

## 5. A VISION OF POETS

First published as the lead poem in the second volume of *Poems* (1844), this was the second longest and most ambitious work after the lead poem in the first volume, 'A Drama of Exile'; EBB identified the two as the collection's 'principal poems' (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 11). Her 1844 'Preface' explained that in 'A Vision of Poets' she had 'endeavoured to indicate the necessary relations of genius to suffering and self-sacrifice' in 'the mission of the poet' in a period when the poet 'wears better broadcloth, but speaks no more oracles'. She intended to explore 'the self-abnegation' involved in the poet's mission and 'the obvious truth, above all, that if knowledge is power, suffering should be acceptable as a part of knowledge' (Volume 2, p. 569). Jottings of an indeterminate date for a projected work in a bundle of manuscripts labelled 'Scraps' in the poet's own hand (D1421) may form one early strand in the poem's genesis.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the line, 'The Poem opens with a retrospective allusion to my last work,' these notes have some parallels with the work that would become 'A Vision of Poets', although they are also suggestive at points of the earlier work 'The Development of Genius' (*HUP*, vol. 2, pp. 99–133), on which EBB was working in 1826–7 (*BC*, vol. 1, pp. 273, 358–60).<sup>2</sup> The notes in 'Scraps' mention a dreaming poet who 'hears all the noises of nature; & stunned & tortured awakes' (although in these notes the dreaming poet is female, not male); they also comment on the divine mission of poetry, the lives, loves and readerships of various poets and their immortality.

The draft manuscript of 'A Vision of Poets', in three sections in three different notebooks (see D1090, D1091, D1092) now in the Berg Collection, bears out EBB's statement to RB in January 1846 that work on the poem commenced at 'the beginning' of her illness (in 1838–9), and that after a long interruption she took it up again.<sup>3</sup> She was misremembering, however, when she recalled that she did so 'in the spring of 1844' (*BC*, vol. 11, p. 295). In fact, she returned to the poem in 1843. On 13 July 1843 she announced, 'I have been writing, writing, writing ... & have almost finished a long poem, "A vision of poets", in some six hundred lines' (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 265). On 3 August she described to her friend and correspondent Mary Russell Mitford her 'new just finished poem of some six or seven hundred lines' as 'allegorical & mystical & nearly everything it ought not

to be to please you' – alluding to her fellow writer's objections to the abstract tendency of some of her works (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 270).<sup>4</sup> By 18 September, when the poem had expanded to 'some eight hundred lines', she similarly described it as 'philosophical, allegorical, – anything but popular', as well as written in 'stanzas, every one an octosyllabic triplet' (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 332).<sup>5</sup> After this point, she still continued to add to the poem, commenting to Mitford on 2 October 1843 that it had 'developped [*sic*] into something beyond eight hundred lines – & now I am finishing' (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 347). Her remarks suggest that she felt compelled to add the framing narrative of the 'Conclusion' (ll. 820–1005) after initially considering the poem complete. Portion two of the draft manuscript (ll. 259–684; D1091) includes a marginal sketch of faces in profile.<sup>6</sup> After 1844, among the numerous revisions in the text, the most notable was the deletion of two stanzas following l. 426.

In her remarks to RB on 'A Vision of Poets', EBB compared the rhyming triplets used in the poem to the form of Tennyson's 'The Two Voices' (1842), but insisted that she did not yet know his 'best *early* productions' when she began the poem and that the 'rhythmical form' was not 'indebted' to him (*BC*, vol. 11, p. 295). The most direct influence on the poem's form is the *Commedia (Divine Comedy)* of Dante Alighieri, which EBB had read by 1826,<sup>7</sup> although she did not attempt the interlocking rhymes of his *terza rima*, an intricacy more easily achieved in rhyme-rich Italian than in English. 'A Vision of Poets' also employs the dream vision and the allegorical quest integral both to Dante's work and to much medieval and Romantic English poetry. The poem teems with allusions not only to Dante (see n. 63 below), but also to classical poets such as Homer and Sappho (see ll. 295, 318), as well as later European and English poets. The *Trionfi (Triumphs)* by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca or Petrarch (see n. 41 below) is an important antecedent for the poem's motif of the symbolic processional of figures from the past.<sup>8</sup> English poets whose works resonate in the text range from Geoffrey Chaucer (see ll. 388–90), in particular *The House of Fame* (see n. 71 below), to Edmund Spenser, echoed in the poem's opening scene (see n. 2 below), to John Keats, a recurrent presence throughout the poem (ll. 84, 289–91, 407–11) – although the work by Keats it most resembles, *The Fall of Hyperion* (1857), had not yet been published.<sup>9</sup> There are also numerous parallels with RB's *Paracelsus* (1835), especially the theme of aspiration, the vision of immortal poets and the representation of God as the greatest poet.<sup>10</sup> EBB's command of the English and Western European poetic traditions is especially evident in a bravura passage (ll. 289–432) invoking the immortal 'king-poets' (l. 728) of the past, including French, Spanish and Portuguese poets and dramatists, as well as classical Italian and English writers. This series of pithy portraits of poets '[w]ho died for Beauty, as martyrs do / For Truth' (ll. 290–1) opens with the poem's most direct echo of Keats.<sup>11</sup> More extended views on many of

the English poets alluded to here can be found in EBB's 1842 essay, 'The Book of the Poets' (Volume 4, pp. 443–505) – a wide-ranging 'Survey of the English poets, under the pretence of a review' (*BC*, vol. 5, p. 349). Her critique of the 'idol-worship of RHYME' in the age 'pet-named the Augustan' (the Restoration and eighteenth century) and the period's movement away from Nature (Volume 4, pp. 466, 474) helps to explain her exclusion of poets such as John Dryden and even Alexander Pope, her childhood idol, from the immortal authors memorialized in 'A Vision of Poets'. The work's symphonic musical metaphors may reflect the influence of 'that Goëthe of music', Beethoven, whose memoirs EBB read in January 1843 and whom she considered 'a poet if ever there was one' (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 292; vol. 8, p. 89). Although in 'A Vision of Poets' EBB engages in the male impersonation characteristic of some of her earlier works by portraying a male poet as her protagonist, the work reflects a striking energy of aspiration for fame, contrasting with the ambivalence about the pursuit of poetic immortality in 'The Vision of Fame' and 'The Student' (Volume 4, pp. 161–3, 298–300). Her own identification with the poem's protagonist is implied by her May 1843 description of 'the great dead poets' as 'friend[s] of my soul' (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 112), and by a signed citation of ll. 904–6 that she inserted in 1857 in an 1853 American edition of her *Poems* (D1093).

Despite its 'allegorical' and 'mystical' nature, 'A Vision of Poets' was a work important to many nineteenth-century writers, among them John Ruskin (see n. 9 below) and Emily Dickinson (see n. 14 below). It was among the 1844 poems that held Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother William Michael Rossetti 'spell-bound'.<sup>12</sup> RB's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855) is reminiscent at points of the grotesque symbolic landscape the pilgrim-poet encounters (ll. 124–92), while his 'Abt Vogler' (1864) recalls EBB's musical metaphors for poetic vision. RB was especially struck, as many critics were, by EBB's catalogue of 'king-poets':

how perfect, absolutely perfect, are those three or four pages ... which present the Poets – a line, a few words, and the man there, – one twang of the bow – and the arrowhead in the white – Shelley's 'white ideal all statute-blind' is – perfect. (*BC*, vol. 11, p. 15)

Not all reviewers agreed, although many were similarly impressed. While John Forster in the *Examiner* (5 October 1844) and J. Ferrier in *Blackwood's* (November 1844) objected to EBB's characterization of some of the poets (*BC*, vol. 9, pp. 346, 359), Edgar Allan Poe described the composition as 'thoughtful, vivid, epigrammatic, and abundant in just observation' (*Broadway Journal*, 11 January 1845; *BC*, vol. 10, p. 351). The American author and editor Cornelius Mathews termed the catalogue of king-poets 'one of the finest pieces of criticism in the language; or rather of delicate critical and poetical sympathy' (*United States*

*Magazine*, and *Democratic Review*, October 1844; *BC*, vol. 9, p. 343). G. Gilfilian similarly observed of these ‘thumb-nail’ portraits that ‘often her one glance sees, and her one word shows, the very heart of an author’s genius and character’ (*Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1847; *BC*, vol. 14, p. 383). H. F. Chorley criticized the poem’s ‘cumbrous machinery and its involved phraseology’ in the *New Quarterly Review* (January 1845; *BC*, vol. 10, p. 348), whereas the *Atlas* reviewer (August 1844) described it as ‘the most remarkable poem’ in the 1844 volumes (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 329), and S. Ferguson observed in the *Dublin University Magazine* (February 1845), ‘you feel, as you proceed, that you are in the company of one to whom all the masters of the Greek, Latin, and Italian schools are familiar in the originals’ (*BC*, vol. 10, p. 370). Mid-century Victorian reviewers remarked the parallels with Dante and Keats in particular (see *BC*, vol. 10, p. 340; vol. 11, p. 342). ‘A Vision of Poets’ continued to be cited in the obituary essays and by critics up to the end of the century.<sup>13</sup> The quest for poetic power in the poem was not lost on some conservative reviewers, who found it inappropriate in a woman. In *Blackwood’s* Ferrier urged ‘Miss Barrett’ to ‘wash her hands completely’ of the ‘poets, either great, or whom she takes for such’, and to ‘come before the public in the graces of her own feminine sensibilities’ (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 363).

*Criticism*: among modern critics, while A. Hayter describes ‘A Vision of Poets’ as the ‘fullest expression of Mrs. Browning’s idea of the poetical character’ next to *Aurora Leigh* in *Mrs. Browning: A Poet’s Work and its Setting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 74, she mentions it only in passing. D. Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), considers the poem’s treatment of nature and religion. M. Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), explores its combination of anxiety and audacity of authorship, its narrative framework and its echoes of Dante, Keats, Chaucer and RB’s *Paracelsus*. L. Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), addresses its representation of suffering and a female Wisdom figure. C. Scheinberg, *Women’s Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), treats it in relation to Hebrew metaphors and traditions. S. Johnson, ‘Aurora Leigh’s Radical Youth: Derridean *Parergon* and the Narrative Frame in “A Vision of Poets”’, *Victorian Poetry*, 44 (2006), pp. 425–44, argues that it is a more subversive work than *Aurora Leigh* in its representation of a woman poet’s engagement with a masculine literary tradition.

*Text*: *Poems*, 4th edn (1856), vol. 1, pp. 199–249.

*Editions*: *Poems (1844–56)*, *A Drama of Exile: and Other Poems (1845)*.

*Manuscripts*: Berg (D1090, D1091, D1092), Yale (D1093), ABL (D1094), NYPL-RB (D1095).

*Emendations*: l. 931: closed sentence; ll. 451–9, 895–930, 962–3: adjusted use of quotation marks for a quote (double) within a quote (single). EBB used single marks for both the interior quote and the exterior, creating some confusion where two singles appeared to be a double.

