

Robert Browning (1812-1889)
Selections from *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842)

“Evelyn Hope”

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead!	1
Sit and watch by her side an hour.	
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;	
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,	
Beginning to die too, in the glass;	5
Little has yet been changed, I think:	
The shutters are shut, no light may pass	
Save two long rays through the hinge’s chink.	
Sixteen years old when she died!	
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;	10
It was not her time to love; beside,	
Her life had many a hope and aim,	
Duties enough and little cares,	
And now was quiet, now astir,	
Till God’s hand beckoned unawares, —	15
And the sweet white brow is all of her.	
Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?	
What, your soul was pure and true,	
The good stars met in your horoscope,	
Made you of spirit, fire and dew —	20
And, just because I was thrice as old	
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,	
Each was naught to each, must I be told?	
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?	
No, indeed! for God above	25
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,	
And creates the love to reward the love:	
I claim you still, for my own love’s sake!	
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,	
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:	30
Much is to learn, much to forget	
Ere the time be come for taking you.	

But the time will come,—at last it will,
 When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
 In the lower earth, in the years long still, 35
 That body and soul so pure and gay?
 Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
 And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
 And what you would do with me, in fine,
 In the new life come in the old life's stead. 40

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
 Given up myself so many times,
 Gained me the gains of various men,
 Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
 Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope, 45
 Either I missed or itself missed me:
 And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
 What is the issue? Let us see!

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!
 My heart seemed full as it could hold; 50
 There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
 And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
 So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:
 See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
 There, that is our secret: go to sleep! 55
 You will wake, and remember, and understand. 56

“My Last Duchess”

FERRARA

THAT's my last Duchess painted on the wall, 1
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said 5
 “Fra Pandolf” by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) 10
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps 15
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast, 25
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill 35
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
 E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; 45
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense 50
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, 55
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me! 56