

however, the laborious methods of steel engraving, preferring the freer processes of etching, drawing, painting, and wood engraving. Upon winning an important prize in 1833 from the Society of Arts for *John Gilpin*, an etching for a poem by Cowper, Browne left Finden's to work on his own. In 1836 he was commissioned to illustrate Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*, succeeding Robert Seymour and R. W. Buss, both prominent artists, and winning out over Thackeray, who had also applied for the job. He hit the mark at once with "First appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller." Browne was twenty at the time and Dickens was twenty-four.

Critics disagree about whether Browne's illustrations, in addition to expressing the author's intentions, offer independent interpretations. His great skill as an illustrator, however, is beyond dispute. Particularly notable are his strong characterizations and striking tonalities, and his use of emblematic details, grotesquerie, and visual parallelism of structures. His work was highly sought by publishers until 1867, when he had a stroke. In 1878 he was awarded an annuity by the Royal Academy.

SUZANNE GRAVER

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BROWNING, ELIZABETH BARRETT (1806-1861)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a significant Victorian poet whose work was marked by bold thematic range, stylistic innovation, and empathy for victims of social injustice.

The eldest of eleven children in a wealthy

landed family, Elizabeth Barrett lived until she was twenty at the family's country estate in Herefordshire. A vigorous autodidact, she taught herself Greek, composed poems at eight, and at thirteen wrote "The Battle of Marathon," a privately printed Homeric epic in four books. *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* appeared anonymously in 1826. A riding accident injured her spine when she was fifteen, and a ruptured blood vessel further limited her activities at twenty-two. The family suffered financial reversals after 1832, and moved first to Sidmouth and then to London. In 1833 Barrett published a translation of *Prometheus Bound*, and in 1838 *The Seraphim and Other Poems*, her first signed volume and a popular success. *The Seraphim* resembles Tennyson's 1832 *Poems* in its fluid versification, exotic settings, and high valuation of the poet's social role. Its rewriting of Christian myth and the celebration of the love of mother for child ("The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus," "Isobel's Child") anticipate aspects of her later work.

Barrett's 1844 *Poems* established her among the foremost poets of her generation. Its opening work, "A Drama of Exile," inverts biblical and Miltonic accounts of the Fall, and casts Eve as a redemptress whose noble spirit and future motherhood foreshadow later human salvation. The 1844 *Poems* also included several ballads, among them "Lady Geraldine's Courtship"; a tribute to George Sand; and "The Cry of the Children," a denunciation of child labor.

Her correspondence with Robert Browning began the next year; she was then almost forty, and he was an impecunious thirty-three-year-old author of three little-read volumes of poetry. In defiance of her father, she secretly married Browning and eloped to Florence, Italy, where they lived for the next fifteen years. She bore a son, Robert Weidemann, in 1849.

Her next volume of *Poems*, which appeared in 1850, included "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," a painfully empathetic inversion of her favorite theme of mother love, and the better-known *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, written during her courtship. Her chronicle of the healing effects of growing love influenced several later Victorian sonnet sequences, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The House of Life" and Christina Rossetti's "Monna Innominata."

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Barrett Browning's social sympathies deepened in *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851), which mourns the repression of Italian Nationalism by Pope Pius IX and Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany, and more strikingly in *Aurora Leigh* (1857), which she considered "the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered." In this verse novel, she mixed her characteristic idealism with wit, sarcasm, and incisive social analysis, qualities rare in early Victorian poetry. *Aurora Leigh* is remarkable for its analysis of female archetypes, scathing critique of bourgeois marriage and heedless wealth, sympathetic portrayal of the servant Miriam, and direct examination of the facts of prostitution and rape. Above all, however, it is distinguished by its final celebration of an explicitly egalitarian marriage. Despite its apparent iconoclasm, *Aurora Leigh* was widely read and admired, and went through nineteenth editions by 1885.

Barrett Browning's last works were *Poems Before Congress* (1860) and the posthumous *Last Poems* (1862). These include poetic treatments of slavery ("A Curse for a Nation"), seduction ("Lord Walter's Wife"), art ("A Musical Instrument"), and bereavement ("Mother and Poet").

After a period of critical neglect, the lyricism, iconoclasm, and stylistic innovation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry have begun to regain some of the serious attention they amply merit.

FLORENCE BOOS

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BROWNING, ROBERT (1812-1889)

Robert Browning's poetic achievement is the dramatic monologue, as in *Men and Women* (1855). Less popular than Tennyson, he gained distinction as a sage with *The Ring and the Book* (1868-1869). By liberating language from conventional stuffiness, anchoring images in everyday reality, and experimenting with new poetic forms, he anticipated and influenced modern movements in the poetry of Hardy, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Frost.

Born in Camberwell, south of London, Browning learned Latin and Greek from his bibliophile father and piety, love of nature, and music from his Nonconformist mother; both encouraged his poetry. He read his name in Elizabeth Barrett's *Poems* (1844) and first wrote to her on January 10, 1845, declaring "I do . . . love these books with all my heart—and I love you too." He saw her in May; they were clandestinely married on September 12, 1846 and a week later eloped, eventually settling in Florence. After her death in 1861, Browning returned to England where he gradually reentered society.

The anonymous *Pauline* (1833) sold not a copy; *Paracelsus* (1835) and the notoriously difficult *Sordello* (1840) fared a little better. Six plays (1837-1846) failed, but gradually Browning found his medium in the miniature dramatic scene, first brilliantly in *Pippa Passes* (1841). *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) contained fourteen poems; eight are still standard favorites, including "My Last Duchess" (originally "Italy"), presenting sensational incidents in sharp detail as smouldering passions strain beneath the verse. Browning praised Elizabeth Barrett's directness in his second letter to her: "You speak out, you—I only make men & women speak—give you truth