## Notes:

1. Now in the Berg Collection, catalogue entry 65B2482. The folder also contains possibly related notes on various poets (D1330). The items are of varying dates.
2. The fragmentary notes may also relate to another early work on ‘the sorrows of poets’, referred to as ‘The poet’s record’ (D0733–5; see *BC*, vol. 5, p. 102, and Volume 5, pp. 505–9); on 18 August 1831, after finishing ‘Keats’s Lamia, Isabella, Eve of St. Agnes & Hyperion’, she wrote, ‘Poor, poor Keats. His name shall be in my “<Poets> Record[?]”’ (*Diary*, p. 93).
3. A draft of ll. 1–261 (D1090), appears in Berg Notebook III (D1399). With the exception of ‘A Vision of Poets’, this notebook contains drafts of poems principally published in *The Seraphim, and Other Poems* (1838), along with a draft of ‘The Romaunt of the Page’ (1838), not ‘drafts for *Poems* (1844)’, as the *Reconstruction* entry states.
4. Mitford preferred the shorter 1844 works to both ‘A Vision of Poets’ and ‘A Drama of Exile’, which she found ‘obscure’ (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 317; SD1220); she entreated EBB to turn to ‘poems of human feelings and human actions’ like ‘The Romaunt of the Page’ (*BC*, vol. 5, p. 135). EBB frequently defended her works against Mitford’s charge of obscurity and mysticism, along with those of other poets such as RB, the ‘king of the mystics’ (*BC*, vol. 10, p. 20), and Tennyson (see *BC*, vol. 4, p. 181; vol. 6, pp. 148, 219). On allegory, see EBB’s view in ‘The Book of the Poets’ that at its best, as in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, it is ‘the abnegation of itself’, because ‘it enchants us away from its own purposes’ (Volume 4, p. 456).
5. See EBB’s comment that octosyllabic verse can include lines of nine and ten syllables, depending upon the placement of ‘the final accent & rhyme’ (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 122).
6. M. Stone has argued that these are profiles of living authors including Wordsworth, influenced by EBB’s correspondence with the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (conference paper, ‘The Creative Process and Collaboration among the Arts’, Victorians Institute Conference, Greensboro, North Carolina, 2005).
7. In the Preface to *An Essay on Mind* EBB alludes to the ‘sublime Dante’, while in October 1826, in an exchange on metre with the classical scholar Uvedale Price, she regrets his having omitted Dante when he declared that ‘Shakespeare Milton Ariosto and Tasso have done all that was possible in less perfect languages & metres’, expressing her ‘strong feeling of preference for Dante in his rugged grandeur, to Tasso’ (*BC*, vol. 1, p. 260). In ‘An Island’, l. 20 (below, p. 492), she invokes the vision of ‘Dante’s paradise’, while her 1840s notebooks include draft translations of the opening lines of *The Inferno* (D1210–13). On her view of the importance of Dante in the history of poetry, see also the headnote to *Casa Guidi Windows* (Volume 2, p. 485), and her exchange with RB in 1845, when she objects to his claim that Italian poetry at best only furnishes material for ‘northern rhymers’; in response, she points to Dante in particular, observing that ‘Dante’s poetry seems to come down in hail, rather than in rain – but count me the drops congealed in one hail stone!’ (*BC*, vol. 10, pp. 184, 189).
8. Petrarch’s sequence of *Triumphs*, also written in *terza rima*, presents dream visions in which the narrator witnesses processions of illustrious figures from the past. (Its title

refers the ancient Roman 'triumphs', in which victorious generals paraded their prisoners before the populace as symbols of their successes.) The poem memorializes the successive conquests of man by Love, Love by Chastity, Chastity by Death, Death by Fame, Fame by Time, and finally Time by Eternity or God. Section IV, the *Triumph of Love*, includes a vision of famous love poets.

9. The striking parallels may spring in part from the common influence of Dante on both poems; like Keats, EBB was familiar with the translation of Dante by Henry Frances Cary, who was a friend of Mary Russell Mitford (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 3). She had, however, read many of Keats's other poems by 1831–2, including *Hyperion* (1820), which she called 'poetry of wonderful grandeur' (*Diary*, pp. 93–4). In December 1842 she also received two pages of Keats's poetry in manuscript from Haydon. For her high praise of Keats's 'fine genius' and her correspondence concerning him, see *BC*, vol. 6, pp. 113, 126, 243, 246, 251, 254; vol. 8, p. 92; vol. 9, p. 81; vol. 11, pp. 67–8.
10. On EBB's admiration for *Paracelsus* despite reservations on certain points, see *BC*, vol. 3, p. 186.
11. Cf. the conclusion to Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820): 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'. See EBB's comment on criticism that seems 'to uphold the beauty of truth but to deny the *truth of beauty*' (*BC*, vol. 3, p. 185).
12. *Some Reminiscences of William Michael Rossetti*, 2 vols (London: Brown, Langham & Co., 1906), vol. 1, p. 232.
13. See S. B. Holcombe, 'Death of Mrs. Browning', *Southern Literary Messenger*, 33 (1861), p. 40, who commends the poem's 'remarkable gallery of critical portraits of the immortal poets'; [G. Massey], 'Last Poems and Other Works of Mrs. Browning', *North British Review*, 36 (May 1862), p. 528, who also praises the 'descriptive power' of the catalogue of king-poets, in which EBB 'crowd[s] so much meaning into so few words'; [K. Field], 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Atlantic Monthly*, 8 (1861), who identifies EBB as one of her own 'poet[s] true / Who died for Beauty, as martyrs do for Truth' (p. 368) and cites the poem again in closing (p. 376); W. T. Herridge, 'E. B. Browning', *Andover Review*, 7 (1887), pp. 610, 621–2; and A. C. Benson, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', in *Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1896), p. 222, whose views on the poem's catalogue of king-poets are mixed.

O Sacred Essence, lighting me this hour,  
How may I lightly stile thy great power?  
*Echo.* Power.  
Power! but of whence? under the greenwood spraye?  
Or liv'st in Heaven? saye.  
*Echo.* In Heavens aye.  
In Heavens aye! tell, may I it obtayne  
By alms, by fasting, prayer, – by paine?  
*Echo.* By paine.  
Show me the paine, it shall be undergone:  
I to mine end will still go on.  
*Echo.* Go on.

BRITANNIA'S PASTORALS<sup>1</sup>

A POET could not sleep aright,  
For his soul kept up too much light  
Under his eyelids for the night.

And thus he rose disquieted  
With sweet rhymes ringing through his head,  
And in the forest wandered,  
Where, sloping up the darkest glades,  
The moon had drawn long colonnades,  
Upon whose floor the verdure fades

To a faint silver, – pavement fair 10  
The antique wood-nymphs scarce would dare  
To foot-print o'er, had such been there,

And rather sit by breathlessly,  
With fear in their large eyes, to see  
The consecrated sight. But HE 15

The poet, who with spirit-kiss  
Familiar, had long claimed for his  
Whatever earthly beauty is, –

Who also in his spirit bore  
A Beauty passing the earth's store, 20  
Walked calmly onward evermore.

1. 11 wood-nymphs] Dryads 1844  
1. 12 had such been] if such were 1844–50  
1. 13 And] But 1844–50  
1. 14 fear] tears 1844–50

His aimless thoughts in metre went,  
Like a babe's hand without intent  
Drawn down a seven-stringed instrument.

Nor jarred it with his humour as, 25  
With a faint stirring of the grass,  
An apparition fair did pass.

He might have feared another time,  
But all things fair and strange did chime  
With his thoughts then, as rhyme to rhyme. 30

An angel had not startled him,  
Alighted from Heaven's burning rim  
To breathe from glory in the Dim;

Much less a lady<sup>2</sup> riding slow  
Upon a palfrey white as snow, 35  
And smooth as a snow-cloud could go.

Full upon his she turned her face, –  
'What, ho, sir poet! dost thou pace  
Our woods at night, in ghostly chace  
'Of some fair Dryad of old tales, 40  
Who chaunts between the nightingales,  
And over sleep by song prevails?'

She smiled; but he could see arise  
Her soul from far adown her eyes,  
Prepared as if for sacrifice. 45

She looked a queen who seemeth gay  
From royal grace alone. 'Now, nay',  
He answered, – 'slumber passed away

'Compelled by instincts in my head  
That I should see to-night, instead 50  
Of a fair nymph, some fairer Dread.'

She looked up quickly to the sky  
And spake: – 'The moon's regality  
Will hear no praise! she is as I.

l. 25 humour] mood when 1844; mood whenas 1845

l. 26 of] down 1844–50

l. 32 Alighted] Dropping 1844–50

l. 32 burning] encyclic 1844–50

l. 41 chaunts] chants 1845

'She is in heaven, and I on earth;  
This is my kingdom – I come forth  
To crown all poets to their worth.' 55

He brake in with a voice that mourned;  
'To their worth, lady? They are scorned  
By men they sing for, till inurned. 60

'To their worth? Beauty in the mind  
Leaves the hearth cold, – and love-refined  
Ambitions make the world unkind.

'The boor who ploughs the daisy down,  
The chief whose mortgage of renown  
Fixed upon graves, has bought a crown – 65

'Both these are happier, more approved  
Than poets! – why should I be moved  
In saying . . . both are more beloved?'

'The south can judge not of the north', 70  
She resumed calmly; 'I come forth  
To crown all poets to their worth.

'Yea, verily, to anoint them all  
With blessed oils which surely shall  
Smell sweeter as the ages fall.' 75

'As sweet', the poet said, and rung  
A low sad laugh, 'as flowers are, sprung  
Out of their graves when they die young.

'As sweet as window eglantine,  
Some bough of which, as they decline, 80  
The hired nurse gathers at their sign.

'As sweet, in short, as perfumed shroud  
Which the gay Roman maidens sewed  
For English Keats,<sup>3</sup> singing aloud.'

The lady answered, 'Yea, as sweet! 85  
The things thou namest, being complete  
In fragrance as I measure it.

1. 59 lady?] lady! 1844–50

1. 61 worth?] worth! 1844–50

1. 73 verily,] sooth! and 1844–50

1. 77 are,] do, 1844–53

1. 81 gathers] plucketh 1844–50

1. 83 gay] fair 1844–50

'Since sweet the death-clothes and the knell  
Of him who having lived, dies well, –  
And holy sweet the asphodel

90

'Stirred softly by that foot of his,  
When he treads brave on all that is,  
Into the world of souls, from this.

'Since sweet the tears, dropped at the door  
Of tearless Death, – and even before.  
Sweet, consecrated evermore.

95

'What, dost thou judge it a strange thing,  
That poets, crowned for vanquishing,  
Should bear some dust from out the ring?

'Come on with me, come on with me,  
And learn in coming! let me free  
Thy spirit into verity.'

100

She ceased: her palfrey's paces sent  
No separate noises as she went;  
'Twas a bee's hum, a little spent.

105

And while the poet seemed to tread  
Along the drowsy noise so made,  
The forest heaved up overhead

Its billowy foliage through the air,  
And the calm stars did far and spare  
O'erswim the masses everywhere;

110

Save when the overtopping pines  
Did bar their tremulous light with lines  
All fixed and black. Now the moon shines

A broader glory. You may see  
The trees grow rarer presently.  
The air blows up more fresh and free.

115

Until they come from dark to light,  
And from the forest to the sight  
Of the large Heaven-heart, bare with night, –

120

l. 98 vanquishing,] conquering, 1844

l. 110 spare] fair 1844–50

l. 112 when] where 1844–50

A fiery throb in every star,  
 Those burning arteries that are  
 The conduits of God's life afar!

A wild brown moorland underneath,  
 And four pools breaking up the heath 125  
 With white low gleamings, blank as death.

