

## From *Pippa Passes*<sup>2</sup>

### Song

The year's at the spring  
 And day's at the morn;  
 Morning's at seven;  
 The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
 The lark's on the wing; 5  
 The snail's on the thorn:  
 God's in his heaven—  
 All's right with the world!

## My Last Duchess<sup>3</sup>

### FERRARA

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<sup>4</sup> hands  
 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  
 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  
 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  
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20

## Notes

<sup>2</sup> *title* this song recurs throughout *Pippa Passes*. Pippa, a young girl, works in a silk mill and passes through Asolo, an Italian town near Venice. Each scene involves characters in crisis; as Pippa passes by their houses, she sings her song, an ironic comment on each event, influencing it in ways she does not comprehend. The poem is sometimes misread as a statement of Browning's easy optimism. First published in the first number of *Bells and Pomegranates* (April 1841).

<sup>3</sup> *title* the duke is based on Alfonso II, duke of Ferrara (1533–97), who married 14-year-old Lucrezia, daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–74) of Florence in 1558. She died in 1561, possibly a victim of poisoning. The duke renegotiated a second

marriage in 1565 with the niece of the Count of Tyrol (Barbara of Austria, 1539–72), using the count's emissary, Nikolaus Mardruz. First published in *Bells and Pomegranates*, No. III (Nov. 1842): *Dramatic Lyrics*. This poem was the first of a pair entitled "Italy and France," and was first titled "I. Italy"; in *Poems* (2 vols, 1849) it was given its present title. The other poem was "II. France," later titled "Count Gismond." Richard Howard (b. 1929), American poet and translator, published a sequel poem, "Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565" (in *Trappings* 2000).

<sup>4</sup> *Pandolf* an imaginary painter and brother of a religious order.

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<sup>5</sup> 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 pretence 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,<sup>6</sup> though,  
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, 55  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck<sup>7</sup> cast in bronze for me.

## Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister<sup>8</sup>

### I

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!  
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,

## Notes

<sup>5</sup> *favour* token of special regard, such as a ribbon, necklace, or locket.

<sup>6</sup> *Neptune* the Roman god of the sea (Gk. Poseidon), often depicted in a chariot drawn by sea-horses.

<sup>7</sup> *Claus of Innsbruck* an imaginary sculptor. Innsbruck was the capitol of the Tyrol in Austria, where the most famous

bronze sculptures are full-life statues adorning the tomb of Emperor Maximilian I that Browning had visited in 1838.

<sup>8</sup> *title* probably the cloister attached to the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (1279–1360), a church of the Dominican order of friars, and hence the speaker would be a Dominican. The largest chapel in the cloister is the

God's blood, would not mine kill you!  
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5  
 Oh, that rose has prior claims—  
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?  
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

## II

At the meal we sit together:  
*Salve tibi!*<sup>9</sup> I must hear 10  
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,  
 Sort of season, time of year:  
*Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely*  
*Dare we hope oak-galls,<sup>10</sup> I doubt:*  
*What's the Latin name for 'parsley'?*<sup>11</sup> 15  
 What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?<sup>12</sup>

## III

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,  
 Laid with care on our own shelf!  
 With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,  
 And a goblet for ourself, 20  
 Rinsed like something sacrificial  
 Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps—  
 Marked with L. for our initial!  
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

## IV

*Saint,*<sup>13</sup> forsooth! While brown Dolores 25  
 Squats outside the Convent bank  
 With Sanchicha, telling stories,  
 Steeping tresses in the tank,  
 Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,  
 —Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30  
 Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?<sup>14</sup>  
 (That is, if he'd let it show!)

## Notes

Spanish Chapel, so named when Eleonora di Toledo (1522–62), wife of Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–74), assigned it to her Spanish courtiers. It was decorated with frescoes by Andrea de Bonaiuto (1343–77). First published in *Bells and Pomegranates*, No. III (Nov. 1842; see n. 1). This poem, called "II. Cloister (Spanish)," was originally part of a pair titled "Camp and Cloister" and was grouped with "I. Camp (French)," later retitled (1849) "Incident of the French Camp."

<sup>9</sup> *Salve tibi* (Lat. greeting to you), conventional salutation used by monastics. The italics throughout indicate the words of Brother Lawrence.

<sup>10</sup> *oak-galls* fungous growths on oak leaves whose tannin is used in dyeing and making ink.

<sup>11</sup> *parsley* the Latin for parsley is *petroselinum*.

<sup>12</sup> *snout* (Lat. *rostrum porcinum*: sow thistle): a member of the dandelion family; in Greek *leontodon*: tooth of the lion; see also Proverbs 11: 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Saint* when the stem of the lily (a symbol for the Virgin Mary or purity; the symbol of Florence) breaks, Lawrence's brother-friar utters an oath, swearing by "Saint" somebody.

<sup>14</sup> *Barbary corsair* the Barbary (Berber) west coast of North Africa; home to sea-going pirates from the time of the crusades until the nineteenth century.

