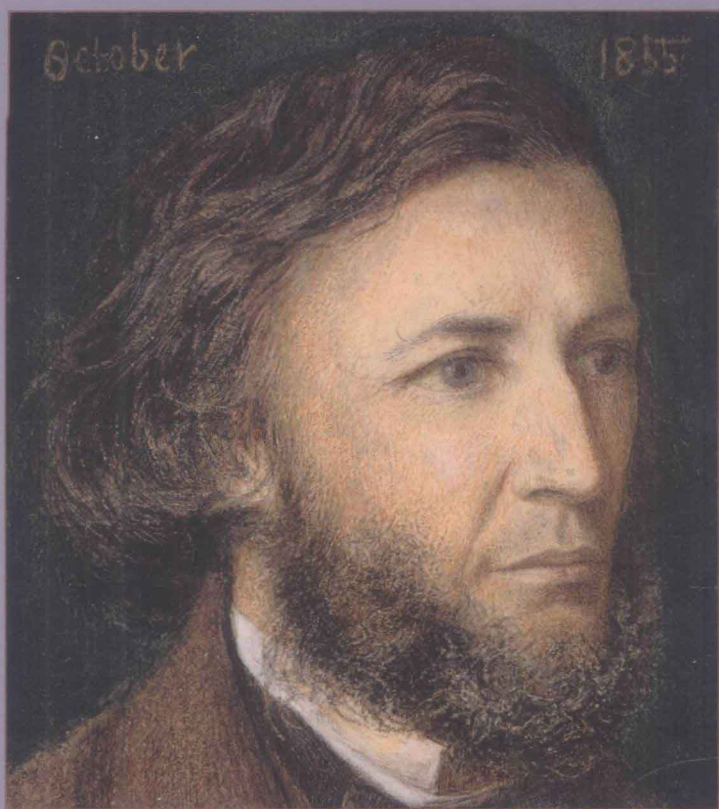


# ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY



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*

JAMES F. HUCKS

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEWARK

*and*

ANDREW M. STAUFFER

BOSTON UNIVERSITY



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# Preface

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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.

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



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# The Experimental Phase (1833–45)

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## 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 sauraïis jamais être.—MAROT<sup>1</sup>

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 offendiculo, 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 repperitis, 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.*<sup>2</sup>

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.