Beside the first pool, near the wood,  
 A dead tree in set horror stood,  
 Peeled and disjointed, stark as rood.

Since thunder-stricken, years ago, 130  
 Fixed in the spectral strain and throe  
 Wherewith it struggled from the blow.

A monumental tree, alone,  
 That will not bend in storms, nor groan,  
 But break off sudden like a stone.<sup>4</sup> 135

Its lifeless shadow lies oblique  
 Upon the pool, – where, javelin-like,  
 The star-rays quiver while they strike.

'Drink', said the lady, very still –  
 'Be holy and cold'. He did her will, 140  
 And drank the starry water chill.

The next pool they came near unto,  
 Was bare of trees: there, only grew  
 Straight flags and lilies, just a few,

Which sullen on the water sate 145  
 And leant their faces on the flat,  
 As weary of the starlight-state.

'Drink', said the lady, grave and slow  
 'World's use' behoveth thee to know'.  
 He drank the bitter wave below. 150

The third pool, girt with thorny bushes,  
 And flaunting weeds, and reeds and rushes  
 That winds sang through in mournful gushes,

l. 122 Those] With 1844–50

l. 125 And four ... the heath] Low glimmering here and thither, with 1844–50

l. 126 With low white gleamings,] White pools in breaks, 1844–50

l. 134 in storms, nor groan,] if tempest-blown, 1844–50

l. 144 just a few,] fair to view, 1844–50

l. 149 World's use] World's use 1844

l. 149 behoveth] behooveth 1845



He bowed his forehead till his mouth  
Curved in the wave, and drank unloth,                   185  
As if from rivers of the south.

His lips sobbed through the water rank,<sup>6</sup>  
His heart paused in him while he drank,  
His brain beat heart-like, rose and sank,

And he swooned backward to a dream,                   190  
Wherein he lay 'twixt gloom and gleam,  
With Death and Life at each extreme.

And spiritual thunders, born of soul  
Not cloud, did leap from mystic pole  
And o'er him roll and counter-roll,                   195

Crushing their echoes reboant<sup>7</sup>  
With their own wheels. Did Heaven so grant  
His spirit a sign of covenant?

At last came silence. A slow kiss  
Did crown his forehead after this.                   200  
His eyelids flew back for the bliss.

The lady stood beside his head,  
Smiling a thought, with hair dispread.  
The moonshine seemed dishevelled

In her sleek tresses manifold,                   205  
Like Danae's<sup>8</sup> in the rain of old,  
That dripped with melancholy gold.

But SHE was holy, pale, and high,  
As one who saw an ecstasy  
Beyond a foretold agony.                   210

'Rise up!' said she, with voice where song  
Eddied through speech – 'rise up! be strong!  
And learn how right avenges wrong.'

The poet rose up on his feet.  
He stood before an altar set                   215  
For sacrament, with vessels meet;

And mystic altar-lights which shine  
As if their flames were crystalline

1. 187 lips] lip 1844 and 1850

1. 213 avenges] avengeth 1844–50



Before that altar, in the glare.

His eyes were dreadful, for you saw  
That *they* saw God – his lips and jaw,  
Grand-made and strong, as Sinai's Law<sup>11</sup> 255

They could enunciate and refrain  
From vibratory after-pain,  
And his brow's height was sovereign.

On the vast background of his wings  
Rises his image, and he flings, 260  
From each plumed arc, pale glitterings

And fiery flakes (as beateth more  
Or less, the angel-heart) before  
And round him, upon roof and floor,

Edging with fire the shifting fumes; 265  
While at his side, 'twixt lights and glooms,  
The phantasm of an organ booms.

Extending from which instrument  
And angel, right and left-way bent,  
The poet's sight grew sentient 270

Of a strange company around  
And toward the altar, – pale and bound  
With bay above the eyes profound.<sup>12</sup>

Deathful their faces were, and yet  
The power of life was in them set – 275  
Never forgot, nor to forget.

Sublime significance of mouth,  
Dilated nostril full of youth,  
And forehead royal with the truth.

These faces were not multiplied 280  
Beyond your count, but side by side  
Did front the altar, glorified.

Still as a vision, yet exprest  
Full as an action – look and geste<sup>13</sup>  
Of buried saint in risen rest. 285

1. 260 Rises] Arose 1844–50

1. 272 bound] crowned 1844–50

1. 273 With bay ... eyes profound.] With sovran eyes of depth profound. 1844–50

The poet knew them. Faint and dim  
 His spirits seemed to sink in him,  
 Then, like a dolphin, change and swim

The current. These were poets true,  
 Who died for Beauty, as martyrs do 290  
 For Truth – the ends being scarcely two.<sup>14</sup>

God's prophets of the Beautiful  
 These poets were; of iron rule,  
 The rugged cilix, serge of wool.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Homer,<sup>16</sup> with the broad suspense 295  
 Of thunderous brows, and lips intense  
 Of garrulous god-innocence.

There, Shakespeare, on whose forehead climb  
 The crowns o' the world. O, eyes sublime,  
 With tears and laughters for all time!<sup>17</sup> 300

Here, Æschylus,<sup>18</sup> the women swooned  
 To see so awful, when he frowned  
 As the gods did!<sup>19</sup> – he standeth crowned.

Euripides,<sup>20</sup> with close and mild  
 Scholastic lips, – that could be wild, 305  
 And laugh or sob out like a child

Even in the classes. Sophocles,  
 With that king's look which, down the trees,  
 Followed the dark effigies

Of the lost Theban.<sup>21</sup> Hesiod old, 310  
 Who, somewhat blind and deaf and cold,  
 Cared most for gods and bulls.<sup>22</sup> And bold

Electric Pindar,<sup>23</sup> quick as fear,  
 With race-dust on his cheeks, and clear  
 Slant startled eyes that seem to hear 315

The chariot rounding the last goal,  
 To hurtle past it in his soul.  
 And Sappho, with that gloriole<sup>24</sup>

l. 287 spirits] spirit 1844

l. 298 Shakespeare,] Shakspeare, 1844

l. 307 Even] Right 1844–50

Of ebon hair on calméd brows.  
 O poet-woman! none forgoes 320  
 The leap, attaining the repose!<sup>25</sup>

Theocritus, with glittering locks  
 Dropt sideway, as betwixt the rocks  
 He watched the visionary flocks.<sup>26</sup>

And Aristophanes, who took 325  
 The world with mirth, and laughter-struck  
 The hollow caves of Thought and woke

The infinite echoes hid in each.<sup>27</sup>  
 And Virgil: shade of Mantuan beech<sup>28</sup>  
 Did help the shade of bay to reach 330

And knit around his forehead high.  
 For his gods wore less majesty  
 Than his brown bees hummed deathlessly.<sup>29</sup>

Lucretius – nobler than his mood;  
 Who dropped his plummet down the broad 335  
 Deep universe, and said ‘No God’,

Finding no bottom: he denied  
 Divinely the divine, and died  
 Chief poet on the Tiber-side

By grace of God! his face is stern, 340  
 As one compelled, in spite of scorn,  
 To teach a truth he would not learn.<sup>30</sup>

And Ossian, dimly seen or guessed:  
 Once counted greater than the rest,  
 When mountain-winds blew out his vest.<sup>31</sup> 345

And Spenser drooped his dreaming head  
 (With languid sleep-smile you had said  
 From his own verse engenderèd)<sup>32</sup>

On Ariosto’s, till they ran  
 Their curls in one.<sup>33</sup> – The Italian 350  
 Shot nimbler heat of bolder man

1. 318 with that gloriole] crowned with aureole 1844–50

1. 319 hair] curls 1844–50

1. 342 would] could 1844–50

1. 350 curls] locks 1844–50

- From his fine lids. And Dante stern  
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn  
For wine and milk poured out in turn.<sup>34</sup>
- Hard-souled Alfieri;<sup>35</sup> and fancy-willed 355  
Boiardo,<sup>36</sup> – who with laughter filled  
The pauses of the jostled shield.
- And Berni,<sup>37</sup> with a hand stretched out  
To sleek that storm. And, not without  
The wreath he died in, and the doubt 360
- He died by, Tasso! bard and lover,  
Whose visions were too thin to cover  
The face of a false woman over.<sup>38</sup>
- And soft Racine,<sup>39</sup> – and grave Corneille,  
The orator of rhymes, whose wail 365  
Scarce shook his purple.<sup>40</sup> And Petrarch pale,
- From whose brainlighted heart were thrown  
A thousand thoughts beneath the sun,  
Each lucid with the name of One.<sup>41</sup>
- And Camoens, with that look he had, 370  
Compelling India's Genius sad  
From the wave through the Lusiad, –
- The murmurs of the storm-cape ocean  
Indrawn in vibrative emotion  
Along the verse.<sup>42</sup> And while devotion 375
- In his wild eyes fantastic shone  
Under the tonsure blown upon  
By airs celestial, – Calderon.<sup>43</sup>
- And bold De Vega, – who breathed quick  
Verse after verse, till death's old trick 380  
Put pause to life and rhetorick.<sup>44</sup>
- And Goethe<sup>45</sup> – with that reaching eye  
His soul reached out from, far and high,  
And fell from inner entity.<sup>46</sup>

l. 356 laughter] laughters 1844–50

l. 367 From whose ... were thrown ] Who from his brainlit heart hath thrown 1844–50

l. 369 lucid] perfumed 1844–50

l. 373 The murmurs ... ocean] With murmurs of a purple ocean 1844–50

l. 377 Under the tonsure] Between the bright curls 1844–50

l. 380 Verse after verse,] Song after song, 1844–50

And Schiller, with heroic front, 385  
 Worthy of Plutarch's kiss upon't,  
 Too large for wreath of modern wont.<sup>47</sup>

And Chaucer, with his infantine  
 Familiar clasp of things divine.  
 That mark upon his lip is wine.<sup>48</sup> 390

Here, Milton's eyes strike piercing-dim.  
 The shapes of suns and stars did swim  
 Like clouds from them, and granted him

God for sole vision.<sup>49</sup> Cowley there;  
 Whose active fancy debonaire 395  
 Drew straws like amber – foul to fair.<sup>50</sup>

Drayton<sup>51</sup> and Browne,<sup>52</sup> – with smiles they drew  
 From outward nature, still kept new  
 From their own inward nature true.

And Marlowe,<sup>53</sup> Webster,<sup>54</sup> Fletcher,<sup>55</sup> Ben<sup>56</sup> – 400  
 Whose fire-hearts sowed our furrows when  
 The world was worthy of such men.

And Burns, with pungent passionings  
 Set in his eyes. Deep lyric springs  
 Are of the fire-mount's issuings.<sup>57</sup> 405

And Shelley, in his white ideal,  
 All statue-blind!<sup>58</sup> And Keats the real  
 Adonis, with the hymeneal

Fresh vernal buds half sunk between  
 His youthful curls, kissed straight and sheen 410  
 In his Rome-grave, by Venus queen.<sup>59</sup>

And poor, proud Byron,<sup>60</sup> – sad as grave,  
 And salt as life: forlornly brave,  
 And quivering with the dart he drave.

