

The New York Browning Society, Inc. Newsletter

Founded in 1907

Date Wednesday, May 13th 2026

Time 6:00– 7:30PM

Place Jefferson Market Library

425 Avenue of the Americas

James Browning Kepple

Poetry's Revolution Status

**Winners of the 2026 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 13th** 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 **2026 Downey NYC HS Awards for Poetic Excellence** are:

Ria Shivam – Hunter College HS
Katerina Bala – James Madison HS
Justin Lee – Hunter College HS
Ninuola Osunmakinde – Brooklyn Friends School
Lilah Pfeiffer – Mary Louis Academy
Serenity Dingwall – Stuyvesant HS



*James Browning Kepple — President,
The New York Browning Society*

James Browning Kepple, poet, publisher, and longtime steward of the Browning Society's creative lineage, will deliver this year's keynote address. His work bridges the avant-garde and the classical, tracing the pulse of poetic revolution from the underground press to the modern classroom. In his remarks, Kepple will speak on the enduring necessity of poetry — how each generation redefines its voice, and how the act of writing remains a form of resistance, revelation, and renewal. His address will open the ceremony and set the tone for an evening devoted to the power of young poets and the living tradition they inherit.

www.nybrowning.org



◆ THE FIRE THAT PASSES THROUGH US

On Writing, After Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Lineage That Refuses to Die

Every generation believes it is inventing writing for the first time. And in a way, it is.

But the truth — the deeper, older truth — is that every young writer stands in a long procession of people who once felt the same tremor in the chest, the same pressure behind the ribs, the same sense that language might be the only vessel strong enough to hold what their life is becoming.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning understood this. She wrote as if the page were a threshold between worlds — the private interior and the public square, the solitary pulse and the collective heartbeat. She believed writing was not a craft so much as a **conduit**, a way for the human spirit to move through time without losing its shape.

In her letters, she spoke of writing as a kind of **moral weather**, a storm that clarifies the air. She knew that every poem is an act of courage: a person stepping forward and saying, *This is what I saw. This is what I felt. This is what I refuse to let vanish.*

And she was not alone.

Before her, Sappho carved lightning into fragments. After her, Gwendolyn Brooks turned a neighborhood into a cosmos. Between them, countless unnamed voices — students, workers, wanderers, dreamers — wrote in notebooks, on scraps, on the backs of receipts, trying to catch the world before it slipped away.

This contest stands inside that lineage. Not beside it — **inside** it.

Every student who submitted a poem this year joined a tradition older than the city, older than the country, older than the alphabet as we know it. They stepped into the same current that carried Elizabeth’s voice across centuries, the same current that has always carried the young, the restless, the newly-awake.

Writing is not a performance. It is a **continuation**.



A continuation of the human attempt to name what matters. A continuation of the refusal to be silent. A continuation of the ancient belief that language can lift us, link us, and leave a trace that outlives the moment.

We honor not only the craft of these young writers, but the courage it takes to speak at all. Their poems are not entries in a contest — they are entries in a lineage.

And the lineage is alive.



“Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, Or what’s a heaven for?” — Robert Browning, *Andrea del Sarto*

Browning’s line is more than a flourish of Victorian optimism — it is a challenge, a provocation, a dare. It reminds us that the work of art is never simply to describe the world as it is, but to lean toward what it might become. To reach beyond the comfortable, the certain, the already-known.

In *Andrea del Sarto*, the “faultless painter” laments that technical perfection is not the same as greatness. Browning suggests that the true spark of creation lies in the attempt to grasp what forever slips just out of reach — the ideal, the ineffable, the not-yet-possible. That gap between reach and grasp is where art lives.

It is a fitting coda to this year’s celebration: a reminder that poetry is not measured by how neatly it resolves, but by how boldly it reaches. And each poem written by our students this year — whether awarded, shortlisted, or simply submitted — is part of that long, upward gesture. A gesture Browning recognized, honored, and passed forward. The reach continues.

**Please Join us Wednesday May 13th 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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