

ROBERT BROWNING

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was born in London to wealthy family. His education consisted of private tutoring and attendance at the University of London. *Pauline* (1838) was his first published poetry; his early work showed his interest in history (particularly the Italian Renaissance) as well as human psychology. He was a key figure in the development of the dramatic monologue, a first person narrative poem in which the speaker (often unwittingly) reveals some essential conflict or character.

He married Elizabeth Barrett, also a poet, in 1846. Their courtship began with lengthy correspondence—apparently they “fell in love” before even meeting each other. They moved to Italy for the sake of her health; she died in 1861. In addition to his shorter work, he also wrote the epic *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), a poetic work in twelve volumes each of which is a dramatic monologue by differing informants recounting their version of a late Renaissance murder.

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHEENT TO AIX"¹²

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern³, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths⁴ tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right⁵,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear:
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

- 1 Not based on a historical incident, the poem does include with actual cities, Ghent in Belgium and Aix (or Aachen) in neighboring Germany. Lokern, Boom, Duffeld, Mecheln, Aershot, Hasselt, Looz, Tongres, Dalhem are all towns on the route.
- 2 The poem is written in anapestic meter (two short syllables followed by a long) to imitate the horses' gallop.
- 3 An external gate, usually hidden, in a fortress.
- 4 Strap for holding the saddle in place.
- 5 A demipique is a low-pommeled military saddle; cheek-strap refers to the part of the bridle running along the side of the horse's head.

At Aershot up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare through the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland, at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon⁶
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
Your Roos⁷ galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
We'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

"How they'll greet us!"—and all in a moment his roan⁸
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

Then I cast loose my buff-coat,⁹ each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length, into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

And all I remember is,—friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses¹⁰ voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

- 6 *Aye and anon* literally means “ever” and “soon” or frequently.
- 7 Rose, in English, perhaps referring to the red or bay color of its coat.
- 8 A horse coat usually chestnut or bay with white or grey markings.
- 9 A short-sleeve coat, made of heavy material such as buffalo skin that acted as a bullet-proof vest.
- 10 The merchant class or leaders of the town.

SONGS FROM PIPPA PASSES¹¹

Day!
 Faster and more fast,
 O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
 Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim.
 Where spurting and suppressed it lay,
 For not a froth-flake touched the rim
 Of yonder gap in the solid gray
 Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
 But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
 Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

All service ranks the same with God:
 If now, as formerly He trod
 Paradise, His presence fills
 Our earth, each only as God wills
 Can work--God's puppets, best and worst,
 Are we: there is no last nor first.
 The year's at the spring
 And day's at the morn:
 Morning's at seven;
 The hillside's dew-pearled;
 The lark's on the wing;
 The snail's on the thorn:
 God's in His heaven--
 All's right with the world!

PROSPICE

Fear death? to feel the fog in my throat,
 The mist in my face,
 When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
 I am nearing the place,
 The power of the night, the press of the storm,
 The post of the foe;
 Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
 Yet the strong man must go:
 For the journey is done and the summit attained,
 And the barriers fall, 10
 Though a battle's to fight ere the *guerdon* be gained, *gold*
 The reward of it all.
 I was ever a fighter, so--one fight more,
 The best and the last!

I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
 And bade me creep past,
 No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
 The heroes of old,
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's *arrears* *debts*
 Of pain, darkness, and cold. 20

11 Pippa is the lead character in the play "Pippa Passes"; she is a young girl living in the crime-ridden poverty of London, but, like Blake's speakers in "Songs of Innocence," seems unaware of the evils around her.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
 The black minute's at end,
 And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
 Shall dwindle, shall blend,
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
 Then a light, then thy breast,
 O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
 And with God be the rest!

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA¹²

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's¹³ hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 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)¹⁴ 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
 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.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour 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
 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.¹⁵ Who'd stoop to blame

12 "My Last Duchess" is a classic dramatic monologue whose speaker is the fictional Duke of Ferrara, in Italy, who reveals more than he intends and poses as many questions as it answers: Has he had the Duchess murdered? Why did he resent her? Why did he marry her in the first place? What is the role of art in this poem?

13 Fictional "Frater Pandolf," an artist-monk.

14 A measure of his control of his wife and his artifact?

15 Was the Duke jealous? If so, of what?

This sort of trifling?¹⁶ Even had you skill
 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
 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;
 Then all smiles stopped together.¹⁷ There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you¹⁸ rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;¹⁹
 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,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck²⁰ cast in bronze for me!

RABBI BEN EZRA²¹

Grow old along with me!
 The best is yet to be,
 The last of life, for which the first was made:
 Our times are in His hand
 Who saith "A whole I planned,
 Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

Not that, amassing flowers,
 Youth sighed, "Which rose make ours,
 Which lily leave and then as best recall!"

