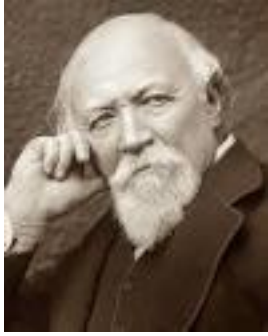


Robert Browning

(7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889)



Browning was an English poet and playwright. He was an exceptionally intelligent child, learning Greek, Latin and French by the age of fourteen and penning a volume of Byronic verse at twelve years old. His first two published

works, *Pauline* in 1833 and *Sordello* in 1840 were not well received and his plays were largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, his uses of diction, rhyme and symbols are widely considered to be significant and influential contributions to poetry. His claim to attention as a children's writer is more modest, resting as it does almost entirely on one poem, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," evidently never highly regarded by its creator. Nevertheless, "The Pied Piper" moved quickly into the canon of children's literature, where it has remained ever since, receiving the dubious honor (shared by the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan) of appearing almost as frequently in "adapted" versions as in the author's original. After reading her works and corresponding with her for a while, Browning married Elizabeth Barrett and the couple moved to Italy where they wrote and had their first and only child. Browning only received renown and critical acclaim after the death of his wife towards the end of his life and was rewarded honorary degrees from the Universities of Edinburgh and Oxford. (taken from poetryfoundation.org and poemanalysis.com)

A Face

BY ROBERT BROWNING

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's

Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might
surround,
How it should waver on the pale gold ground,
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
But these are only massed there, I should
think,
Waiting to see some wonder momentarily
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
(That's the pale ground you'd see this sweet
face by),
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one
eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

Among the Rocks

BY ROBERT BROWNING

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and
feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of
stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and
knows.

If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

Confessions

BY ROBERT BROWNING

What is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,

From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall; is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way... you crept
Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

What right had a lounge up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might
strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"
And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir—used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was—
But then, how it was sweet!

Now

BY ROBERT BROWNING

Out of your whole life give but one moment!
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it, — so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present, — condense,
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's
endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense —
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me,
above me —
Me — sure that despite of time future, time past,
—
This tick of our life-time's one moment you love
me!

How long such suspension may linger? Ah,
Sweet —
The moment eternal — just that and no more —
When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core
While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and
lips meet!

Epilogue

BY ROBERT BROWNING (1889)

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think,
imprisoned—
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you
loved so,
—Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the
unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I
drive!
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched
breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted,
wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-
time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either
should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare
ever
There as here!"

Home-Thoughts, from Abroad

BY ROBERT BROWNING (1845—written while he was in Italy)

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood
sheaf

Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the
swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the
hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's
edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song
twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary
dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

Porphyria's Lover

BY ROBERT BROWNING (1836)

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder
bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain

A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!