

Robert Browning

- 1812 Born, Camberwell (near London); Browning, Sr. clerk in a bank; a man of some means and considerable knowledge and taste; he collected a large library that Browning read voraciously
- 1820 Begins boarding school in Peckham, but mainly educated at home
- 1826 Writes his first poems, but destroys them
- 1828 Attends London University for one semester
- 1833-4 Anonymously publishes *Pauline*, imitative of Shelley; immensely interesting but disguised self-portrait; J. S Mill was going to review it, but found it too rawly subjective; his comments, inadvertently, were discovered by Browning who from then on worked to mute his own personality in his poems
- 1834 Travels to St. Petersburg with a diplomat, a friend of his Uncle.
- 1835 *Paracelsus* essentially a series of monologues spoken by the revered Swiss alchemist and friends on a key theme: the ideal must be located in the actual; establishes Browning's reputation as a significant new poet
- 1837 *Strafford* a play, published and produced; like Tennyson (and other Victorian poets), Browning put much, largely fruitless, effort into writing poetic drama for the stage
- 1838 Takes his first trip to Italy in order to complete *Sordello*, which receives critical condemnation when published in 1840. Jane Carlyle, for example, declared she had read through the whole thing and had never worked out whether *Sordello* was a man, a city or a book. Nevertheless, the poem remains a remarkable philosophical epic
- 1841 First of separately published pamphlets under general title of *Bells and Pomegranates*. The first number is *Pippa Passes*, a dramatic poem of great charm, much the most accessible of Browning's writings to this point
- 1842 The third in the same series, entitled *Dramatic Lyrics*, which includes "My Last Duchess." Elizabeth Barrett, already a famous poet, publishes a complimentary article on RB in the prestigious journal, *The Athenaeum*.
- 1843 The fifth of *Bells and Pomegranates* is *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* published and produced. Second visit to Italy 1843
- 1845 Publishes *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (*Be²P*, no.vii), a brilliant volume Begins his correspondence Elizabeth Barrett: "...I do, as I say, love [your] books with all my heart -- and I love you too."

- 1846 Completes his series *Bells and Pomegranates* with the plays *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*. Secretly marries Elizabeth against her father's wishes; they take up residence in Florence.
- 1849 After several miscarriages, Elizabeth gives birth to their only child, always known as Pen
- 1850 *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*. Long, convoluted dramatic poems that express some of Browning's most powerful religious thoughts and convictions, centering, ultimately, on the omnipotence and omnipresence of Christ's divinity and the divine power and work of love. Meanwhile, EBB publishes an enlarged edition of her 1844 *Poems*, including the love poems she wrote for her husband, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.
- 1851 Forms friendships with other artists like Rossetti, Kingsley, Tennyson, and later Arnold; admires Tennyson, but, like Arnold, distrusts Tennyson's melodic style and noble gestures (e.g. the *Idylls*)
- 1852 writes his critical introduction for a proposed edition of Shelley's letters. The Brownings return to England for one of their short visits. They spend considerable time in Paris during 1851-1853
- 1855 *Men and Women*. A landmark in English poetry, but not well-received. (In a heart-felt letter of 1856, Thomas Carlyle told him: "you are dreadfully difficult to understand.")
- 1861 EBB dies after a long illness. Robert and Pen return to live in London
- 1864 *Dramatis Personae*
- 1867 awarded an Oxford Master of Arts degree and an honorary fellowship at Balliol
- 1868- RB's astounding creativity exhibited in a six-volume collection of his poems, including *Pauline*, now heavily revised. In addition, *The Ring and the Book*, Browning's masterpiece in the view of many, is published in four volumes from November through February
- 1869
- 1871 *Balustion's Adventures*
- 1872 *Fifine at the Fair*
- 1873 *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*
- 1875 *Aristophanes' Apology: Including a Transcript from Euripides, Being the last of Balaustion*
- 1877 *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus* (Browning's translation)
- 1878 Browning and his sister, Sarianna, tour Italy. First visit since death of EBB
- 1879 *Dramatic Idylls, First Series*
- 1880 *Dramatic Idylls, Second Series* published in response to the public's affectionate reception of the first
- 1881 Browning Society established in London. Holds meetings for discussions of Browning's works; numerous chapters founded in Europe and America
- 1887 *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day*
- 1889 dies in Venice; buried in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner

“ His voice sounds loudest, and also clearest, for the things that. . . we like best—the fascination of faith, the acceptance of life, the respect for its mysteries, the endurance of its charges, the vitality of the will, the validity of character, the beauty of action, the seriousness, above all, of the great human passion. If Browning had spoken for us in no other way, he ought to have been made . . . a classic, on account of the extraordinary beauty of his treatment of the special relation between man and woman. It is a complete and splendid picture of the matter, which somehow places it at the same time in the region of conduct and responsibility.”

Henry James