## V

When he finishes refection,  
 Knife and fork he never lays  
 Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35  
 As I do, in Jesu's praise.  
 I the Trinity illustrate,  
 Drinking watered orange-pulp—  
 In three sips the Arian<sup>15</sup> frustrate:  
 While he drains his at one gulp. 40

## VI

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.  
 How go on your flowers? None double? 45  
 Not one fruit-sort can you spy?  
 Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,  
 Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

## VII

There's a great text in Galatians,<sup>16</sup>  
 Once you trip on it, entails 50  
 Twenty-nine distinct damnations,  
 One sure, if another fails:  
 If I trip him just a-dying,  
 Sure of heaven as sure can be,  
 Spin him round and send him flying 55  
 Off to hell, a Manichee?<sup>17</sup>

## VIII

Or, my scrofulous French novel<sup>18</sup>  
 On grey paper with blunt type!  
 Simply glance at it, you grovel  
 Hand and foot in Belial's<sup>19</sup> gripe: 60

## Notes

<sup>15</sup> *Arian* follower of fourth-century heretic Arius, who denied the Trinity by asserting that the Son was created by and was subordinate to the Father.

<sup>16</sup> *Galatians* see Galatians 5: 19–21, a list of seventeen sins (not twenty-nine).

<sup>17</sup> *Manichee* follower of third-century Persian prophet Manes, who held that the world was the site of the battle between equal forces of good and evil. The sect spread widely and was attacked by St Augustine in *Against the Manichees* (397); hence, a general term for heretic.

<sup>18</sup> *novel* sensationalism of some French novels when Browning was publishing, such as Théophile Gautier's

*Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). Here it is depicted as having salacious illustrations.

<sup>19</sup> *Belial* (Heb. worthless, wicked), a biblical demon (Deuteronomy 13: 13; and 2 Corinthians 6: 15), one of the princes of hell who seizes lost souls; last of the fallen angels who becomes one of the princes of hell in *Paradise Lost* (l. 490–505). Four such demons (see "Satan" in stanza IX) are painted on the altar wall in the Spanish Chapel, lamenting as Christ calls the dead from Limbo where they have been waiting for him.

If I double down its pages  
 At the woeful sixteenth print,  
 When he gathers his greengages,  
 Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

## IX

Or, there's Satan!—one might venture 65  
 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-acacia  
 We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine*<sup>20</sup> ... 70  
 'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ*  
*Ave, Virgo!*<sup>21</sup> Gr-r-r—you swine!

The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church<sup>22</sup>

## ROME, 15–

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!<sup>23</sup>  
 Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?  
 Nephews—sons<sup>24</sup>mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well—  
 She, men would have to be your mother once,  
 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! 5  
 What's done is done, and she is dead beside,  
 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,  
 And as she died so must we die ourselves,  
 And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.  
 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie 10

## Notes

<sup>20</sup> *Hy, Zy, Hine* meaning uncertain: perhaps the sound of vesper bells calling to evening prayer, or a medieval curse.

<sup>21</sup> *Virgo* the beginning of the "Hail Mary," the archangel Gabriel's greeting to Mary (Luke 1: 28). The poem's Latin means "full of grace, hail O Virgin," reversing the biblical order.

<sup>22</sup> *title* St Prassede (Lat. Praxedes) was a second-century virgin, the daughter of St Pudens, reputedly converted by St Paul. The basilica housing her remains was built by Pope St Paschal I (d. 824) in 822 on the site of St Praxed's home, according to Murray's nineteenth-century guidebook, a site of peace and security for persecuted martyrs (see lines 13–14). It is decorated with ninth-century mosaics. Although the tomb in the poem is not modelled on one existing tomb, three in the church have features that Browning's bishop orders: the wall-tomb of the Santacroce family (originally a floor tomb) has columns supporting an arch and bas-relief angels over a black basalt sarcophagus (53–54); the tomb of Cardinal Ancherio (Pantaléon Anchier de Troyes, 1210–86), by Arnolfo di

Cambio (c.1240–1310), depicts his recumbent effigy in marble, dressed in mass-vestments, lying on his sarcophagus, held up by seven columns at the front and one at the head and foot (27), covered with a sculpted shroud (89); and the sepulchre of Cardinal Alain Cetine de Taillebour is decorated with classical and Christian motifs, including a tabernacle with a relief of St Praxed (56–62). Browning visited the church in the autumn of 1844. First published in *Hood's Magazine* (Mar. 1845) as "The Tomb at St. Praxed's"; retitled in *Bells and Pomegranates No. VII: Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1849), and eventually placed in the second edition of *Men and Women in Poetical Works* (1863).

<sup>23</sup> *vanity* Ecclesiastes 1: 2; spoken like a text at the beginning of a sermon. Normally deathbed addresses are commendations, occasions of repentance, and exhortations to amended life, as in John Donne's "Death's Duell" (1631).

<sup>24</sup> *sons* clergy, including bishops, were supposed to be celibate, though many, including popes, had illegitimate children.