

The New York Browning Society, Inc. Newsletter

Founded in 1907

Date Wednesday, May 14th 2025

Time 6:00– 7:30PM

Place Jefferson Market Library

425 Avenue of the Americas

Harry Miller – Hope for Young Poets

Winners of the 2025 Downey NYC HS

Awards for Poetic Excellence!



For nearly half a century, the New York Browning Society has championed young poets, providing a platform for emerging voices to share their work. This year, the tradition continues as talented high school poets take center stage at **Jefferson Market Library** on **Wednesday, May 14th** at 6pm.

Founded on the legacy of **Robert Browning**, a poet known for his profound exploration of human nature, dramatic monologues, and philosophical depth, the contest celebrates the enduring power of poetry to inspire, challenge, and connect us.

The winners of this year’s competition—selected from a diverse pool of students across New York City—will have the opportunity to present their work in a space that has long been a hub for literary and artistic exchange. Jefferson Market Library, with its rich history and vibrant programming, provides the perfect backdrop for this celebration of young talent. Our **2025 Downey NYC HS Awards for Poetic Excellence** are:

Soleil Ava Wizman – Hunter College HS
 Alexandra Anthony – The Mary Louis Academy
 Francesca Howard – The Beekman School
 Aisling Glancy – The Mary Louis Academy
 Gideon Facher – Xavier High School
 Alexei Varah – Hunter College HS



Harry Miller walked away from professional sports in part because of a sobering suicide attempt, & mainly because of his rejection of the machine that football has sadly become. He has chosen to start his new life as a writer and mental health advocate with an upcoming novel entitled “*With Bloody Teeth*”. His new book of poetry “*Manhattan! Manhattan!*” From Underground Books is out now! He addresses our Society with an earnest message of hope for our young poets!!





Remembering President Stephen Downey

Steve was that rare combination of athletic and poetic. He was the captain of Hamilton College's football team, which heralded an undefeated season in 1959, but he was equally proud of being President of both The Yeats International Theatre Festival and the New York Browning Society. His long career in public relations and speechwriting (for both the Clinton and Carter campaigns) took him from working for Taodoro Moscoso in Puerto Rico to Brown-Forman in Louisville Kentucky. In 2000 he produced the off-broadway production of *American Rhapsody* which starred his wife, KT Sullivan, and Mark Nadler.

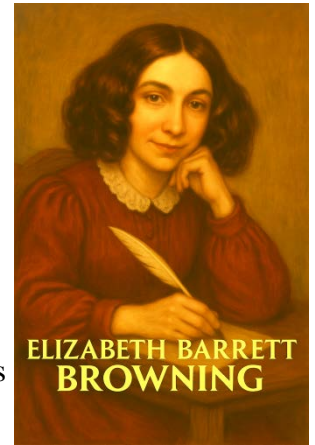
I first spoke with Stephen via email where I inquired about what the qualifications were to attend a New York Browning Society meeting, to which he cordially replied nothing more than an interest in literature and the works of Robert and/or Elizabeth Barrett Browning. How little I knew what I would be walking into in the winter of 2010 as I donned my best Italian suit and entered the portal of the National Arts Club. Filing into a cozy room with a lectern and the clear buzz of people and place and ideas mingling about at 1pm on a Wednesday, I knew I had arrived. It would change my life and usher me into this sacred world of the oldest literary society in NYC. I attended every meeting religiously, listening to professors, award winners, musicians, actors, poets, and scientists, I would strike up a true fast friendship with Steve, one that would evolve over the years and into great accomplishments for the Society.

Steve shared his grand idea for the HS Poetry Contest, he wanted to expand. The contest had only invited a handful of schools each year, & he thought it would be a great way for the Brownings to have even a greater outreach in the tapestry of NYC. Elizabeth Anne Socolow asked Steve if someone could take over the management of the contest, so Steve tapped me. He set me on a mission to engage as many Public, Private, and Parochial schools as we could. He made it clear that we wanted students from all walks of life to be able to participate. Year by year, it would expand, and now, we are inviting over 125+ schools in all of the 5 boroughs. Without his vision the contest would not been what it is today. He looked forward with pride each year, as he saw the joy of the students reading their award winning poems at our annual luncheon. On his passing, I was honored for us to have entitled the award after him. I hope this small gesture will help keep his memory alive! **"Out of your whole life give but a moment!"** from *Now* by Robert Browning

-James Kepple, President

Aurora Leigh on Writing

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one of the most celebrated poets of the Victorian era, was not only a master of verse but also a keen observer of the literary world. Her journey—from a precocious young writer to an internationally renowned poet—was marked by deep intellectual curiosity, rigorous self-education, and an unwavering belief in the power of words.



One poem that beautifully encapsulates her advice to young writers is "**Aurora Leigh**". This epic novel in verse explores themes of artistic integrity, perseverance, and the power of literature to shape society. In it, Browning emphasizes the importance of writing with conviction, embracing one's unique voice, and staying true to one's passion—values she herself championed.

One particularly striking passage from *Aurora Leigh* speaks to the heart of a writer's journey:

"The growing drama has outgrown such toys Of simulated stature, face, and speech: It also, peradventure, may outgrow The simulation of the painted scene, Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume, And take for a worthier stage the soul itself, Its shifting fancies and celestial lights, With all its grand orchestral silences To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds."

**Please Join us Wednesday May 14th 6pm
at the Jefferson Market Library
1st Floor Willa Cather Room
Congratulations to all of our Winning
Students we look forward to hearing
their work!**

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“Ah, but a man's reach should
exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?”
— Robert Browning

The New York Browning Society, Inc. Dues and Donation Form

Make checks payable to: New York Browning Society
Mail checks to James Kepple, President
227 West 149th Street, #6F; New York, NY 10039

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Comments and suggestions?