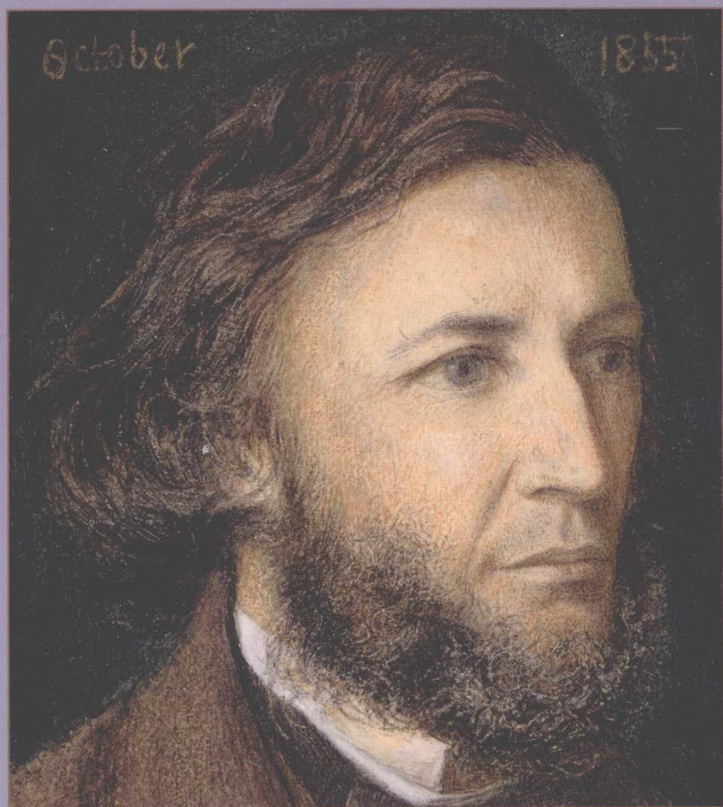


ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY



EDITED BY JAMES F. LOUCKS AND
ANDREW M. STAUFFER

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION
SECOND EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

ROBERT BROWNING'S
POETRY



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
CRITICISM

SECOND EDITION

Selected and Edited by

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Preface

In preparing this second edition of *Robert Browning's Poetry*, we have been mindful that a quarter of a century has elapsed since the first edition was issued, during which period both readers' tastes and scholars' critical approaches have evolved. We have tried to improve the appeal and relevance of this Norton Critical Edition while preserving many of the strengths of the first edition. Accordingly, we have made a handful of significant changes in the selection of poems, while radically altering the selection of modern criticism. Notably, we have printed the early poem *Pauline* in its entirety; dropped Book VI ("Caponsacchi") in favor of Book VII ("Pompilia") in *The Ring and the Book*; and removed "Saul" and "James Lee's Wife" to make room for several other poems we wished to include. Our hope is that this volume will serve as a wide-ranging and usable testament to Browning's poetic achievement.

The texts have been completely reset and re-proofed since the first edition. We have thoroughly amended the annotations, continuing to avoid interpretive notes while providing information intended to clarify Browning's references and vocabulary. Our sense is that readers new to Browning are too often daunted by a mass of footnotes that seem to confirm rumors of the poet's obscurity and difficulty. Therefore, as a general rule, and in the interest of readability, we have chosen to err on the side of annotating too lightly. With few exceptions, we have not, in the notes themselves, cited our many predecessors in Browning scholarship upon whose work these notes frequently depend. The date of each work's composition, whether known or conjectured, is printed after the text on the left-hand side. If a version appeared in print prior to book publication, that date appears on the right. In excerpted passages, the lines are numbered in accordance with the full text, for ease of reference.

We have left unchanged the selection of Victorian opinions on Browning's work, deeming that these remain among the most valuable and telling reactions of the period. However, we have overhauled the "Modern Essays in Criticism" completely, in an attempt to bring the edition up to the present moment in Browning's critical heritage. Only classic essays by Robert Langbaum and Harold Bloom remain from the first edition. The other essays represent a range of some of the best criticism on Browning in recent years, from a number of theoretical perspectives and across a range of Browning's poetry. The work of Isobel Armstrong and Herbert Tucker has been the most influential; and we are pleased to include essays by other scholars who have

changed the ways we think about Browning and his art: Susan Brown, Erik Gray, Stefan Hawlin, Daniel Karlin, Catherine Maxwell, and Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor. Other important work that could not be included can be found listed in the Selected Bibliography, which has been thoroughly revised for this edition.