And visionary Coleridge, who 415  
 Did sweep his thoughts as angels do  
 Their wings, with cadence up the Blue.<sup>61</sup>

These poets faced, and many more,  
 The lighted altar looming o'er  
 The clouds of incense dim and hoar: 420

1. 398 still kept new] to renew 1844–50

1. 418 and many more,] (and other more) 1844–50; (and many more) 1853

1. 419 looming] booming 1844–50

And all their faces, in the lull  
Of natural things, looked wonderful  
With life and death and deathless rule.

All, still as stone, and yet intense;  
As if by spirit's vehemence 425  
That stone were carved, and not by sense.

But where the heart of each should beat,  
There seemed a wound instead of it,  
From whence the blood dropped to their feet,

Drop after drop – dropped heavily, 430  
As century follows century  
Into the deep eternity.<sup>62</sup>

Then said the lady – and her word  
Came distant, as wide waves were stirred  
Between her and the ear that heard, 435

'*World's use* is cold, *world's love* is vain,  
*World's cruelty* is bitter bane,  
But pain is not the fruit of pain.

'Harken, O poet, whom I led  
From the dark wood,<sup>63</sup> Dismissing dread, 440  
Now hear this angel in my stead.

'His organ's clavier strikes along  
These poets' hearts, sonorous, strong,  
They gave him without count of wrong, –

'A diapason<sup>64</sup> whence to guide 445  
Up to God's feet, from these who died,  
An anthem fully glorified.

'Whereat God's blessing IBARAK (יְבָרַךְ)<sup>65</sup>  
Breathes back this music – folds it back  
About the earth in vapoury rack, 450

l. 426 sense.] sense. // All still and calm as statue-stone! [stone: 1850] / The life lay coiled [coiled 1850] unforegone / Up in the awful eyes alone, / And flung its length out through the air / Into whatever eyes should dare / To front them – Awful shapes and fair! 1844, 1850

l. 436 *World's use*] World's use 1844

l. 436 *world's love*] world's love 1844

l. 437 *World's cruelty*] World's cruelty 1844

l. 439 'Harken,] 'Hearken, 1844–50

l. 442 clavier strikes] pedals strike 1844–50

l. 443 sonorous, strong,] which metal-strong, 1844–50

l. 445 A diapason whence to guide] "From which foundation he can guide 1844–50

'And men walk in it, crying "Lo,  
The world is wider, and we know  
The very heavens look brighter so.

"The stars move statelier round the edge  
Of the silver spheres, and give in pledge  
Their light for nobler privilege. 455

"No little flower but joys or grieves,  
Full life is rustling in the sheaves,  
Full spirit sweeps the forest-leaves."

'So works this music on the earth, 460  
God so admits it, sends it forth,  
To add another worth to worth –

'A new creation-bloom that rounds  
The old creation, and expounds  
His Beautiful in tuneful sounds. 465

'Now harken!' Then the poet gazed  
Upon the angel glorious-faced,  
Whose hand, majestically raised,  
Floated across the organ-keys,  
Like a pale moon o'er murmuring seas, 470  
With no touch but with influences.

Then rose and fell (with swell and sround  
Of shapeless noises wandering round  
A concord which at last they found)  
Those mystic keys – the tones were mixed, 475  
Dim, faint, and thrilled and throbb'd betwixt  
The incomplete and the unfix'd:

And therein mighty minds were heard  
In mighty musings, inly stirred,  
And struggling outward for a word. 480

Until these surges, having run  
This way and that, gave out as one  
An Aphroditè of sweet tune, –  
A Harmony, that, finding vent,  
Upward in grand ascension went, 485  
Winged to a heavenly argument –

1. 454 move] walk 1844

1. 455 Of] O' 1844-50

- Up, upward! like a saint who strips  
The shroud back from his eyes and lips,  
And rises in apocalypse.
- A harmony sublime and plain, 490  
Which cleft (as flying swan, the rain, –  
Throwing the drops off with a strain
- Of her white wing) those undertones  
Of perplext chords,<sup>66</sup> and soared at once  
And struck out from the starry thrones 495
- Their several silver octaves as  
It passed to God. The music was  
Of divine stature – strong to pass.
- And those who heard it, understood  
Something of life in spirit and blood – 500  
Something of nature's fair and good.
- And while it sounded, those great souls  
Did thrill as racers at the goals,  
And burn in all their aureoles.
- But she, the lady, as vapour-bound, 505  
Stood calmly in the joy of sound, –  
Like Nature with the showers around.
- And when it ceased, the blood which fell,  
Again, alone grew audible,  
Tolling the silence as a bell. 510
- The sovran angel lifted high  
His hand, and spake out sovranly.  
'Tried poets, harken and reply!
- 'Give me true answers. If we grant  
That not to suffer, is to want 515  
The conscience of the jubilant, –
- 'If ignorance of anguish is  
*But* ignorance, – and mortals miss  
Far prospects, by a level bliss, –
- 'If, as two colours must be viewed 520  
In a visible image, mortals should  
Need good and evil, to see good, –

1. 494 perplext] pèrplex 1844–50

1. 521 visible] seen 1844–50

'If to speak nobly, comprehends  
To feel profoundly – if the ends  
Of power and suffering, Nature blends, – 525

'If poets on the tripod must  
Writhe like the Pythian,<sup>67</sup> to make just  
Their oracles, and merit trust, –

'If every vatic word that sweeps  
To change the world, must pale their lips,  
And leave their own souls in eclipse, – 530

'If to search deep the universe  
Must pierce the searcher with the curse, –  
Because that bolt (in man's reverse)

'Was shot to the heart o' the wood, and lies 535  
Wedged deepest in the best, – if eyes  
That look for visions and surprise

'From influent<sup>68</sup> angels, must shut down  
Their lids first, upon sun and moon,  
The head asleep upon a stone, – 540

'If ONE who did redeem you back,  
By His own loss, from final wrack,  
Did consecrate by touch and track

'Those temporal sorrows, till the taste  
Of brackish waters of the waste 545  
Is salt with tears He dropt too fast, –

'If all the crowns of earth must wound  
With prickings of the thorns He found, –  
If saddest sighs swell sweetest sound,<sup>69</sup> –

'What say ye unto this? – refuse 550  
This baptism in salt water? – choose  
Calm breasts, mute lips, and labour loose?

'Or, oh ye gifted givers! ye  
Who give your liberal hearts to me,  
To make the world this harmony, 555

'Are ye resigned that they be spent  
To such world's help? –  
The Spirits bent  
Their awful brows and said – 'Content.'

1. 538 influent] marshalled 1844–50

1. 542 loss,] lack, 1844–50

1. 542 wrack,] lack, 1844–50

Content! it sounded like *amen*,  
Said by a choir of mourning men; 560  
An affirmation full of pain

And patience, – ay, of glorying  
And adoration, – as a king  
Might seal an oath for governing.

Then said the angel – and his face 565  
Lightened abroad, until the place  
Grew larger for a moment's space, –

The long aisles flashing out in light,  
And nave and transept, columns white  
And arches crossed, being clear to sight 570

As if the roof were off, and all  
Stood in the noon-sun, – 'Lo! I call  
To other hearts as liberal.

'This pedal strikes out in the air:  
My instrument has room to bear 575  
Still fuller strains and perfecter.

'Herein is room, and shall be room  
While Time lasts, for new hearts to come  
Consummating while they consume.

'What living man will bring a gift 580  
Of his own heart, and help to lift  
The tune? – The race is to the swift.<sup>70</sup>

So asked the angel. Straight the while,  
A company<sup>71</sup> came up the aisle  
With measured step and sorted smile; 585

Cleaving the incense-clouds that rise,  
With winking unaccustomed eyes,  
And love-locks smelling sweet of spice.

One bore his head above the rest,  
As if the world were dispossessed. 590  
And One did pillow chin on breast,

Right languid – an as he should faint.  
One shook his curls across his paint,  
And moralised on worldly taint.

l. 575 has] hath 1844–50

One, slanting up his face, did wink  
The salt rheum to the eyelid's brink,  
To think – O gods! or – not to think!

Some trod out stealthily and slow,  
As if the sun would fall in snow  
If they walked to instead of fro. 600

And some, with conscious ambling free,  
Did shake their bells right daintily  
On hand and foot, for harmony.

And some, composing sudden sighs  
In attitudes of point-device,<sup>72</sup>  
Rehearsed impromptu agonies. 605

And when this company drew near  
The spirits crowned, it might appear  
Submitted to a ghastly fear.

As a sane eye in master-passion  
Constrains a maniac to the fashion  
Of hideous maniac imitation 610

In the least geste – the dropping low  
O' the lid, the wrinkling of the brow,  
Exaggerate with mock and mow,<sup>73</sup> – 615

So, mastered was that company  
By the crowned vision utterly,  
Swayed to a maniac mockery.

One dulled his eyeballs, as they ached  
With Homer's forehead, though he lacked  
An inch of any. And one racked 620

His lower lip with restless tooth,  
As Pindar's rushing words forsooth  
Were pent behind it. One, his smooth

Pink cheeks, did rumple passionate, 625  
Like Æschylus<sup>74</sup> – and tried to prate  
On trolling tongue, of fate and fate.

One set her eyes like Sappho's – or  
Any light woman's!<sup>75</sup> one forbore  
Like Dante, or any man as poor 630

In mirth, to let a smile undo  
 His hard-shut lips. And one that drew  
 Sour humours<sup>76</sup> from his mother, blew

His sunken cheeks out to the size  
 Of most unnatural jollities, 635  
 Because Anacreon looked jest-wise.<sup>77</sup>

So with the rest. – It was a sight  
 A great world-laughter would requite,  
 Or great world-wrath, with equal right.

Out came a speaker from that crowd 640  
 To speak for all – in sleek and proud  
 Exordial periods,<sup>78</sup> while he bowed

His knee before the angel. – ‘Thus,  
 O angel who hast called for us,  
 We bring thee service emulous, – 645

‘Fit service from sufficient soul,  
 Hand-service, to receive world’s dole,  
 Lip-service, in world’s ear to roll

‘Adjusted concords – soft enow  
 To hear the wine-cups passing, through, 650  
 And not too grave to spoil the show.

‘Thou, certes, when thou askest more,  
 O sapient angel, leanest o’er  
 The window-sill of metaphor.

‘To give our hearts up! fie! – that rage 655  
 Barbaric antedates the age.  
 It is not done on any stage.

‘Because your scald or gleeman<sup>79</sup> went  
 With seven or nine-stringed instrument  
 Upon his back – must ours be bent? 660

‘We are not pilgrims, by your leave;  
 No, nor yet martyrs! if we grieve,  
 It is to rhyme to ... summer eve.

‘And if we labour, it shall be,  
 As suiteth best with our degree, 665  
 In after-dinner reverie.’<sup>80</sup>

l. 638 A] For *1844–50*

l. 638 would requite,] as it might, *1844–50*

l. 639 Or] For *1844–50*

More yet that speaker would have said,  
Poising, between his smiles fair-fed,  
Each separate phrase till finishéd.

But all the foreheads of those born 670  
And dead true poets flashed with scorn  
Betwixt the bay leaves round them worn –

Ay, jettèd such brave fire, that they,  
The new-come, shrank and paled away,  
Like leaden ashes when the day 675

Strikes on the hearth. A spirit-blast,  
A presence known by power, at last  
Took them up mutely – they had passed.

And *he*, our pilgrim-poet, saw 680  
Only their places, in deep awe, –  
What time the angel's smile did draw

His gazing upward. Smiling on,  
The angel in the angel shone,  
Revealing glory in benison.