Not that, admiring stars,
 It yearned "Nor *Jove*, nor *Mars*; *the planets Jupiter and Mars*
 Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

16 The Duke himself.

17 Is it unclear whether this means he has had her killed or simply killed her joyful nature. At one point Browning admitted that the Duke indeed had killed the Duchess; at another he said the Duke simply sent her off to a nunnery.

18 Here we learn for the first time that the Duke is speaking to an agent of the "Count" whose daughter the Duke is "plotting" to marry? If you were the agent how would you report back to the Count about the Duke?

19 The Duke wants the money for dowry—but instead of being straightforward about it, he uses serpentine logic and sentence structure (a revelation his "snaky" character?).

20 A fictional sculptor—his Neptune taming a seahorse seems possibly garish and shows the Duke's lack of aesthetic judgment (he's more interested in its "rarity"/value than its beauty). Also it highlights his interest in power and control.

21 Abraham Ben Meir Ben Ezra, (1090-1168? C.E. In Toledo, Spain) was a philosopher, astronomer, physician, and poet.

Not for such hopes and fears
 Annulling youth's brief years,
 Do I *remonstrate*: folly wide the mark! *take issue with*
 Rather I prize the doubt
 Low kinds exist without,
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
 Were man but formed to feed 20
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
 Such feasting ended, then
 As sure an end to men;
 Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed
 beast?

Rejoice we are allied
 To That which doth provide
 And not partake, *effect* and not receive! *make happen*
 A spark disturbs our clod;
 Nearer we hold of God.
 Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe. 30

Then, welcome each rebuff
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
 Be our joys three-parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!²²

For thence,--a *paradox* *contradiction*
 Which comforts while it mocks,--
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
 What I aspired to be, 40
 And was not, comforts me:
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.²³

What is he but a brute
 Whose flesh has soul to suit,
 Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
 To man, propose this test--
 Thy body at its best,
 How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

Yet gifts should prove their use:
 I own the Past profuse 50
 Of power each side, perfection every turn:
 Eyes, ears took in their dole,
 Brain treasured up the whole;
 Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn?"

Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
 I see the whole design,

22 The speaker states that we learn more from suffering than pleasure, more from giving than taking. Do you agree?

23 In other words, I'm glad that I didn't turn out to be what I wanted to be—because I wouldn't have developed spiritually and would have "sunk" like a tone in a musical scale.

I, who saw power, see now love perfect too: Perfect I call Thy plan: Thanks that I was a man! Maker, remake, complete,--I trust what Thou shall do!"	60	The Master work, and catch Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.
For pleasant is this flesh; Our soul, in its rose-mesh Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest: Would we some prize might hold To match those <i>manifold</i> Possessions of the brute,--gain most, as we did best!	<i>many</i>	As it was better, youth Should strive, thro' acts <i>uncouth</i> , <i>unrefined</i> 110 Toward making, than repose on aught found made: ²⁴ So, better, age, exempt From strife, should know, than tempt Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death, nor be afraid!
Let us not always say, "Spite of this flesh to-day I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!" As the bird wings and sings, Let us cry "All good things Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"	70	Enough now, if the Right And Good and Infinite Be named here, ²⁵ as thou callest thy hand thine own, With knowledge absolute, Subject to no dispute From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone. 120
Therefore I summon age To <i>grant youth's heritage</i> , <i>admit youth's value</i> Life's struggle having so far reached its term: Thence shall I pass, approved A man, for aye removed From the developed brute; a God tho' in the <i>germ</i> .	<i>seed</i>	Be there, for once and all, Severed great minds from small, Announced to each his station in the Past! Was I, the world arraigned, Were they, my soul disdained, Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!
And I shall thereupon Take rest, ere I be gone Once more on my adventure brave and new: Fearless and unperplexed, When I wage battle next, What weapons to select, what armour to indue.	80	Now, who shall arbitrate? Ten men love what I hate, Shun what I follow, slight what I receive; Ten, who in ears and eyes 130 Match me: we all surmise, They, this thing, and I, that: whom shall my soul believe?
Youth ended, I shall try My gain or loss thereby; Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold: And I shall weigh the same, Give life its praise or blame: Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.	90	Not on the vulgar mass Called "work," must sentence pass, Things done, that took the eye and had the price; O'er which, from level stand, The low world laid its hand, Found straight way to its mind, could value in a <i>trice</i> : <i>instant</i>
For, note when evening shuts, A certain moment cuts The deed off, calls the glory from the gray: A whisper from the west Shoots--"Add this to the rest, Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."		But all, the world's coarse thumb And finger failed to plumb, 140 So passed in making up the main account: All instincts immature, All purposes unsure, That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:
So, still within this life, Tho' lifted o'er its strife, Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last, "This rage was right <i>i' the main</i> , <i>for the most part</i> 100 That <i>acquiescence</i> vain: <i>passive consent</i> The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."		Thoughts hardly to be packed Into a narrow act, Fancies that broke thro' language and escaped: All I could never be, All, men ignored in me, This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped. 150
For more is not reserved To man, with soul just nerved To act to-morrow what he learns to-day: Here, work enough to watch		Ay, note that Potter's wheel, ²⁶ <hr/> 24 It is proper that Youth should attempt to create things, even if crude. 25 Perhaps a reference to ancient Jewish tradition of not speaking the name of God. 26 See <i>the Bible: Isaiah Ch. 54 and Jeremiah Ch. 18i</i>) as well

