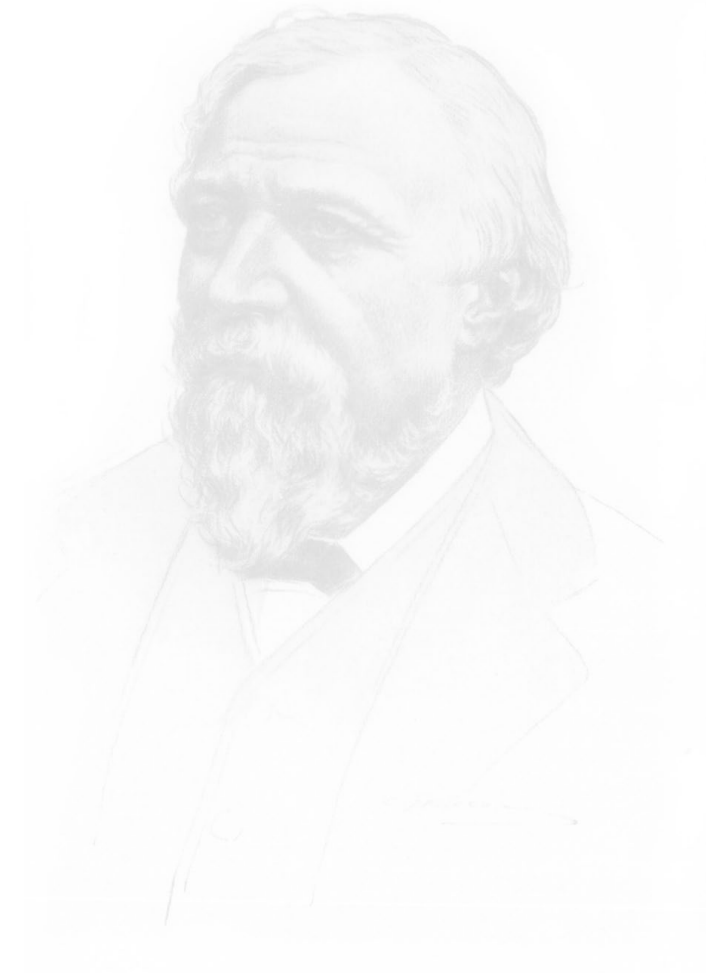
Dramatic Monologue

The term designates a type of poem that was perfected by Robert Browning. In its fullest form, as represented by several of Browning's poems, the dramatic monologue has the following characteristics:

- 1. A single person, who is not the poet himself, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment.*
- 2. This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people but we know of the auditor's presence and what they say and do only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker.*
- 3. The principle controlling the selection and organisation of what the speaker says is the unintentional revelation of his temperament and character.*

Even Browning, in monologues such as 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister', omits the second attribute, the presence of the silent auditor, but attributes 1 and 3 are essential distinctions between the dramatic monologue and the dramatic lyric. Thus John Donne's 'The Flea', although very close to the dramatic monologue, lacks one essential feature: the focus of interest is on the speaker's elaborately ingenious argument, rather than on the character he inadvertently reveals in the course of arguing.

(adapted from A Glossary of Literary Terms, M.H. Abrams)



Carol Rumens writes on 'Two in the Campagna' in *The Guardian*

Robert Browning's 'Two in the Campagna' is a study in paradox. It's a love poem that deconstructs love, a pastoral that has seen not only death but bio-diversity. Conversational, daringly sexual, it remains a soliloquy. There may be two in this campagna but two are not one, and the poet has no hesitation in admitting it.

By 1854, Browning had been married long enough to admit it, of course. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, according to an early biographer, regarded the poem highly, and a sense of complicity is sustained. The speaker frequently turns to his companion for verification. If he is more interested in thought than sensation, he never gives up on the desire for transcendent union. The burning question with which the poem begins, and which will be re-examined thoroughly in its later stanzas, is about shared experience: '... do you feel today / as I have felt ...?'

The first paradox is that the pair of lovers sits down in order 'to stray / In spirit better through the land'. 'This morn of Rome and May', the spacious, sunlit fields with their 'endless fleece / Of feathery grasses' are to be thought about, rather than luxuriantly enjoyed.

But the train of thought is immediately elusive, 'like turns of thread the spiders throw'. It can only be temporarily pinned down by the poet's mastery of rhyme, not permanently secured. The second stanza evokes the tentative initial process of composition. Rhymes can't always be found, or can't always be trusted with ideas, and the poem seems to fear that the ideas it wants to explore will somehow escape.

The speaker is something of a naturalist, intently observing not only his own thoughts but the wandering gossamer of an actual web. It leads his eye from the fennel to the ruined tomb to the minutiae of the flower whose 'orange cup' contains five small beetles. The beetles provoke a new thought about perception: 'blind and green, they grope' and, by implication, the poet in his world is blind and groping, too.

Although Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was not published until 1859, four years after *Men and Women*, the collection in which 'Two in the Campagna' appears, new biological findings were certainly in the mid-Victorian air. 'Such life here, through such lengths of hours' expresses awe not only of time, but of diversity. The ensuing four lines seem to attempt a Darwinian reconciliation of the universe, apparently free to get on with its own evolutionary processes, and the designer who watches the plans unfold: 'Such miracles perfumed in play, / Such primal naked forms of flowers, / Such letting nature have her way / While heaven looks from its towers!'

At this point, the speaker remembers his companion and again the questions of union and separation begin to tease. The desire for sensuous hedonism is expressed with a touch of defiance, but the poet knows that this is not the whole answer. 'Unashamed of soul' though these unconventional English lovers may manage to be, a perfect union is impossible; they cannot fuse into one self.

The problem of space turns into a problem with time. There is the almost-captured 'good minute' and, then, the question, 'Already, how am I so far / out of that minute' — perfectly timed to occur, if not exactly a minute later, after the single beat of the stanza break. To be in the moment, purely present to experience, is only fleetingly possible. Its achievement would mean an existence outside time, and that, as the poem recognises, is beyond possibility.

'Two in the Campagna' is one of the most sombrely honest of love poems, but its doubts and questions are so scrupulously recorded and so beautifully, coherently woven together that it reassures us. For most of the scientists of Browning's day, the designer of the universe was still 'in his Heaven', and the poet, by analogy, still at the centre of his twisting, turning, but reassuringly symmetrical web of a poem. Random, meaningless and incoherent modernity is still many decades in the future.

Robert Browning