Till, ripened in the light which shut 685  
The poet in, his spirit mute  
Dropped sudden, as a perfect fruit.

He fell before the angel's feet,  
Saying – 'If what is true is sweet,  
In something I may compass it. 690

'For, where my worthiness is poor,  
My will stands richly at the door,  
To pay short comings evermore.

'Accept me therefore. Not for price 695  
And not for pride, my sacrifice  
Is tendered! for my soul is nice

'And will beat down those dusty seeds  
Of bearded corn, if she succeeds  
In soaring while the covey feeds.

'I soar – I am drawn up like the lark<sup>81</sup> 700  
To its white cloud. So high my mark,  
Albeit my wing is small and dark.

'I ask no wages – seek no fame.  
Sew me, for shroud round face and name,  
God's banner of the oriflamme.<sup>82</sup> 705



In pauses massively aloof

Like measured thunders, – now rejoined  
In concords of mysterious kind  
Which fused together sense and mind, –

Now flashing sharp on sharp along 745  
Exultant, in a mounting throng, –  
Now dying off to a low song

Fed upon minors! – wavelike sounds  
Re-eddying into silver rounds,  
Enlarging liberty with bounds. 750

And every rhythm that seemed to close  
Survived in confluent underflows  
Symphonious with the next that rose.

Thus the whole strain being multiplied  
And greatened, – with its glorified 755  
Wings shot abroad from side to side, –

Waved backward (as a wind might wave  
A Brocken mist,<sup>86</sup> and with as brave  
Wild roaring) arch and architrave,

Aisle, transept, column, marble wall, – 760  
Then swelling outward, prodigal  
Of aspiration beyond thrall,

Soared, – and drew up with it the whole  
Of this said vision – as a soul  
Is raised by a thought. And as a scroll 765

Of bright devices is unrolled  
Still upward, with a gradual gold, –  
So rose the vision manifold,

Angel and organ, and the round  
Of spirits, solemnised and crowned, – 770  
While the freed clouds of incense wound

Ascending, following in their track,  
And glimmering faintly, like the rack

1. 744 fused] won 1844–50

1. 747 to a low] into a 1844–50

1. 748 wavelike] starry 1844–50

1. 749 Re-eddying into] Moved on free-paced, in 1844–50

1. 757 backward] backwards 1844

1. 765 scroll] roll 1844–50

1. 770 solemnised] solemnized 1844



The golden morning's open flowings  
Did sway the trees to murmurous bowings,<sup>90</sup>  
In metric chant of blessed poems.

And passing homeward through the wood,  
He prayed along the solitude, – 815  
'THOU, Poet-God, are great and good!

'And though we must have, and have had  
Right reason to be earthly sad, –  
THOU, Poet-God, are great and glad!'

CONCLUSION<sup>91</sup>

Life treads on life, and heart on heart. 820  
We press too close in church and mart,  
To keep a dream or grave apart.

And I was 'ware of walking down  
That same green forest where had gone  
The poet-pilgrim. One by one 825

I traced his footsteps. From the east  
A red and tender radiance pressed  
Through the near trees, until I guessed  
The sun behind shone full and round;  
While up the leafiness profound 830  
A wind scarce old enough for sound

Stood ready to blow on me when  
I turned that way; and now and then  
The birds sang and brake off again

To shake their pretty feathers dry 835  
Of the dew sliding droppingly  
From the leaf-edges, and apply

Back to their song. 'Twixt dew and bird  
So sweet a silence ministered,  
God seemed to use it for a word. 840

Yet morning souls did leap and run  
In all things, as the least had won  
A joyous insight of the sun.

1. 816 are] art 1844–53

1. 819 are] art 1844–50

1. 836 the dew sliding] dew which slideth 1844

And no one looking round the wood  
Could help confessing as he stood, 845  
*This Poet-God is glad and good.*

But hark! a distant sound that grows!  
A heaving, sinking of the boughs –  
A rustling murmur, not of those!

A breezy noise, which is not breeze! 850  
And white-clad children by degrees  
Steal out in troops among the trees

Fair little children, morning-bright,  
With faces grave, yet soft to sight,  
Expressive of restrained delight. 855

Some plucked the palm-boughs within reach,  
And others leapt up high to catch  
The upper boughs, and shake from each

A rain of dew, till, wetted so,  
The child who held the branch let go, 860  
And it swang backward with a flow

Of faster drippings. Then I knew  
The children laughed – but the laugh flew  
From its own chirrup, as might do

A frightened song-bird; and a child 865  
Who seemed the chief, said very mild,  
'Hush! keep this morning undefiled.'

His eyes rebuked them from calm spheres;  
His soul upon his brow appears  
In waiting for more holy years. 870

I called the child to me, and said,  
'What are your palms for?' – 'To be spread,'  
He answered, 'on a poet dead.'

'The poet died last month, and now  
The world which had been somewhat slow 875  
In honoring his living brow,

'Commands the palms – They must be strown  
On his new marble very soon,  
In a procession of the town.'

I sighed and said, 'Did he foresee 880

Any such honor?' 'Verily  
I cannot tell you,' answered he.

'But this I know, – I fain would lay  
My own head down, another day,  
As *he* did, – with the fame away. 885

'A lily, a friend's hand had plucked,  
Lay by his death-bed, which he looked  
As deep down as a bee had sucked,

'Then, turning to the lattice, gazed  
O'er hill and river, and upraised 890  
His eyes illumined and amazed

'With the world's beauty, up to God,  
Re-offering on their iris broad  
The images of things bestowed

'By the chief Poet.<sup>92</sup> – "God!" he cried, 895  
"Be praised for anguish, which has tried;  
For beauty, which has satisfied: –

"For this world's presence, half within  
And half without me – thought and scene –  
This sense of Being and Having been. 900

"I thank Thee that my soul hath room  
For Thy grand world. Both guests may come –  
Beauty, to soul – Body, to tomb.

"I am content to be so weak.  
Put strength into the words I speak, 905  
And I am strong in what I seek.

"I am content to be so bare  
Before the archers, everywhere  
My wounds being stroked by heavenly air.

"I laid my soul before Thy feet, 910  
That Images of fair and sweet  
Should walk to other men on it.

"I am content to feel the step  
Of each pure Image! – let those keep 915  
To mandragore, who care to sleep.

"I am content to touch the brink

1. 893 their] his 1844–53

1. 899 thought] sound 1844–50



'In silence, and God heard the rest  
'Twixt the sun's footsteps down the west.  
Then he called one who loved him best,

955

'Yea, he called softly through the room  
(His voice was weak yet tender) – "Come,"  
He said, "come nearer! Let the bloom

960

"Of Life grow over, undenied,  
"This bridge of Death, which is not wide –  
I shall be soon at the other side.

"Come, kiss me!" So the one in truth  
Who loved him best – in love, not ruth,  
Bowed down and kissed him mouth to mouth.

965

'And in that kiss of Love, was won  
Life's manumission. All was done –  
The mouth that kissed last, kissed *alone*.

'But in the former, confluent kiss,  
The same was sealed, I think, by His,  
To words of truth and uprightness.'

970

The child's voice trembled – his lips shook  
Like a rose leaning o'er a brook,  
Which vibrates though it is not struck.

975

'And who, I asked, a little moved  
Yet curious-eyed, 'was this that loved  
And kissed him last, as it behoved?'

'*T*, softly said the child; and then,  
'*T*, said he louder, once again.  
'*His son*, – my rank is among men.

980

'And now that men exalt his name  
I come to gather palms with them,  
That holy Love may hallow Fame.

'He did not die alone, nor should  
His memory live so, 'mid these rude  
World-praisers – a worse solitude.

985

'Me, a voice calleth to that tomb  
Where these are strewing branch and bloom,  
Saying, *come nearer!* – and I come.

990

'Glory to God!' resuméd he,  
And his eyes smiled for victory  
O'er their own tears which I could see

Fallen on the palm, down cheek and chin – 'That poet now has entered in The place of rest which is not sin.	995
'And while he rests, his songs in troops Walk up and down our earthly slopes, Companioned by diviner Hopes.'	
'But <i>thou</i> ,' I murmured, – to engage The child's speech farther – 'hast an age Too tender for this orphanage.'	1000
'Glory to God – to God!' he saith, 'KNOWLEDGE BY SUFFERING ENTERETH, AND LIFE IS PERFECTED BY DEATH.'	1005

## NOTES:

1. *BRITANNIA'S PASTORALS*: a pastoral romance (1613–16) by William Browne (1591–1645), from Book I, the fifth 'Song,' which recounts the conversion of the allegorical character Riot; the passage is followed by an extended simile involving a maiden learning a 'charming skill' in music through aspiration and effort (*Select Works of the British Poets from Chaucer to Johnson*, ed. R. Southey (London: Paternoster Row [1831]), p. 869); EBB owned this edition of Southey's anthology (A2177). Browne is included below at l. 397 and also in EBB's review of 'The Book of the Poets' (Volume 4, p. 458). She described him as 'very graphic – more definitely so than most poets are' (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 162).
2. *a lady*: Initially suggesting Una, who rides a small white mule and guides the Redcrosse Knight in Book I of Edmund Spenser's (1552–99) allegorical romance *The Faerie Queene* (1589), this 'lady' modulates below (ll. 208–10) into a figure more akin to Beatrice, Dante's spiritual guide in the 'Paradiso' of his *Commedia*.
3. *as perfumed shroud ... For English Keats*: alluding to Keats's death in 1821, and his burial in Rome (see n. 58 below), which EBB also cites in the opening to a projected long poem dating from the early 1840s beginning 'Italy! world's Italy!' (Berg Notebook IV, D1400), published by M. Stone, 'Constructing the Archive and the Nation in "Italy! world's Italy!"; "My Last Duchess," *Aurora Leigh*, and an Unpublished Manuscript by Elizabeth Barrett Browning,' *Victorian Review*, 33:2 (2007), pp. 35–57. The text is included in Volume 5, pp. 638–40.
4. *Since thunder-stricken ... stone*: cf. the similar image in EBB's 'The Tempest,' ll. 134–51 (Volume 4, pp. 225–6).
5. *Beside the fourth pool ... wings expand*: Porter and Clarke note the parallels between the landscape described here, 'where toads crawl, bats cling, and oily snakes "strain hard against the soil"; and the landscape of RB's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855), with its 'dank soil padded to a plash by poisoned toads' (see *CW*, vol. 2, p. xx1).
6. *His lips sobbed ... water rank*: cf. the similar phrasing in Raphael's reassurance to Noah about his son Japhet in Byron's drama *Heaven and Earth* (1822), that he 'shall not drink

1. 995 has] hath 1844–50

/ With sobs the salt foam of the swelling waters' (ll. 766–7). For EBB's familiarity with the drama, see *BC*, vol. 4, p. 186.

