



# SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

Her poetic inspiration is the highest—we can conceive of nothing more august. Her sense of Art is pure in itself.

—Edgar Allan Poe

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

SONNETS FROM THE  
PORTUGUESE

Elizabeth Barrett Browning



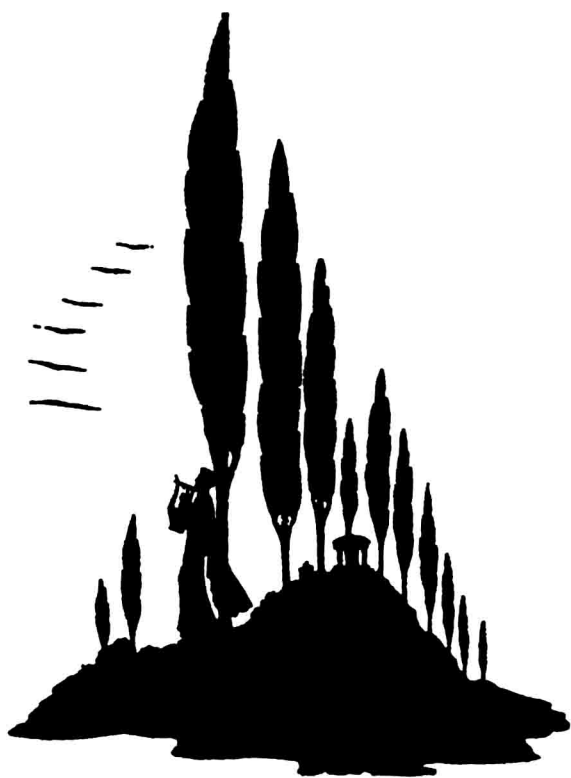
# I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung  
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,  
Who each one in a gracious hand appears  
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:  
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,  
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,  
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;  
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—  
“Guess now who holds thee!”—“Death,” I said, But, there,  
The silver answer rang, “Not Death, but Love.”



## II

But only three in all God's universe  
Have heard this word thou hast said,—Himself, beside  
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied  
One of us ... that was God, ... and laid the curse  
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce  
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had died,  
The death-weights, placed there, would have signified  
Less absolute exclusion. “Nay” is worse  
From God than from all others, O my friend!  
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,  
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;  
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:  
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,  
We should but vow the faster for the stars.



### III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!  
Unlike our uses and our destinies.  
Our ministering two angels look surprise  
On one another, as they strike athwart  
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art  
A guest for queens to social pageantries,  
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes  
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part  
Of chief musician. What hast thou to do  
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,  
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through  
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?  
The chrism is on thine head,—on mine, the dew,—  
And Death must dig the level where these agree.





## IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,  
Most gracious singer of high poems! where  
The dancers will break footing, from the care  
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.  
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor  
For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear  
To let thy music drop here unaware  
In folds of golden fulness at my door?  
Look up and see the casement broken in,  
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!  
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.  
Hush, call no echo up in further proof  
Of desolation! there's a voice within  
That weeps ... as thou must sing ... alone, aloof.



## V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,  
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,  
And, looking in thine eyes, I over-turn  
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see  
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,  
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn  
Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn  
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,  
It might be well perhaps. But if instead  
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow  
The grey dust up, ... those laurels on thine head,  
O my Beloved, will not shield thee so,  
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred  
The hair beneath. Stand further off then! go!



## VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand  
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore  
Alone upon the threshold of my door  
Of individual life, I shall command  
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand  
Serenely in the sunshine as before,  
Without the sense of that which I forbore—  
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land  
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine  
With pulses that beat double. What I do  
And what I dream include thee, as the wine  
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue  
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,  
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.



## VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,  
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole  
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,  
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole  
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole  
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,  
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.  
The names of country, heaven, are changed away  
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;  
And this ... this lute and song ... loved yesterday,  
(The singing angels know) are only dear  
Because thy name moves right in what they say.