The list of scholars to whom we owe debts is long: the work of Richard Altick, A. K. Cook, W. C. DeVane, William Irvine, Roma King, and Park Honan was crucial to the preparation of the first edition and remains so here. We have also profited from the first-rate scholarship in the editions of Tim Burnett, Thomas J. Collins, Stefan Hawlin, Ian Jack, Robert Inglesfield, Daniel Karlin, Michael Meredith, and John Woolford. For more direct advice and assistance, we would like to thank David Latané, Jack Kolb and Chip Tucker. Cara Norris was invaluable as a research assistant in our preparations. Brian Baker, of W. W. Norton, has been an encouraging and helpful guide throughout the process, and he has our thanks.

Contents

Preface	ix
 The Texts of the Poems	
A Note on the Texts	3
The Experimental Phase (1833–45)	5
<i>Pauline; A Fragment of a Confession</i> (1833; final version 1888)	5
From <i>Paracelsus</i> (1835)	29
From <i>Sordello</i> (1840)	39
<i>Pippa Passes</i> (1841)	44
From <i>Dramatic Lyrics</i> (1842)	83
My Last Duchess	83
Count Gismond	84
Incident of the French Camp	88
Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister	89
In a Gondola	92
Cristina	98
Johannes Agricola in Meditation	100
Porphyria's Lover	101
The Pied Piper of Hamelin	103
From <i>Dramatic Romances and Lyrics</i> (1845)	110
“How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix”	110
Pictor Ignotus	112
The Italian in England	114
The Englishman in Italy	118
The Lost Leader	124
Home-Thoughts, from Abroad	125
[“Here’s to Nelson’s Memory!”]	125
Home-Thoughts, from the Sea	126
The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church	126
Garden Fancies	130
The Laboratory	134
Meeting at Night; Parting at Morning	136
 The Major Phase (1855–69)	
From <i>Men and Women</i> (1855)	137
Love Among the Ruins	137
A Lovers’ Quarrel	139
Up at a Villa—Down in the City	144

A Woman's Last Word	147
Fra Lippo Lippi	148
A Toccata of Galuppi's	157
By the Fire-Side	160
Mesmerism	169
An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician	174
My Star	181
"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"	181
Respectability	188
A Light Woman	189
The Statue and the Bust	191
How It Strikes a Contemporary	198
The Last Ride Together	201
The Patriot—An Old Story	204
Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha	205
Bishop Blougram's Apology	210
Memorabilia	235
Andrea del Sarto	236
In a Year	242
"De Gustibus—"	244
Women and Roses	246
Holy-Cross Day	247
The Guardian-Angel	252
Cleon	254
Popularity	262
Two in the Campagna	264
A Grammarian's Funeral	266
"Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books"	270
One Word More	271
From <i>Dramatis Personae</i> (1864)	277
Dûs aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de Nos Jours	277
Abt Vogler	283
Rabbi Ben Ezra	286
Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island	292
Confessions	300
Prospice	302
Youth and Art	302
A Likeness	305
Apparent Failure	307
Epilogue	309
From <i>The Ring and the Book</i> (1868–69)	312
Book V. Count Guido Franceschini	315
Book VII. Pompilia	361
Book X. The Pope	401
The Later Achievement (After 1870)	
From <i>Fifine at the Fair</i> (1872)	448
Prologue (Amphibian)	448
Epilogue (The Householder)	451

From <i>Aristophanes' Apology</i> (1875)	452
[Thamuris Marching]	452
From <i>Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper:</i> <i>With Other Poems</i> (1876)	455
House	455
Fears and Scruples	457
Numpholeptos	459
From <i>Jocoseria</i> (1883)	459
Adam, Lilith, and Eve	462
Never the Time and the Place	463
From <i>Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in</i> <i>Their Day</i> (1887)	464
With Christopher Smart	464
From <i>Asolando: Fancies and Facts</i> (1889)	471
Prologue	471
Bad Dreams, I–IV	473
“Imperante Augusto Natus Est—”	478
Development	482
Epilogue	485
Prose	
From “Introductory Essay” to the <i>Letters of</i> <i>Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> (1852)	486