7. *reboant*: rebelling, re-echoing loudly. Cf. the reference to 'reboant whirlwinds' in l. 97 of Tennyson's 'Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind' in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). The *OED* cites only these two instances.
8. *Danaë's*: for classical accounts of Danaë, daughter of Acrisius of Argos, who was impregnated by Zeus in a shower of gold rain, see Apollodorus, *The Library*, II.4.1, and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV.610. Cf. EBB's later use of Danaë in representing the 'artist-soul' in *Aurora Leigh*, III.122–43 (see Volume 3, pp. 62–3).
9. *The arches ... bend and slacken*: John Ruskin (1819–1900) cites this passage as 'summing up all I could say about the arch'; see 'John Ruskin to EBB' in J. C. Kimball, 'A Ruskin Letter to Mrs. Browning', *Browning Newsletter*, 8 (Spring 1972), pp. 47–9.
10. *That central altar ... taper-sheen*: Cf. the setting of 'a splendid cathedral' with 'a fine organ and anthems' and 'fumes of incense' in 'A Dream of Arcadi' (1842) by Thomas Powell (1809–87), as described by Richard Hengist Horne (*BC*, vol. 8, p. 349) in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1843). EBB collaborated with Horne on this collection (see *BC*, vol. 8, pp. 341–427). Powell, a minor poet and editor, was an occasional correspondent of EBB and a friend of RB's before revelations of his forgeries (see *BC*, vol. 4, pp. 330–1).
11. *Sinai's Law*: on the implied parallel between the angel and Moses on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, see Exodus 19–20.
12. *bay above the eyes profound*: cf. *Aurora Leigh* II:33–59, where the young Aurora compares herself to Dante, yet chooses 'headlong ivy' to crown herself a poet on her twentieth birthday, not the 'bay', because 'The fates deny us if we are overbold' (see Volume 3, p. 31).
13. *geste*: look or aspect; bearing, carriage or mien; the *OED* cites EBB's usage.
14. *Beauty ... scarcely two*: an echo of Keats. Emily Dickinson (1830–86) in turn echoes EBB's lines in Poem 544, on 'The Martyr Poets', written in response to 'A Vision of Poets', as A. Swyerski notes in 'Dickinson and "that Foreign Lady"', *Symbiosis*, 4:1 (2000), pp. 51–65, on p. 63.
15. *rugged cilix, serge of wool*: a garment made from the hair of goats found in Cicilia, a province of Asia Minor; here, invoking the 'iron' discipline and haircloth habit worn by monks who mortify the flesh.
16. *Homer*: On EBB's love of Homer and her juvenile epic in imitation of him, see the headnote to *The Battle of Marathon* (1820), in Volume 4, pp. 7–67, and n. 29 below. She was given F. A. Wolf's *Homeri et Homeridarum Opera et Reliquiae* (1806) in July 1831 (*Diary*, p. 57; and A1208), but she repudiated Wolf's argument that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not the works of a single poet (see n. 8 to 'Earth and Her Praisers', below, p. 476; and *Aurora Leigh*, V.1246–57, Volume 3, pp. 149–50). She also possessed a bust of Homer (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 41, n. 12; vol. 7, p. 149).
17. *Shakespeare ... all time*: here coupled with Homer because the two topped EBB's hierarchy of poets, as the greatest figures of 'antique and modern literatures' (see 'The Book of the Poets', Volume 4, pp. 443–506).
18. *Aeschylus*: In EBB's view, Aeschylus (c. 525–456 BC), the first great Greek writer of tragedy, was the 'sublimest of the sublime Greeks'; she also defended him as 'the obscurest poet in the world, . . . with the exception of . . . we will say . . . M<sup>r</sup> Browning!' (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 148). For a description of the two versions of 'Prometheus Bound', see the headnote to the 1850 version, above, pp. 119–27. See also her unpublished monodrama on the death of Aeschylus (c. 1845), long misattributed to RB (Volume 5, pp. 651–9).

19. *the women swooned ... gods did*: J. Ferrier observed of this passage in *Blackwood's*: 'It is well known that no pregnant woman could look Æschylus in the face when the fit of inspiration was on him, without having cause to regret her indiscretion' – i.e., suffer a miscarriage; 'delicacy' dictated the matter 'be only barely hinted at', Ferrier added, punningly complaining of what he saw as 'miscarried' grammar in the passage (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 360). EBB explained to John Kenyon, "The critic mistakes my allusion, which was to the fact that in the acting of the Eumenides, when the great tragic poet did actually "frown as the gods did", women fell down fainting from the benches. I did not refer to the effect of his human countenance "during composition" (*BC*, vol. 9, pp. 217–18).
20. *Euripides*: EBB considered Euripides (c. 484–c. 406 BC) a 'more pathetic writer' than Sophocles or Æschylus (*Diary*, p. 43); she contrasted his 'abandon to the pathetic' with Æschylus in particular, who 'sheds tears like a strong man' (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 18). See also 'Wine of Cyprus' (Volume 2, pp. 193–205), ll. 89–92, and n. 16.
21. *Sophocles ... the lost Theban*: the allusion is to the trilogy of plays by Sophocles (c. 495–c. 405 BC) on Oedipus, King of Thebes, who, after blinding himself, is led by the gods from an olive grove into the underworld; see also 'Wine of Cyprus', ll. 85–8 (Volume 2, p. 199). EBB had read all the plays of both Sophocles and Euripides by the end of March 1832 (*Diary*, p. 229).
22. *Hesiod ... gods and bulls*: In the 1840s EBB translated extracts from Hesiod (c. eighth century BC) (see D1221–5), who was credited with writing the *Theogony* (chiefly about gods) and *Works and Days* (about bulls and farm creatures).
23. *Pindar*: EBB's *Diary* records in detail her reading of the Greek lyric poet Pindar (c. 522–c. 446 BC) in 1831–2. She found 'very fine things' in the seventh Olympic ode (p. 207) and judged the fourteenth 'harmonious & beautiful' (p. 239), but observed, 'Pindar's subjects are of little interest to my mind' (p. 233). She received an edition of Pindar in 1831 which is filled with her annotations (see A1850).
24. *gloriole*: i.e., an aureole or halo; the *OED* cites only four uses of the term, all between 1813 and 1874, of which this is one.
25. *Sappho ... repose*: prior to the publication of *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation* (1885) by H. T. Wharton, representations of the legendary Greek lyric poet Sappho (associated with seventh-century BC Lesbos) principally drew on the verse epistle 'Sappho to Phaon' in the *Heriodes* by Ovid (43 BC–AD 18). In the poem Sappho laments her abandonment by the young ferryman Phaon, before leaping to her death from the Leucadian Cliff (see Y. Prins, *Victorian Sappho* ((Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 17–18). In 1844 EBB described herself as "little & black" like Sappho, en attendant the immortality; she also compared the genius of George Sand to that of Sappho (*BC*, vol. 8, pp. 128, 211). Unlike many nineteenth-century women poets, EBB did not write poems about Sappho or publicly compare herself to Sappho (on other women poets, see Prins, ch. 4, and, for example, 'Sappho's Song', ll. 141–60, in *The Improvisatrice* (1824) by Letitia E. Landon (1802–38). See also the head-note to EBB's translation 'Song of the Rose' (Volume 2, pp. 303–5), a work 'attributed' to Sappho.
26. *Theocritus ... visionary flocks*: In 1828 EBB excerpted Virgil (see ll. 329–33) and the Greek poet Theocritus (c. 308–c. 240 BC), famed for his pastoral idylls on rustic subjects, from her critique of 'pastoral poetry' with its 'shepherds & shepherdesses . . . asses, in the modern long run of making love & hay' (*BC*, vol. 2, p. 166). Cf. the allusion to Theocritus in 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', no. I (Volume 2, p. 442).

27. *Aristophanes ... in each*: EBB received an edition of the *Comoediae* by the Greek poet-dramatist Aristophanes (c. 447–c. 386 BC) in 1838; in 1842, she informed H. S. Boyd that she did ‘not know much more of *him* than three or four of his plays’ (A0082; *BC*, vol. 5, p. 257).
28. *Virgil ... Mantuan beech*: Virgil or Publius Vergilius Maro (c. 70–c. 19 BC) was commonly called the Mantuan after his place of birth, Mantua; a legendary account tells of his mother’s dream that she gave birth to a laurel or bay tree that took root and sprang up full grown (see N. Horsfall (ed.), *A Companion to the Study of Virgil*, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), p. 5).
29. *brown bees hummed deathlessly*: The fourth book of Virgil’s *Georgics* describes the lives and habits of bees. EBB’s scant praise reflects her view that Homer and the Greeks were generally superior to Virgil and the Roman poets. She ‘tried hard to like olives & the Æneid upon principle,’ but was much more drawn to ‘Homer’s fire,’ declaring that one might ‘as well compare the mouse with the mountain!’ as Virgil with Homer (*BC*, vol. 2, p. 107).
30. *Lucretius ... would not learn*: The Roman poet and philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99–c. 55 BC) argued in his epic *De Rerum Natura* that the world could be explained without recourse to divine intervention. EBB saw him as ‘great though erring’ (see the preface to her *An Essay on Mind*, Volume 4, p. 78), a ‘Heathen’ writer whose works paradoxically testified to ‘the reflection of divinely revealed lights’ (*BC*, vol. 2, p. 213). Cf. Tennyson’s dramatic monologue ‘Lucretius’ (1868).
31. *Ossian ... his vest*: refers to *The Poems of Ossian, Translated by James Macpherson* (1762), presented by Macpherson (1736–96) as the works of a third-century Gaelic bard. The veiled scepticism of ll. 342–5 reflects EBB’s agreement with the view of Samuel Johnson, Sir Walter Scott and others that Macpherson was an ‘impostor’. She considered Ossian ‘as the poetical lay figure upon which Mr. Macpherson dared to cast his personality’ (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 268) and in 1842–3 carried on an extended debate with her friend H. S. Boyd concerning the authenticity and quality of ‘Ossian’s’ poems, a subject much discussed in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century (see *BC*, vol. 6, pp. 267–8, 281–3, 297–8, 306–7, 318, 328, 335, 345–6; vol. 7, pp. 35, 73–4, 80).
32. *Spenser ... engenderèd*: see headnote and n. 2 above on Spenser; cf. the parallel emphasis on the mellifluous harmony of Spenser’s poetry in EBB’s ‘The Book of the Poets’ (Volume 4, p. 456).
33. *Ariosto’s ... in one*: The characterization and narrative form of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* were heavily influenced by the Italian epic *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), as Spenser revealed in indicating his desire to ‘emulate’ and ‘overgo’ Ariosto (see his letters to Gabriel Harvey, in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, ed. A. D. Stoll (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2006), p. x).
34. *Dante ... in turn*: on Dante, see the headnote and the headnote to *Casa Guidi Windows* (Volume 2, pp. 481–91).
35. *Alfieri*: In 1826 EBB mentioned the ‘extraordinary history’ of the mind of the Italian dramatist Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), as revealed in the *Memoirs of the Life and Writing of Victor Alfieri* (1810; see *BC*, vol. 1, p. 273). In 1838 she described him as ‘more markedly a poet of *action* than any other poet I can think of, and how he makes you shiver! Mr. Wordsworth told me that he could read him only once’ (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 109). On her exchange with Wordsworth about Alfieri, see her prose account of her meeting with Wordsworth, a manuscript now in the Berg Collection (D0618), Volume 5, pp. 523–5.

