

ROBERT BROWNING  
My Last Duchess

*Ferrara*<sup>3</sup>

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands<sup>4</sup>  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Frà 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  
10 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  
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
Frà 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  
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.  
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,  
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  
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
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  
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this

3. Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century, is the presumed speaker of this dramatic monologue, which is loosely based on historical events. The duke's first wife—whom he had married when she was fourteen—died under suspicious circumstances at seventeen, and he then negotiated through an agent (this poem's auditor) for the hand of the niece of the count of Tyrol in Austria.

4. Frà Pandolf is, like Claus (line 56), fictitious.

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
 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  
 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
 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  
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
 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,  
 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

1842

## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

### Kubla Khan

*Or, a Vision in a Dream*<sup>5</sup>

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
 A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
 Through caverns measureless to man  
 5 Down to a sunless sea.  
 So twice five miles of fertile ground  
 With walls and towers were girdled round:  
 And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills  
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
 10 And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.  
 But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
 Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!<sup>6</sup>  
 A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
 15 As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
 By woman wailing for her demon-lover!<sup>7</sup>  
 And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,

5. Coleridge said that he wrote this fragment immediately after waking from an opium dream and that after he was interrupted by a caller he was unable to finish the poem.

6. That is, from side to side beneath a cover of cedar trees.

7. In a famous and often-imitated German ballad, the lady Lenore is carried off on horseback by the specter of her lover and married to him at his grave.