Criticism

VICTORIAN VIEWS

John Forster • Evidences of a New Genius for Dramatic Poetry	495
Thomas Carlyle • [Letter to Browning]	497
George Eliot • [Review of <i>Men and Women</i>]	498
William Morris • [Browning's Alleged Carelessness]	501
John Ruskin • [Browning and the Italian Renaissance]	502
Walter Bagehot • [Browning's Grotesque Art]	504
Robert W. Buchanan • [<i>The Ring and the Book</i>]	508
Alfred Austin • The Poetry of the Period: Mr. Browning	509
Algernon Charles Swinburne • [Browning's Obscurity]	513
Gerard Manley Hopkins • [Strictures on Browning]	516
Oscar Wilde • [Browning as “Writer of Fiction”]	517
Henry James • Browning in Westminster Abbey	519

MODERN ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

Robert Langbaum • The Dramatic Monologue: Sympathy versus Judgment	523
Herbert F. Tucker • Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric	542
Isobel Armstrong • The Politics of Dramatic Form	557
Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor • The Pragmatics of Silence, and the Figuration of the Reader in Browning's Dramatic Monologues	576

Catherine Maxwell • Browning's Pygmalion and the Revenge of Galatea	589
Daniel Karlin • Browning's Poetry of Intimacy	610
INTERPRETATIONS OF POEMS	
Stefan Hawlin • Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's': How Venice Once Was Dear	622
Harold Bloom • Browning's "Childe Roland": All Things Deformed and Broken	634
Erik Gray • Andrea del Sarto's Modesty	643
Isobel Armstrong • Browning's "Caliban" and Primitive Language	651
Susan Brown • "Pompilia": The Woman (in) Question	659
Robert Browning: A Chronology	679
Selected Bibliography	681
Index of Titles	687

The Texts of
THE POEMS



A Note on the Texts

The order of the poems is that of their initial publication in book form; the text followed, however, is the "Fourth and complete edition" of 1888–94 in seventeen volumes, all but the last having been supervised by Browning in the final months of his life. Alert and meticulous even in old age, Browning supplied the publisher, Smith, Elder, and Company, with a list of corrections—mostly in punctuation—that he wished to make in the first ten volumes of the 1889 reprint. Since not every correction was made (or made accurately) by the publisher, we have taken the course of emending the 1888–89 text in accordance with Browning's extant corrigenda, rather than relying on the 1889 reprint. Though the corrigenda sent to Smith, Elder have not been recovered, two presumably parallel sets of corrections in Browning's hand remain, differing in only a few particulars; these may be found in a list in the Brown University Library, and in the Dykes Campbell copy of the 1888–89 edition in the British Museum. We are indebted to Philip Kelley and William S. Peterson for their convenient tabulation of Browning's final revisions (*Browning Institute Studies*, 1 [1973], 109–17).

Browning's own corrections have been made silently. Below are listed our own verbal emendations; the edition followed, where relevant, is given in parentheses:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>Cristina</i> , 1. 63: "the next life" for
"next life" (1849). | "other" for "others" (1855). |
| <i>Bishop Blougram's Apology</i> , 1. 608:
"soil" for "soul" (1885). | <i>The Ring and the Book</i> , X.1141:
"law's" for "laws." |
| <i>Bishop Blougram's Apology</i> , 1. 759: | |

The rare misspellings and obvious errors of punctuation in the 1888–89 edition have been silently corrected. Two peculiarities of Smith, Elder's house styling have been normalized: the inverted commas used to begin every line of continuous quoted material are suppressed; and the irregular practice of numbering half-lines of *The Ring and the Book* is not followed. The line numbering in that poem follows that of the "Florentine Edition."



The Experimental Phase (1833–45)

PAULINE; A FRAGMENT OF A CONFESSION

(1833; final version 1888)

Published anonymously when Browning was twenty-one years old, *Pauline* records various early crises of the poet's intellectual and creative development, with particular reference to his reading of the "Sun-treader," Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), an early hero of Browning's. Although ostensibly dramatic in form, the poem cleaves fairly closely to autobiography, and the personally reticent Browning later came to regard it with "extreme repugnance." *Pauline* was positively but slightly noticed by reviewers in 1833, and did not sell well at all. However, John Stuart Mill read it with great interest and annotated it closely, and sent his copy back to Browning. Mill wrote at the end of the volume, "With considerable poetic powers, this writer seems to me possessed with a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than I ever knew in a sane human being." Browning suppressed *Pauline* until 1868, when he reluctantly included a revised version of this "crude preliminary sketch" in an edition of his collected works. Our text is from the 1888 collected *Poetical Works*, for which Browning again revised the poem, "experience helping, in some degree, the helplessness of juvenile haste and heat in their untried adventure long ago."

