



Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Sonnets from the Portuguese

By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett was born on 6 March 1806, in Coxhoe Hall, County Durham, the eldest of 12 children. The family's wealth was derived from sugar plantations manned by slaves in Jamaica, enabling them to also purchase a 500-acre estate in Herefordshire. This wealth allowed her to publish poems from an early age. However, by age 20, the family's fortunes were in decline, though they were never below comfortable, after losing a lawsuit over their plantations.

Shortly thereafter, Elizabeth became afflicted with an unknown disease and became addicted to morphine. Despite this, she continued to write and became increasingly popular both in England and the United States. Her poems against slavery chronicled her abhorrence of the basis of the family wealth. In 1844 she was introduced to the younger Robert Browning, who was a great admirer of her work and began a secret courtship and thence to marriage. To him she wrote and dedicated one of her greatest works, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and they went to live in Italy in 1846. Although by now an invalid, she seemed insecure of the love of the vigorous Robert, but continued to write and publish poetry as diverse as love sonnets and political pieces before succumbing to death in 1861. Our reader is Ghizela Rowe.

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