That metaphor! and feel
 Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,--
 Thou, to whom fools propound,
 When the wine makes its round,
 "Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

Fool! All that is, at all,
 Lasts ever, past recall;
 Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
 What entered into thee, 160
That was, is, and shall be:
 Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee mid this dance
 Of *plastic* circumstance, *mold-able*
 This Present, thou forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
 Machinery just meant
 To give thy soul its bent,
 Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

What tho' the earlier grooves
 Which ran the laughing loves 170
 Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
 What tho' about thy rim,
Scull-things in order grim *skull?*
 Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

Look not thou down but up!
 To uses of a cup
 The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
 The new wine's foaming flow,
 The Master's lips a-glow!
 Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's
 wheel? 180

But I need, now as then,
 Thee, God, who mouldest men!
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
 Did I,--to the wheel of life
 With shapes and colours *rife*, *overflowing*
 Bound dizzily,--mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst.

So take and use Thy work,
 Amend what flaws may lurk,
 What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
 My times be in Thy hand! 190
 Perfect the cup as planned!
 Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

(See Edgar's song in "Lear.")²⁷

as in medieval Persian poet Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, first translated into English in 1859 by Edward FitzGerald.
 27 In *King Lear*, Gloucester's son Edgar pretends to be "Mad Tom" and sings a nonsense "Child Rowland to the dark tower came,/ His word was still 'Fie, foh, and fum/I smell

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
 That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
 Askance to watch the working of his lie
 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
 Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
 What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
 All travellers who might find him posted there,
 And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh 10
 Would break, what crutch '*gin write* my epitaph *would write*
 For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

If at his counsel I should turn aside
 Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
 Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
 I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
 Nor hope rekindling at the end *descried*. *saw*
 So much as gladness that some end might be.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
 What, with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope 20
 Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
 With that *obstreperous* joy success would bring,-- *loud*
 I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
 My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

As when a sick man very near to death
 Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
 The tears, and takes the farewell of each friend,
 And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
 Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,
 "And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;")²⁸ 30

While some discuss if near the other graves
 Be room enough for this, and when a day
 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
 With care about the banners, scarves, and *staves*: *clubs*
 And still the man hears all, and only craves
 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
 So many times among "The Band"--to wit,
 The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed 40
 Their steps--that just to fail as they, seemed best,
 And all the doubt was now--should I be fit?

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,

the blood of a British man."
 ("*King Lear*," Act 3, scene 4).

28 Since I am dying, there's no use crying about the latest blow.

That hateful cripple, out of his highway
 Into the path he pointed. All the day
 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray. *stray (Childe Roland)*

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two, 50
 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
 O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; gray plain all round:
 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound,
 I might go on; naught else remained to do.

So, on I went. I think I never saw
 Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
 For flowers--as well expect a cedar grove!
 But cockle, spurge,²⁹ according to their law
 Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
 You'd think; a burr had been a treasure trove. 60

No! penury, inertness, and grimace,
 In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
 Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
 "It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
 'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
 Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free." *burn up*

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
 Above its mates, the head was chopped; the *bents* *stalks*
 Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to balk³⁰ 70
 All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
 Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.³¹

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
 In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
 Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
 One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
 Stood stupefied, however he came there:
 Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
 With that red gaunt and *colloped* neck a-strain, *ridged* 80
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
 I never saw a brute I hated so;
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.³²

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
 I asked one *draught* of earlier, happier sights, *draft/drink*

29 Cockles are a common weed; spurge often hap a poisonous sap.

30 Dock is a form of greens, sometimes used in salads; *swarth* indicates unnatural blackness. To *balk* is to prevent.

31 That is, living according to their lower passions ("pashing their life out") not their more nobler faculties.

32 Is the speaker's lack of empathy with the "brute" fair?

Ere fitly I could hope to play my part. *Before ably*
 Think first, fight afterwards--the soldier's art:
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights. 90

