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 GHENT 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 postern¹, 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 girths¹ tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right²,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokern, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear:
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear:
'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

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 anon³
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
Your Roos⁴ 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,⁵ 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 sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And all I remember is,—friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground.

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 Aye and anon literally means "ever" and "soon" or frequently.
⁴ Rose, in English, perhaps referring to the red or bay color of its coat.
⁵ A horse coat usually chestnut or bay with white or grey markings.
⁶ A short-sleeve coat, made of heavy material such as buffalo skin that acted as a bullet-proof vest.
⁷ The merchant class or leaders of the town.
SONGS FROM PIPPA Passes

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,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
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.

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

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 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)
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
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,
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

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.
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?
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? 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. There she stands as if alive. Will’lt 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 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, taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

RABI BEN EZRA

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 is 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
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.

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!

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

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
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,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

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

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 manifold Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

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!"

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage, admit youth's value
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 germ.

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.

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.

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."

So, still within this life,
The' lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right 'i' the main, for the most part
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

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

The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

As it was better, youth
Should strive, thro' acts uncouth, unrefined
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!

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.

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!

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They, this thing, and I, that: whom shall my soul believe?

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 trice: instant
But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
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:

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

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,26

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 the Bible: Isaiah Ch. 54 and Jeremiah Ch. 18i) 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,
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
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What tho' about thy rim,
Scull-things in order grim
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?

But I need, now as then,
Thy, 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,
Bound dizzyly,--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!
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.")

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 pursued 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
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
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
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
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,--
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;")

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:
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
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."


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

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 *balk* 30
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*

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 face 33
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--laugh! 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;
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;
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*!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a *splash*? Toads in a poisoned tank, *slight splash*
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage--

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?
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"?
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when--
Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
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 harrow 18 fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
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!) 19) within a rood-- quarter acre
Bog, clay, and rubble, sand, and stark black dearth.

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
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's bosom-friend,
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!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when--
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,
After a life spent training for the sight!

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.

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

Not hear? 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
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."

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.