36. *Boiardo*: Matteo Maria Boiardo (c. 1441–94), Italian poet, courtier in Ferrara; his greatest work, the unfinished *Orlando Inamorato*, inspired Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.
37. *Berni*: Francesco Berni (c. 1497–1536), Italian poet who stylistically reworked Boiardo's *Orlando Inamorato*.
38. *Tasso ... woman over*: Torquato Tasso (1544–95), courtier in the court of Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara (1533–97), the Duke on whom RB modelled the speaker in 'My Last Duchess' (1842). Tasso is most remembered for *Gerusalemme Liberata*, completed in 1575 and known in manuscript before it was published in 1581. In March 1843 EBB invoked Tasso after Dante in alluding to great poets unafraid to speak 'Christ's name' in their poetry (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 21). His doomed love for Leonora or Elenore d'Este of Ferrara made him a tragic hero of interest to RB, who compared his initial letter of tribute to EBB to a tribute addressed to Tasso (*BC*, vol. 10, p. 21). Intermittently confined for psychological instability, Tasso died in Rome shortly before he was to be crowned as Italy's poet laureate (the 'wreath' – i.e., wreath of laurels – in l. 360).
39. *Racine*: EBB viewed Jean Racine (1639–99), the French neoclassical dramatist and poet, as a writer of perfect style but 'coldness' (see *BC*, vol. 9, p. 302, and *An Essay on Mind*, ll. 1065–8 (Volume 4, pp. 108–9), where she notes his 'polish' and 'eloquence', yet observes, 'twere mean / To leave the path of Nature for Racine'.
40. *Corneille ... his purple*: the purple or declamatory style of the French dramatist Pierre Corneille (1606–84). In 'An Essay on Mind', ll. 1061–8 (Volume 4, p. 108), EBB commends English poets for not imitating the 'stage of France', even though Corneille may 'walk with Genius o'er th' inspired boards'.
41. *Petrarch ... name of One*: see the headnote to this poem on its echoes of Petrarch's *Trionfi*. Here EBB refers to his more famous *Rime sparse*, the series of love poems addressed to Laura (his 'One'). In 1837 EBB allowed that Petrarch wrote 'beautifully' in the 'Rimes' yet confessed she did not have 'an enthusiasm' for him, finding his work deficient in 'earnestness & intensity' because of 'the eternal Doubt which hangs around his poetry, as to whether he loved a woman an abstraction or a cloud' (*BC*, vol. 3, p. 246). Nevertheless, in the early 1840s she translated half a dozen of his works (see D1245–55 and Volume 5, pp. 613–16, 634–7). Soon after the Brownings married in 1846 they 'made a pilgrimage ... as became poets' to the fountain of Vaucluse closely associated with Petrarch (*EBB-AB*, vol. 1, pp. 15–16); and in 1851 'for Petrarch's sake' they visited the Italian poet's home at Arquà, where he died (*LEBB*, vol. 2, p. 9; see also *MRM*, vol. 3, p. 325; *EBB-EAHO*, pp. 39–40). Cf. EBB's reference to Petrarch in 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship', ll. 159–60 (below, p. 396). On her revisions of Petrarchan conventions in the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', see the headnote to that sequence, Volume 2, pp. 425–42.
42. *Camoens ... verse*: EBB celebrates the Portuguese poet Luis Vaz de Camoens (1524–80) as author of the epic *Os Lusíadas* (1572), on the discovery of the passage to the East Indies or India by his kinsman, the explorer Vasco de Gama (c. 1469–1524), although his love lyrics more directly influenced her own poetry, especially 'Catarina to Camoens' (Volume 2, pp. 395–406) and 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', (Volume 2, pp. 425–80); see *Diary*, p. 181; and the headnotes to the poems). In 1844 she evidently expressed interest in the minor poems of Camoens to R. H. Horne (*BC*, vol. 9, p. 37; see also vol. 12, p. 86).
43. *Under the tonsure ... Calderon*: the Spanish dramatist Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600–81) became a priest in 1651.
44. *De Vega ... rhetorick*: an allusion to the prolific output of the Spanish dramatist and poet Felix de Lope de Vega Carpio (1562–1635), author of hundreds of plays as well as works in many other genres.

45. *Goethe*: In July 1831, EBB observed of Johann Wolfgang von Goëthe (1749–1832), the German poet, playwright, novelist and natural philosopher, that ‘if ever I learnt German, it sh<sup>d</sup> be more for the sake of reading the Sorrows of Werter [1774] than Klopstock’s Messiah’, alluding to *Der Messias; ein Heldengedicht* (1749) by Gottlieb Friedrich Klopstock (*Diary*, p. 55). She began to study German literature in the summer of 1837, and in 1839 found ‘more essential genius in Goethe’s mysterious Faustic growlings than in Schiller’s most eloquent eloquence’, saying that ‘Goëthe’s poetry comes like the wind’ and that his *Faust* (1808, 1832) was an ‘untranslatable wonder’ (*BC*, vol. 4, p. 120). For her reiteration of the contrast between Schiller and Goëthe in 1841, and a further contrast between Goëthe and Shelley, see *BC*, vol. 5, p. 60. She earlier addressed Goëthe’s genius in ‘To Bettine, the Child-Friend of Goethe’ (below, pp. 515–19) and wrote an essay on Goëthe’s *Memoirs*, now in the ‘Scraps’ bundle of manuscripts in the Berg Collection (D1299; see this poem’s headnote). EBB also translated nearly three dozen poems (or parts of poems) by Goëthe in a notebook (Wellesley College Pocket Notebook I, D1416); see Volume 5, pp. 545–82.
46. *fell from inner entity*: i.e., from inner essence or being; EBB confirmed that ‘fell’ here is a verb after the reviewer in *Blackwood’s* misinterpreted it as an adjective and called the passage an ‘enigma’ (see *BC*, vol. 9, pp. 220, 360).
47. *Schiller ... modern wont*: on EBB’s view of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), German poet, dramatist, essayist and historian, see n. 45 above, and EBB’s ‘The Dead Pan’ (Volume 2, pp. 371–86), her poetic response to Schiller’s ‘The Gods of Greece’ (1788). She also admired Schiller’s play *The Robbers* (1781; see *BC*, vol. 4, p. 120). Despite her private view of Goëthe’s greater genius, she here implies that Schiller is a figure like the heroes of *Parallel Lives*, the biographies of Greeks and Romans by Mestrius Plutarchus (AD c. 45–c. 125).
48. *Chaucer ... wine*: on Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1346–1400), see this poem’s headnote and n. 71 below. EBB defended Chaucer’s ‘clasp of things divine’ in 1843 (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 21) and contributed to *The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer, Modernized* (1841), edited by Horne. She owned a bust of Chaucer that presided over her collection of English poetry in her bedroom-study in Wimpole Street (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 149), described the first era of English poetry as ‘the Chaucerian’, and commented extensively on his contributions to English poetry in ‘The Book of the Poets’ (Volume 4, pp. 444–50, 454–6). The ‘mark’ of ‘wine’ upon his lips alludes to the royal grant providing Chaucer with a daily pitcher of wine (*CW*, vol. 2, p. 393).
49. *Milton’s eyes ... God for sole vision*: In her extended comments on John Milton (1608–74) in ‘The Book of the Poets’ (Volume 4, pp. 443–505), EBB emphasizes his blindness, his epic Christian vision, his ‘majestic personality’, his commitment to political freedom and his expression of freedom in the forms of poetry; however, she judges him a lesser genius than Homer and criticizes the absence of true ‘spirituality’ in his ‘spiritual personages’. For her poetic responses to Milton’s ode ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’ (1645) and *Paradise Lost* (1667), see ‘The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus’ (below, pp. 477–87), her Preface to the 1844 *Poems* (Volume 2, pp. 567–70) and ‘A Drama of Exile’ (above, pp. 1–73).
50. *Cowley ... fair*: on EBB’s views of the English ‘metaphysical’ poet Abraham Cowley (1618–57) as a poet ‘without the poet’s heart’, notable for his ‘associative’ faculty and ‘mere Fancy’, see ‘The Book of the Poets’ (Volume 4, pp. 468–9). She repudiated the term ‘metaphysical poets’ applied to such writers as Cowley, and suggested that he ‘went to the shambles’ for his imagery.

51. *Drayton*: for EBB's comments on works by the Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton (1563–1631), including the 'Polyolbion' (1612, 1622), his 'Heroical Epistles' (1597) and his 'Barons' Wars' (1603), see 'The Book of the Poets' (Volume 4, p. 458). For the influence of Drayton's *England's Heroical Epistles* on 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship', see the headnote to that poem (below, pp. 383–90).
52. *Browne*: i.e., William Browne, author of *Britannia's Pastorals*; see n. 1 above.
53. *Marlowe*: In her comments on the English drama in 'The Book of the Poets', EBB describes Christopher Marlowe (1564–93) as 'more essentially a poet than a dramatist' and notable for 'the elemental monotonies' of his rhythm (Volume 4, p. 461). For her views on R. H. Horne's *The Death of Marlowe* (1837), see *BC*, vol. 4, p. 195.
54. *Webster*: EBB makes passing mention of John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1625), the English dramatist known for Jacobean masterpieces such as *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1614), in 'The Book of the Poets', where she chronicles 'the names of Chapman, Dekker, Webster, Turneur, Randolph, Middleton, and Thomas Heywood', calling them 'great names, and worthy ... of Shakespeare's brotherhood' (Volume 4, p. 461).
55. *Fletcher*: unlike this mention of John Fletcher (1576–1625), the English dramatist who collaborated with Francis Beaumont (1584–1616), Shakespeare and others, EBB's reference to him in 'The Book of the Poets' does not 'put asunder' the 'names which friendship and poetry joined together' (i.e., Beaumont and Fletcher). However, she comments that the two collaborators are inferior to Shakespeare, and write not like men, or 'like women either', but 'perhaps ... like centaurs', although with poetical genius (Volume 4, p. 465). For her use of an epigraph from Beaumont and Fletcher, see the headnote to 'The Romaunt of the Page' (below, p. 292).
56. *Ben*: although he lacked the 'elasticity and abandonment' of Shakespeare, EBB commends the English dramatist and poet Ben Jonson (1574–1637) for his learning, his versification heaving 'heavily with thought' and his 'comic powers' (Volume 4, p. 464).
57. *Burns ... issuings*: EBB's passionate praise of Robert Burns (1759–96) arises from her view of his role in the 'revival' or 'awakening' and the 'visible movement towards Nature' we now associate with Romanticism, a movement she describes in 'The Book of the Poets' (Volume 4, p. 508).
58. *Shelley ... statue-blind*: 'It was Shelley that high, & yet too low, elemental poet, who froze in cold glory between Heaven & earth, neither dealing with man's heart, beneath, nor aspiring to communion with supernal Humanity, the heart of the God-Man' (*BC*, vol. 5, p. 60), EBB observed in 1841 of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), in contrasting the English Romantic poet with Goëthe. RB enthusiastically agreed with the characterization of Shelley in these lines (see the headnote, above), despite his youthful adulation of Shelley as the '[s]un-treader' (*Pauline; A Fragment of a Confession* (1833), l. 151). For additional comments by EBB on Shelley's poetry, see her 1831–2 *Diary* (pp. 102, 138) and letters (esp. *BC*, vol. 6, pp. 144, 243; vol. 8, p. 76). Her annotations on Shelley's *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, given to her in January 1840 (A2102) are discussed by J. Thorpe, 'Elizabeth Barrett's Commentary on Shelley: Some Marginalia', *Modern Language Notes*, 66 (1951), pp. 455–8.
59. *Keats ... Venus queen*: on the multiple echoes of Keats in 'A Vision of Poets', see this poem's headnote and nn. 3, 14 above. EBB here alludes to Shelley's representation of Keats as Adonis (in Greek mythology, god of nature and consort of Venus) in his elegy for Keats, *Adonais* (1821), which she describes as 'perfectly exquisite' in her 1831–2 *Diary* (p. 138) despite her later critiques of Shelley.