Plus ne suis ce que j'ai été
Et ne le sçaurois jamais être.—MAROT¹

NON dubito, quin titulus libri nostri raritate sua quamplurimos alliciat ad legendum: inter quos nonnulli obliquæ opinionis, mente languidi, multi etiam maligni, et in ingenium nostrum ingrati accedent, qui temeraria sua ignorantia, vix conspecto titulo clamabunt Nos vetita docere, hæresium semina jacere: piis auribus offencilo, præclaris ingeniis scandalo esse: . . . adeo conscientiæ suæ consulentes, ut nec Apollo, nec Musæ omnes, neque Angelus de cælo me ab illorum execratione vindicare queant: quibus et ego nunc consulo, ne scripta nostra legant, nec intelligant, nec meminerint: nam noxia sunt, venenosa sunt: Acherontis ostium est in hoc libro, lapides loquitur, caveant, ne cerebrum illis excutiat. Vos autem, qui æqua mente ad legendum venitis, si tantam prudentiæ discretionem adhibueritis, quantam in melle legendo apes, jam securi legite. Puto namque vos et utilitatis haud parum et voluptatis plurimum accep-

1. Epigraph by Clément Marot (1496–1544), "I am no longer what I have been, and would never know how to be again."

turos. Quod si qua repereritis, quæ vobis non placeant, mittite illa, nec utimini. NAM ET EGO VOBIS ILLA NON PROBO, SED NARRO. Cætera tamen propterea non respuite Ideo, si quid liberius dictum sit, ignoscite adolescentiæ nostræ, qui minor quam adolescens hoc opus composui.—*Hen. Corn. Agrippa, De Occult. Philosoph. in Præfat.*²

LONDON: January 1833.

V. A. XX.

[This introduction would appear less absurdly pretentious did it apply, as was intended, to a completed structure of which the poem was meant for only a beginning and remains a fragment.]

Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me—thy soft breast
 Shall pant to mine—bend o'er me—thy sweet eyes,
 And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms
 Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen
 To shut me in with thee, and from all fear; 5
 So that I might unlock the sleepless brood
 Of fancies from my soul, their lurking-place,
 Nor doubt that each would pass, ne'er to return
 To one so watched, so loved and so secured.
 But what can guard thee but thy naked love? 10
 Ah dearest, whoso sucks a poisoned wound
 Envenoms his own veins! Thou art so good,
 So calm—if thou shouldst wear a brow less light
 For some wild thought which, but for me, were kept
 From out thy soul as from a sacred star! 15
 Yet till I have unlocked them it were vain
 To hope to sing; some woe would light on me;
 Nature would point at one whose quivering lip
 Was bathed in her enchantments, whose brow burned
 Beneath the crown to which her secrets knelt, 20
 Who learned the spell which can call up the dead,
 And then departed smiling like a fiend
 Who has deceived God,—if such one should seek
 Again her altars and stand robed and crowned
 Amid the faithful! Sad confession first, 25

2. Latin introduction adapted from the preface to Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531): 'I have no doubt that the title of our book may by its unusual character entice very many to read it, and that among them some of biased opinions, with weak minds—many even hostile and churlish—will attack our genius, who in the rashness of their ignorance will cry out, almost before they have read the title, that we are teaching forbidden things, are scattering the seeds of heresies, that we are an annoyance to righteous ears, to enlightened minds an object of offence; so taking care for their consciences that neither Apollo, nor all the Muses, nor an angel from heaven could save me from their execration. To these I now give counsel not to read our book, neither to understand it nor remember it; for it is harmful, poisonous; the gate of Hell is in this book; it speaks of stones—let them beware lest by them it beat out their brains. But if you who come to its perusal with unprejudiced minds will exercise as much discernment and prudence as bees gathering honey, then read with safety. For I think you will receive not a little of instruction and a great deal of enjoyment. On the other hand, if you find things which do not please you, pass over them and make no use of them. FOR I DO NOT RECOMMEND THESE THINGS TO YOU: I MERELY TELL YOU OF THEM. Yet do not on that account reject the rest. Therefore if anything has been said rather freely, forgive my youth; I wrote this work when I was less than a youth' (F. A. Pottle's translation). The note "V[ixeram] A[nnos] XX." means Browning was 20 when he wrote the poem.

