



O E M S

Part 2

Dramatic Monologue

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BROWNING

"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's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
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
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
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
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
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 that 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'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
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!

TENNYSON

"Ulysses" (1842)

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an agèd wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were

For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

 This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

 There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me—
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

ROSSETTI

"No Thank You, John" (1862)

I never said I loved you, John:

 Why will you tease me day by day,
And wax a weariness to think upon
 With always "do" and "pray"?

You know I never loved you, John;

 No fault of mine made me your toast:
Why will you haunt me with a face as wan
 As shows an hour-old ghost?

I dare say Meg or Moll would take

 Pity upon you, if you'd ask:
And pray don't remain single for my sake
 Who can't perform that task.

I have no heart?—Perhaps I have not;

 But then you're mad to take offence
That I don't give you what I have not got:
 Use your common sense.

Let bygones be bygones:

 Don't call me false, who owed not to be true:
I'd rather answer "No" to fifty Johns
 Than answer "Yes" to you.

Let's mar our pleasant days no more,

 Song-birds of passage, days of youth:
Catch at to-day, forget the days before:
 I'll wink at your untruth.

Let us strike hands as hearty friends;
 No more, no less; and friendship's good:
Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
 And points not understood

In open treaty. Rise above
 Quibbles and shuffling off and on:
Here's friendship for you if you like; but love,—
 No thank you, John.

ARNOLD

"Dover Beach" (1867)

The sea is calm tonight.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

LERNER

"Come to the Ball" (1956)

Come to the ball,
Oh, come to the ball,
It wouldn't be fair
To the men who'll be there
To deny them
All the dreams you'll supply them.
There even may be a dashing marquis
Who, feature by feature,
Will swear you're the creature
He always prayed for,
Single stayed for.
If you aren't there,
His complete despair
Will be painful to see.
So come to the ball with me.

Consider the lord
So frantically bored
He's leaving his kin
And becoming an In-
Dian lancer,
Hoping danger's the answer.
Your innocent glow
Will dazzle him so
Than glancing at you
Will restore his illu-
Sions and as he glances,
Farwell, lancers.
Should he die, alas,

At the Khyber Pass,
What a loss it would be,
So come to the ball with me.

I can see you now in a gown by Madame Worth,
When you enter ev'ry monocle will crash.
I can see you now, like a goddess come to earth,
I can hear the ladies' teeth begin to gnash.
Little chaps will wish they were Atlas,
A queen will want you for her son.
Portly men will wish they were fatless,
And the married men will wish they were Un.
What a triumph, through and through,
What a moment, what a coup.

And off by a wall,
Unnoticed by all,
A man with a smile
You could see for a mile
Will be standing,
His dimensions expanding.
The pride in his eyes
Will double their size,
As sweetly and neatly
You somehow completely
Electrify them,
Lorelei them.
Search the world around
There could not be found
Someone prouder than he,
So come to the ball with me.

SONDHEIM

"Could I Leave You?" (1971)

Leave you? Leave you?
 How could I leave you?
 How could I go it alone?
 Could I wave the years away
 With a quick goodbye?
 How do you wipe tears away
 When your eyes are dry?

Sweetheart, lover,
 Could I recover,
 Give up the joys I have known?
 Not to fetch your pills again
 Every day at five,
 Not to give those dinners for ten
 Elderly men
 From the U.N.—
 How could I survive?

Could I leave you
 And your shelves of the World's Best Books
 And the evenings of martyred looks,
 Cryptic sighs,
 Sullen glares from those injured eyes?
 Leave the quips with a sting, jokes with a sneer,
 Passionless lovemaking once a year?
 Leave the lies ill-concealed
 And the wounds never healed
 And the games not worth winning
 And—wait, I'm just beginning!

What, leave you, leave you,
How could I leave you?
What would I do on my own?
Putting thoughts of you aside
In the south of France,
Would I think of suicide?
Darling, shall we dance?

Could I live through the pain
On a terrace in Spain?
Would it pass? It would pass.
Could I bury my rage
With a boy half your age
In the grass? Bet your ass.
But I've done that already—or didn't you know, love?
Tell me, how could I leave when I left long ago, love?

Could I leave you?
No, the point is, could you leave me?
Well, I guess you could leave me the house,
Leave me the flat,
Leave me the Braques and Chagalls and all that.

You could leave me the stocks for sentiment's sake
And ninety percent of the money you make.
And the rugs
And the cooks—
Darling, you keep the drugs,
Angel, you keep the books.
Honey, I'll take the grand,
Sugar, you keep the spinet
And all of our friends and—

Just wait a goddam minute!

Oh,

Leave you? Leave you?

How could I leave you?

Sweetheart, I have to confess:

Could I leave you?

Yes.

Will I leave you?

Will I leave you?

Guess!

DUFFY

"Medusa" (1999)

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.

My bride's breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified?

Be terrified.
It's you I love,
perfect man, Greek God, my own;
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
from home.
So better be for me if you were stone.

I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebbly fell
to the ground.
I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down.

I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick

shattered a bowl of milk.
I looked at a snuffling pig,
a boulder rolled
in a heap of shit.

I stared in the mirror.
Love gone bad
showed me a Gorgon.
I stared at a dragon.
Fire spewed
from the mouth of a mountain.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.
Wasn't I beautiful
Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now.