60. *Byron*: a major influence on EBB's poetic formation and earlier works such as *The Battle of Marathon* (Volume 4, pp. 7–67), 'Stanzas on the Death of Lord Byron' (Volume 4, pp. 138–40) and 'An Essay on Mind' (Volume 4, pp. 77–131). The characterization of Byron here reflects her critique of the mid-Victorian reaction against him – what she described as 'the present fashion of decrying Byron as a poet' (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 171) – a 'fashion' she repeatedly resisted in her letters '[B]ecause he had more than his due fame once', she said in 1844, Byron 'is now denied his just honours' (*BC*, vol. 8, p. 216; see also vol. 6, pp. 171, 192; vol. 8, p. 176, where she also associates with him the image of a dart). She simultaneously defends and critiques Byron in a review of Wordsworth's poetry associated with her essay 'The Book of the Poets' (see Volume 4, pp. 455, 474), anticipating ll. 133–8 in Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse' (1855) in focusing on the 'one-sided passionateness' and the 'wound of a heart' his poetry displayed (Volume 4, p. 509). In 1846 EBB encouraged RB to renew his youthful affection for Byron (*BC*, vol. 13, p. 280).
61. *visionary Coleridge ... Blue*: a characterization of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1824) reflecting EBB's view in 1842–3 that he had 'an intenser genius' or 'grander genius' than Wordsworth (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 75; vol. 7, p. 123). In November 1842, in a letter discussing the depiction of 'the idea of *solitude*' in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), she described Coleridge as having 'a soul more intensely poetical (in the appreciation of mind)' than either Wordsworth or Byron (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 171). Her friend Mary Russell Mitford found Coleridge 'very much the greater poet' than Wordsworth (*BC*, vol. 5, p. 333). EBB's earlier reference to Coleridge in 1831 also makes mention of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (*Diary*, p. 85). For echoes of his poetry in 'The Poet's Vow', see the headnote to that poem (below, pp. 225–9).
62. *blood dropped ... deep eternity*: cf. the parallel image in EBB's 'Sounds', ll. 130–2 (Volume 2, p. 54), of God's speaking in the soul: 'sit still beneath My rood, / And count the droppings of My victim-blood, / And seek no other sound!'
63. *the dark wood*: cf. the allegorical wood in the opening passage of the *Inferno*, beginning Dante's *Commedia*, a passage that EBB translated (D1210–13); on Dante, see the headnote and ll. 352–4 above. For EBB's translation, see Volume 5, p. 327.
64. *diapason*: the interval of an octave or the consonance produced by the highest and lowest notes in the musical scale; more figuratively, a complete concord or rich outburst of sound made up of all tones or notes; also the foundation-stops in an organ. EBB uses the metaphor similarly in 1845: 'All truth, & all beauty & all music belong to God – He is in all things, – and in speaking of all, we speak of Him. In poetry, which includes all things, "the diapason closeth full in . . . God"', she observes, citing Dryden's 'A Song for St Cecilia's Day' (1687; *BC*, vol. 10, p. 139).
65. *IBARAK* (יְבָרַךְ): Hebrew for 'blessing'; on EBB's use of Hebrew in the poem, see C. Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 74.
66. *perplext chords*: cf. EBB's sonnet 'Perplexed Music' (Volume 2, pp. 91–2), in which 'the strain' of 'God's will in his worlds' unfolds in 'sad, perplexed minor' (ll. 4–5) – pluralized as 'minors' in the editions of 1844–50, a diacritical mark indicates emphasis on the first syllable of 'perplext'.
67. *Writhe like the Pythian*: the priestess of Apollo uttering oracles in her fit of inspiration in a cave at Delphi, and another of the poem's many echoes of Keats; cf. the convulsion of Apollo in *Hyperion*, Book 3, ll. 120–36, a work praised by EBB for its 'radiance' in 1831 (*Diary*, p. 93). Commentary on EBB's *Poems before Congress* (1860) would eventually pervert imagery of the inspired prophetess to characterize EBB as a 'Pythoness ...

- under the influence of her Cacodaemon, 'having been seized with a ... fit of insanity' (W. E. Aytoun, 'Poetic Aberrations,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 87 (April 1860), p. 492). In the 1890s, these metaphors resurfaced, as critic E. Gosse repeatedly used the imagery of 'Pythia' and the 'Pythian shriek' to condemn EBB's poetry (see his *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896), p. 5, and *A Short History of Modern English Literature* (New York: Appleton, 1897), p. 338), a development analysed by T. Lootens, *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp. 154–7.
68. *influënt*: exercising celestial influence; see 'The Seraphim', l. 387, above, p. 94. Cf. EBB's later use of the word in *Aurora Leigh* (1856), l.625 (Volume 3, p. 17), in describing the heavens, a usage noted in the *OED*.
69. *If saddest sighs swell sweetest sound*: cf. Percy Shelley's 'To a Sky-Lark' (1820), 'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought' (l. 90).
70. *The race is to the swift*: an echo of Ecclesiastes 9:11: 'the race is not to the swift.'
71. *A company*: the satire of pretender poets, continuing to l. 669, echoes Chaucer's *The House of Fame*, also composed in octosyllabic verse, which EBB cites in June 1843 (*BC*, vol. 7, p. 204). In this dream vision parodying Dante's journey in the *Commedia*, the poet is carried by an eagle to the House of Fame, which is adorned with statues of historians and poets; here he observes the Queen of Fame distributing fame and slander to a similar company of satirized aspirants. On EBB's knowledge of Chaucer, see n. 48, above.
72. *attitudes of point-device*: dramatic poses arranged to the point of perfection. Emma Lyon, Lady Hamilton (1765–1815), the lover of naval hero Lord Horatio Nelson, was known for her 'attitudes': silent poses and gestures used to dramatize scenes from classical myth or well-known stories (see A. D. Culler, 'Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue', *PMLA*, 90 (1975), pp. 373–4).
73. *mock and mow*: to jeer and grimace, make faces. Cf. the use of the phrase in *Aurora Leigh*, IV.1186 (Volume 3, p. 118).
74. *Pink cheeks ... Like Æschylus*: possibly a veiled reference to EBB's first translation of Æschylus (see n. 18 above); the reference to Homer in ll. 619–21 similarly recalls her juvenile epic *The Battle of Marathon* (Volume 4, pp. 7–67).
75. *like Sappho's ... light woman's*: on Sappho, see n. 24 above; on constructions of Sappho as a 'light' or promiscuous woman, see Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p. 61.
76. *humours*: here, fancies or whims, with connotations of the earlier sense of 'humour' referring to the four chief bodily fluids or to mental dispositions and temperaments thought to be determined by them.
77. *Anacreon ... looked jest-wise*: In her youth and her maturity, EBB translated many verses inspired by the sixth-century Greek poet Anacreon, whose sensuous lyrics or 'anacreontics' celebrate drinking and erotic love; see D1167–87 (D0378 is also a translation from Anacreon, not an original verse, as indicated in the *Reconstruction*). For EBB's own variation on a drinking song in the Anacreontic tradition, see 'Wine of Cyprus' (Volume 2, pp. 193–205). See also Volume 5 for the translations that were included in *Last Poems* and previously unpublished translations.
78. *Exordial periods*: introductory sentences, from 'exordium', the rhetorical term for the introductory section of a discourse, while 'periods' here refers to sentences with a rhetorical or ornamental style.
79. *scald or gleeman*: the use of these archaic terms for an ancient Scandinavian poet and a professional entertainer or minstrel, respectively, reflects EBB's interest in the ballad

- revival associated with Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765); see 'The Book of the Poets', Volume 4, p. 508; and *BC*, vol. 6, p. 268.
80. *And if we labour ... after-dinner reverie*: Contrast EBB's assertion that she 'never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry; nor leisure, for the hour of the poet' (see Preface to the 1844 *Poems*, Volume 2, p. 570).
  81. *like the lark*: cf. Shelley's comparison of the poet to a lark in 'To a Sky-Lark' (1820), echoed above in l. 549.
  82. *oriflamme*: a sacred banner, usually with two or three points of red or orange silk attached to a lance.
  83. *God's future with my past*: cf. the similar imagery in EBB's sonnet 'Past and Future' (Volume 2, pp. 79–80), and the revision of this sonnet in sonnet XLII of 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' (Volume 2, pp. 477–8).
  84. *unforbade*: unforbidden; only citation of the word given in the *OED*.
  85. *My soul ... grew blind*: on blindness as a mark of poetic insight, and on EBB's comparison of herself to a 'blind poet' (*BC*, vol. 10, p. 133), see C. K. Jones, "'Some World's-Wonder in Chapel or Crypt': Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Disability," *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 16 (2002), pp. 21–35; and J. M. Rodas, 'Misappropriations: Hugh Stuart Boyd and the Blindness of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,' *Victorian Review*, 33:2 (2007), pp. 103–18.
  86. *Brocken mist*: a mist on the Brocken (in the Hartz Mountains of Saxony), a mountain famous for the 'Brocken spectre', an optical illusion in which magnified shadows of spectators are projected on the mists around the summit of the opposite mountain. Romantic literature (e.g., Goëthe's *Faust*) frequently refers to the Brocken and its spectre. In June 1842, longing for the ability to travel the Continent like John Kenyon, EBB expressed her strong desire to be 'in the heart of the Brockens' (*BC*, vol. 6, p. 23).
  87. *chrysopras*: a golden-green precious stone, the chrysoprasus of Revelation 21:20.
  88. *Her smile the last thing ... far as memory*: an image possibly parodied in the grin of the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); see A. Hayter, *Mrs. Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 98.
  89. *Jacob at the Bethel stone*: see Jacob's awakening after a divinely inspired revelatory dream in Genesis 28:10–19.
  90. *bowings*: possible meanings here include a bending or curving action, an inflexion of the voice and the movement of a bow on a stringed musical instrument.
  91. *CONCLUSION*: criticized in 1900 as 'structurally an over-elaboration of the theme' by Porter and Clarke (*CW*, vol. 2, p. xxiv); for opposing readings that explore the aesthetic functions of the poem's narrative framing, see M. Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 92–3, and S. Johnson, 'Aurora Leigh's Radical Youth: Derridean *Parergon* and the Narrative Frame in "A Vision of Poets"', *Victorian Poetry*, 44 (2006), pp. 425–44.
  92. *the chief Poet*: see the similar statement in 'The Dead Pan', l. 248 (Volume 2, p. 383), 'God Himself is the best Poet'; also see the earlier statement in RB's *Paracelsus* (1835), Part 2, ll. 648–9: 'God is the perfect poet, / Who in his person acts his own creations.'
  93. *maythorn*: i.e., a hawthorn; the *OED* cites this usage as one of only two.
  94. *Guido*: Guido Reni (1575–1642), once called 'the Divine Guido', was a prolific painter in the high Baroque style whose major works include frescoes commissioned for the Quirinal and Farnese palaces by Pope Paul V, as well as other works for the Borghese family (see *BC*, vol. 6, p. 289).