Remorse and pardon and old claims renewed,
Ere I can be—as I shall be no more.

I had been spared this shame if I had sat
By thee for ever from the first, in place
Of my wild dreams of beauty and of good, 30
Or with them, as an earnest of their truth:
No thought nor hope having been shut from thee,
No vague wish unexplained, no wandering aim
Sent back to bind on fancy's wings and seek
Some strange fair world where it might be a law; 35
But, doubting nothing, had been led by thee,
Thro' youth, and saved, as one at length awaked
Who has slept through a peril. Ah vain, vain!

Thou lovest me; the past is in its grave
Tho' its ghost haunts us; still this much is ours, 40
To cast away restraint, lest a worse thing
Wait for us in the dark. Thou lovest me;
And thou art to receive not love but faith,
For which thou wilt be mine, and smile and take
All shapes and shames, and veil without a fear 45
That form which music follows like a slave:
And I look to thee and I trust in thee,
As in a Northern night one looks alway
Unto the East for morn and spring and joy.
Thou seest then my aimless, hopeless state, 50
And, resting on some few old feelings won
Back by thy beauty, wouldst that I essay
The task which was to me what now thou art:
And why should I conceal one weakness more?

Thou wilt remember one warm morn when winter 55
Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath
Blew soft from the moist hills; the black-thorn boughs,
So dark in the bare wood, when glistening
In the sunshine were white with coming buds,
Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks 60
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes.
I walked with thee who knew'st not a deep shame
Lurked beneath smiles and careless words which sought
To hide it till they wandered and were mute,
As we stood listening on a sunny mound 65
To the wind murmuring in the damp copse,
Like heavy breathings of some hidden thing
Betrayed by sleep; until the feeling rushed
That I was low indeed, yet not so low
As to endure the calmness of thine eyes. 70
And so I told thee all, while the cool breast
I leaned on altered not its quiet beating:
And long ere words like a hurt bird's complaint

Bade me look up and be what I had been,
 I felt despair could never live by thee: 75
 Thou wilt remember. Thou art not more dear
 Than song was once to me; and I ne'er sung
 But as one entering bright halls where all
 Will rise and shout for him: sure I must own
 That I am fallen, having chosen gifts 80
 Distinct from theirs—that I am sad and fain
 Would give up all to be but where I was,
 Not high as I had been if faithful found,
 But low and weak yet full of hope, and sure
 Of goodness as of life—that I would lose 85
 All this gay mastery of mind, to sit
 Once more with them, trusting in truth and love
 And with an aim—not being what I am.

Oh Pauline, I am ruined who believed
 That though my soul had floated from its sphere 90
 Of wild dominion into the dim orb
 Of self—that it was strong and free as ever!
 It has conformed itself to that dim orb,
 Reflecting all its shades and shapes, and now
 Must stay where it alone can be adored. 95
 I have felt this in dreams—in dreams in which
 I seemed the fate from which I fled; I felt
 A strange delight in causing my decay.
 I was a fiend in darkness chained for ever
 Within some ocean-cave; and ages rolled, 100
 Till through the cleft rock, like a moonbeam, came
 A white swan to remain with me; and ages
 Rolled, yet I tired not of my first free joy
 In gazing on the peace of its pure wings:
 And then I said "It is most fair to me, 105
 Yet its soft wings must sure have suffered change
 From the thick darkness, sure its eyes are dim,
 Its silver pinions must be cramped and numbed
 With sleeping ages here; it cannot leave me,
 For it would seem, in light beside its kind, 110
 Withered, tho' here to me most beautiful."
 And then I was a young witch whose blue eyes,
 As she stood naked by the river springs,
 Drew down a god: I watched his radiant form
 Growing less radiant, and it gladdened me; 115
 Till one morn, as he sat in the sunshine
 Upon my knees, singing to me of heaven,
 He turned to look at me, ere I could lose
 The grin with which I viewed his perishing:
 And he shrieked and departed and sat long 120
 By his deserted throne, but sunk at last
 Murmuring, as I kissed his lips and curled
 Around him, "I am still a god—to thee."