

The New York Browning Society, Inc. Newsletter

Founded in 1907

Date Wednesday, November 20th 2024

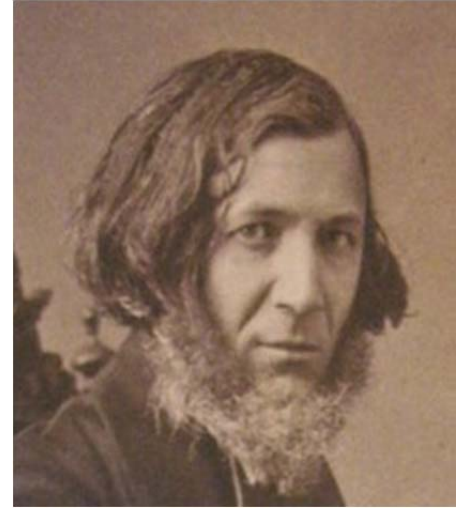
Time 6:00– 7:30PM

Place Jefferson Market Library

425 Avenue of the Americas

Tom D'Egidio

PROSPICE



From “Prospice”, by Robert Browning:

***“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 Latin verb ‘prospice’ means to look forward, to see ahead. “Prospice”, Robert Browning’s sublime meditation on Death (& on Life), provides the theme for a Browning Society discussion of the life & poetry of our late Vice-President, Robert Kramer. A reading of “Prospice”, as well as of the poems and translations of Robert Kramer will be food for thought and spur to pay tribute to the life & work of Robert Kramer.

Dramatis Personae

Written over a period of eight years, in such different places and changing circumstances, it is not surprising that the poems in the volume are so disparate in tone. A number of lyrics express the mood of lost love. But the chief characteristic of *Dramatis Personae* is this: that in an age when the poets were mainly interested in escaping to the past—Tennyson to Arthur’s medieval kingdom, Arnold to Greece, Rossetti and Morris to the Middle Ages, the young Swinburne to Greece and

Elizabethan England—Browning almost alone wrote of contemporary ideas and contemporary life, often in colloquial language and contemporary phrase. The true topics of *Dramatis Personae* are such live and pressing problems as science, higher criticism of the Scriptures, recent tendencies in the religious life of England, spiritualism, social conditions in the 1860’s, and modern love. After Mrs. Browning’s death in June, 1861, Browning purposely plunged himself into English life “with all its noises and hoarse disputes”—and there never had been a more troubled time. This collection is the poet’s straightforward answer to the perplexing questions of 1864. Besides the poems on controversial subjects, *Dramatis Personae* includes a surprising number of purely occasional pieces, such as *May and Death*, for example, and everywhere that it is possible to do so Browning has drawn his illustration and language from contemporary life. The seamy side of life is more observable in *Dramatis Personae* than in *Men and Women*; and yet, probably because of what he had suffered in the loss of his wife, the poet’s spiritual fervor rose, perhaps even to its greatest height, in such poems as *Prospice*, *Abt Vogler*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and the *Epilogue*. Finally on May 28, 1864, *Dramatis Personae* was published. The manuscript, presented to Frederic Chapman on June 20, 1864, by the poet, is now in the Morgan Library in New York City.

Please Join us Wednesday Nov 20th at the Mae West Room 6:00pm! Jefferson Market Library!

www.nybrowning.org



Oscar Wilde on Browning

He has been called a thinker, and was certainly a man who was always thinking ... but it was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves. It was the machine he loved, not what the machine makes. The method by which the fool arrives at his folly was as dear to him as the ultimate wisdom of the wise....

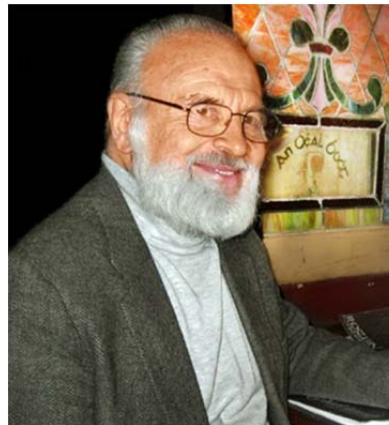
Yes. Browning was great. And as what will he be remembered? As a poet? Ah, not as a poet! He will be remembered as a writer of fiction, as the most supreme writer of fiction, it may be, that we have ever had. His sense of dramatic situation was unrivalled, and, if he could not answer his own problems, he could at least put problems forth, and what more should an artist do? Considered from the point of view of a creator of character, he ranks next to him who made Hamlet.

Prospice

The poem was probably written in the fall of 1861. It is an autobiographical in character—the poet speaks in the first person—and was written shortly after the death of Mrs. Browning. In his wife's Testament after her Browning wrote a translation of Dante's words death concerning Beatrice (*Convito*, II, 9): "Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another, there where that lady lives of whom my soul was enamored." In writing the poem, also, Browning must have remembered the words of John Donne, for whom he has a great admiration: "I would not that death should take me asleep. I would not have him merely seize me, and only declare me to be dead, but win me, and overcome me."

Donne is probably one of the "peers" that Browning had in mind in line 17, Beside being perhaps the most direct affirmation of Browning's belief in the immortality of the soul, the poem is a notable expression of courage, and phrases like "Yet the strong man must go," and "fare like my peers The heroes of old," seem to be drawn from words of Norse or an ancient Saxon warrior. Perhaps the primitive love of battle conflicts a little with the Christian spirit of the ending of the poem. *Prospice*, like Tennyson's *Ulysses*, written under a similar feeling of great loss, is a notable expression of courage. It has been generally accepted as one of the greatest of Browning's poems.

Remembering Vice President Robert Kramer



Robert Kenneth Kramer, poet, critic, father, friend, translator of European literature, and Professor Emeritus at Manhattan College has left this terrestrial plane early at the young age of 90. He will be sorely missed and we wish him the best on his continued journey!

An excerpt from his poem:

"His imagined sentimental last poem"

Thus now I shall conclude
like that youthful actor
who appears upon the Jacobean stage
only after the drama is ended
and the curtain down,
to speak his rhyming verses,
his witty and yet melancholic epilogue,
and to perform one final graceful sweeping bow,
as he begs forbearance of his audience,
Those in the semi- darkness beyond the footlights,
and bids adieu

Please join us in the Celebration of his life, his poems,
and his numerous translations!

Mae West Room
Jefferson Market Library
11/20/24 6pm!

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