

Browning. Wilde's joke may help us understand Browning's relationship to the writers of his era. For if Browning seems out of step with other Victorian poets, he is by no means out of step with his contemporaries in prose. The grotesque, which plays such a prominent role in the style and subject matter of Carlyle and Dickens and in the aesthetic theories of John Ruskin, is equally prominent in Browning's verse:

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!  
 Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.  
 Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,  
 Stinking and savory, smug and gruff.

Like Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34), these lines from "Holy-Cross Day" (1855) present a situation of grave seriousness with noisy jocularly. It was fitting that Browning and Carlyle remained good friends, even though the elder writer kept urging Browning to give up verse in favor of prose.

The link between Browning and the Victorian prose writers is not limited to style. With the later generation of Victorian novelists, George Eliot, George Meredith, and Henry James, Browning shares a central preoccupation. Like Eliot in particular, he was interested in exposing the devious ways in which our minds work and the com-

plex stress lay on incidents in the development of a human life is worth study." His psychological insights can be readily seen in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (1845) and "Andrea del Sarto." These are spoken monologues, not inner monologues in the sense that the insight into the workings of the mind is similarly acute. The lines often follow the rapid shifts of the speaker's mental processes from one cluster of associations to another. A further challenge for the reader is to identify what has been left out. As was remarked in a review by Ernest Dowson, Browning's "masterpieces in verse" demonstrate "the tact of omission." "My Last Duchess," he added, "is

in many ways a forerunner of twentieth-century literature should not be forgotten. Its historicism. Energy is the most characteristic aspect of his work. As an Englishman Turgenev compared Browning's handshake to an electric shock. Hopkins described Browning as "a man bouncing up and down full of bread and cheese and saying that he meant to stand firm." The buoyancy imparts a creative vitality to all of Browning's

### Porphyria's Lover<sup>1</sup>

The rain set early in tonight,  
 The sullen wind was soon awake,  
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
 And did its worst to vex the lake:  
 5 I listened with heart fit to break.  
 When glided in Porphyria; straight  
 She shut the cold out and the storm,  
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
 10 Which done, she rose, and from her form

1. One of a pair of monologues originally published as "Madhouse Cells," a title that emphasized the speaker's abnormal state of mind.

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
 And, last, she sat down by my side  
 15 And called me. When no voice replied,  
 She put my arm about her waist,  
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
 And all her yellow hair displaced,  
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
 20 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,  
 Murmuring how she loved me—she  
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,  
 To set its struggling passion free  
 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,  
 25 And give herself to me forever.  
 But passion sometimes would prevail,  
 Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain  
 A sudden thought of one so pale  
 For love of her, and all in vain:  
 30 So, she was come through wind and rain.  
 Be sure I looked up at her eyes  
 Happy and proud; at last I knew  
 Porphyria worshiped me: surprise  
 Made my heart swell, and still it grew  
 35 While I debated what to do.  
 That moment she was mine, mine, fair,  
 Perfectly pure and good: I found  
 A thing to do, and all her hair  
 In one long yellow string I wound  
 40 Three times her little throat around,  
 And strangled her. No pain felt she;  
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.  
 As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
 I warily oped her lids: again  
 45 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.  
 And I untightened next the tress  
 About her neck; her cheek once more  
 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:  
 I propped her head up as before,  
 50 Only, this time my shoulder bore  
 Her head, which droops upon it still:  
 The smiling rosy little head,  
 So glad it has its utmost will,  
 That all it scorned at once is fled,  
 55 And I, its love, am gained instead!  
 Porphyria's love: she guessed not how  
 Her darling one wish would be heard.  
 And thus we sit together now,  
 And all night long we have not stirred,  
 60 And yet God has not said a word!