

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!

1834

1836, 1842

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

i

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flowerpots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood,¹ would not mine kill you!
5 What? your myrtle bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims—
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

2

At the meal we sit together:
io *Salve tibi!*² I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork crop: scarcely
*Dare we hope oak-galls,*³ I doubt:
15 *What's the Latin name for "parsley"?*
*What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?*⁴

3

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
20 And a goblet for ourself,

1. An oath (archaic).

2. Hail to thee! (Latin); i.e., "your health!" This and other speeches in italics in this stanza are the words of Brother Lawrence.

3. Abnormal outgrowths on oak trees, used for tanning.

4. Dandelion (19th-century use).

Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps⁰ *jaws*
Marked with L. for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

4
25 *Saint*, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
30 – Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?⁵
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

5
When he finishes refection,⁰ *dinner*
Knife and fork he never lays
35 Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange pulp –
In three sips the Arian⁶ frustrate;
40 While he drains his at one gulp.

6
Oh, those melons? If he's able
We're to have a feast! so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
45 How go on your flowers? None double?
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange! – And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

7
There's a great text in Galatians,⁷
so Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
55 Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?⁸

8
Or, my scrofulous French novel
On gray paper with blunt type!

5. Pirate of the Barbary Coast of northern Africa, renowned for fierceness and lechery.

6. Heretical follower of Arius (256–336), who denied the doctrine of the Trinity.

7. The speaker hopes to obtain Lawrence's damnation by luring him into a heresy when he may prove unable to interpret "Galatians" in an

unswervingly orthodox way. In Galatians 5:15–23 St. Paul specifies an assortment of "works of the flesh" that lead to damnation, which could make up a total of "twenty-nine" (line 51).

8. A heretic, a follower of Mani (3rd century), Persian religious leader.

Simply glance at it, you grovel
60 Hand and foot in Belial's⁰ gripe: *the devil's*
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

9

65 Or, there's Satan!—one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia⁹
70 We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine'*
'St, there's Vespers!² *Plena gratia.*
*Ave, Virgo!*³ Gr-r-r—you swine!

ca. 1839

1842

My Last Duchess'

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's² hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"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
io The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
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
is Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
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
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

9. The speaker would pledge his own soul to Satan in return for blasting Lawrence and his "rose-acacia," but the pledge would be so cleverly worded that the speaker would not have to pay his debt to Satan. There would be an escape clause ("flaw in the indenture") for himself.

1. Perhaps the opening of a mysterious curse against Lawrence.

2. Evening prayers.

3. Full of grace, Hail, Virgin! (Latin). The speaker's twisted state of mind may be reflected in

his mixed-up version of the prayer to Mary: "Ave, Maria, gratia plena."

1. The poem is based on incidents in the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy, whose first wife, Lucrezia, a young woman, died in 1561 after three years of marriage. Following her death, the duke negotiated through an agent to marry a niece of the Count of Tyrol. Browning represents the duke as addressing this agent.

2. Friar Pandolf, an imaginary painter.