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face³³
 Beneath its *garniture* of curly gold, *finery*
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

Giles then, the soul of honour--there he stands
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
 What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
 Good--but the scene shifts--faugh! what hangman hands 100
 Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

Better this present than a past like that;
 Back therefore to my darkening path again!
 No sound, no sight so far as eye could strain.
 Will the night send a *howlet* or a bat? *owl*
 I asked: when something on the dismal flat
 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.³⁴

A sudden little river crossed my path
 As unexpected as a serpent comes. 110
 No sluggish tide *congenial* to the glooms; *sympathetic*
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
 For the fiend's glowing hoof--to see the wrath
 Of its black eddy *bespate* with flakes and spumes. *spattered*

So petty, yet so spiteful! All along,
 Low scrubby *alders* kneeled down over it; *trees*
 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
 The river which had done them all the wrong,
 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. 120

Which, while I *forded*,--good saints, how I feared *crossed*
 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
 --It may have been a water-rat I speared,
 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.³⁵

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
 Now for a better country. Vain *presage!* *hope*
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank 130
 Soil to a *plash?* Toads in a poisoned tank, *slight splash*
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage--

33 A fellow knight, as is Giles, mentioned in the following stanza. Both have failed the quest.

34 Does Childe Roland's imagination color his perceptions?

35 Another example of Roland's hysteria? Can he be trusted to give an objective account of his "quest"?

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.³⁶
 What penned them there, with all the plain, to choose?
 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
 None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves³⁷ the Turk
 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

And more than that--a *furlong* on--why, there! *200 meters*
 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel, 140
 Or brake, not wheel--that harrow³⁸ fit to reel
 Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
 Of *Tophet's* tool, on earth left unaware, *Hell's*
 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
 Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
 Changes, and off he goes!³⁹) within a *rood*-- *quarter acre*
 Bog, clay, and rubble, sand, and stark black dearth. 150

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
 Broke into moss or substances like boils;
 Then came some palsied oak, a *cleft* in him *hole*
 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
 Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

And just as far as ever from the end,
 Naught in the distance but the evening, naught
 To point my footstep further! At the thought,
 A great black bird, Apollyon's⁴⁰ bosom-friend, 160
 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
 That brushed my cap--perchance the guide I sought.

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
 All round to mountains--with such name to grace
 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
 How thus they had surprised me,--solve it, you!⁴¹
 How to get from them was no clearer case.

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
 Of mischief happened to me, Gods knows when-- 170

36 Harsh enclosure.

37 The notion seems to be that Turks (Muslims) would pit
 Christian galley-slaves (oarsmen) against their Jewish
 counterparts for mere cruelty.

38 A farm instrument with sharp tines or wheels used to rake
 and level the ground before planting. Here, become a giant
 torture device.

39 Another sign of Roland's mental instability? He's quick to
 call another a fool and in general disgusted by all human
 folly, except, presumably, his own.

40 Apollyon is literally "the Destroyer" (*Revelation* 9:11)--also
 the name of a devil whom Christian must fight in John
 Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

41 You try to figure it out! Roland attacks the reader here.

In a bad dream, perhaps. Here ended, then,
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
 As when a trap shuts--you're inside the den.

Burningly it came on me all at once,
 This was the place! those two hills on the right,
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
 While, to the left, a tall scalped mountain ... Dunce,
 Dotard, a-dozing at the very *nonce*, *present*
 After a life spent training for the sight!⁴² 180

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.⁴³

Not see? because of night perhaps?--why, day
 Came back again for that! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled thro' a cleft:
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay, 190
 Chin upon hand, to see *the game at bay*, *the prey caught*
 "Now stab and end the creature--to the *heft!*"⁴⁴ *hilt*

Not hear?⁴⁵ when noise was everywhere! it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,--
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
 To view the last of me, a living frame 200
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn⁴⁶ to my lips I set, *fearless*
 And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"⁴⁷

42 All the preparation in the world does not equal actual
 experience.

43 The metaphor compares Roland's sudden arrival at the
 tower to that of a shipman sudden realization that he has run
 into a storm only as his boat's timbers "shiver."

44 Roland imagines the mountains (as giants) looking on with
 cruelty as they await his gruesome death (by stabbing--to
 the heft or hilt of the sword).

45 Again, Roland tries to bring the reader into his subjective
 imagination: you, reader, can't hear it?

46 An imaginary instrument like a trumpet.

47 It remains unclear who speaks the quotation and if it is a
 statement of success or failure. What is the result of Childe
 Roland's quest? What will happen next? By blowing his
 horn will he redeem those who have gone before or is it an
 act of futility (of which he may or may not be aware).