

THE PORTAL

News from the Armstrong Browning Library

*"A wondrous
portal opened
wide..."*

Number 53 • Spring 2009

Browning Day to be Held May 7, 2009

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*Spring's first breath
Blew soft from the moist
hills; the blackthorn boughs,
So dark in the bare wood,
when glistening
In the sunshine were white
with coming buds,
Like the bright side of a
sorrow, and the banks
Had violets opening from
sleeplike eyes.*

Pauline—RB

Browning Day! The very sound of it implies poetry and music. This annual celebration of the collective birthdays of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Armstrong Browning Library's founder, Dr. A. J. Armstrong, provides a venue for patrons to catch up on what has been happening at the Library and to reconnect with each other.

Thursday, May 7, at 2:30 pm, Michael Meredith, Curator of the Modern Collections at Eton College, will speak on the topic "Robert Browning and the Actors." Meredith is currently sketching out ideas for a new book, provisionally called *The Hidden Browning*, which will include a chapter on Browning and the theater. The book will deal with areas of the poet's life that have been neglected so far by biographers. "I think RB will come out of it as far less confident and certain of himself than he often seemed in public, much more emotional and complex," said Meredith. "The lecture is my first attempt to come to terms with this."

When asked about his reason for accepting the invitation to be this year's Browning Day lecturer, Meredith replied: "Because the ABL is the most marvelous place to be, and I always love my stays there. This will be my third lecture, and my eighth visit since I first came to Baylor in the late 60s. That was in mid-summer and Dr. Herring [ABL director] was on vacation. He had locked up all the cabinets containing EBB's and RB's letters and hidden the key. Luckily there was so much else to see and to read that I fell in love with the library and the university. It has been fascinating to see it grow and prosper over the years."

Meredith has had a long career at Eton as head of English, housemaster and college librarian. During his time as librarian, he built up a large collection of 19th- and 20th-century rare books, letters and manuscripts, which includes some of

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's family papers. As a collector, mainly of Robert Browning and his friends, Meredith is a member of the Roxburghe Club and the Grolier Club of New York. He is the general editor of *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, published by Oxford University Press, and is co-editor of volume 15, *Parleyings* and *Asolando*, which is to be released this year. He has written extensively on the Brownings, and he is about to complete his third term as president of the Browning Society of London.

The ABL has enjoyed a long friendship with Eton College. In 1983, at the suggestion of Meredith, Eton's Provost and Fellows donated to ABL a plaster reproduction of an original bust of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822). Eton commissioned the copy during the WWII bombing raids so the original could be put away for safekeeping. The original bust, also in plaster, was created from memory by Marianne Hunt, wife of Leigh Hunt, in 1836, and was given to Browning by his writer friend, Thomas Carlyle. Shelley was the first major influence upon the young Browning who emulated him for a short time. In more recent years, ABL reciprocated Eton's generosity by permanently loaning to their library one of the original copies of the bronze Clapsed Hands of the Brownings created by Harriet Hosmer in 1853.

In addition to Meredith's lecture, Browning Day will also feature music by Salvadoran-born composer Carlos Colón. A reception will follow in the Cox Reception Hall. The event is free and open to the public.



This year's Browning Day guest lecturer is visiting scholar Michael Meredith of Eton College.

Collections: A Partnership with Patrons

As a library of record, the Armstrong Browning Library strives to collect all things related to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Rita Patteson, Curator of Manuscripts and Interim Director of the ABL, said that the primary strategy for collecting is, "Buy everything we can!" Since most remain in private hands or institutions, Browning items show up at auctions with increasing rarity. When the really good ones come along, the ABL wastes no time.

In October 2008, a notice from Chris Coover, an English literature specialist at Christie's auction house in New York, caught the attention of scholars, librarians and collectors worldwide interested in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, by stating: "I am truly delighted to report that an extensive EBB manuscript album, sold in 1913 in the London dispersal of the Browning Collections . . . has resurfaced after some 95 years in the shadows." Immediately, the ABL staff determined the notebook was an essential item for Baylor University and soon gained the support of VP/Dean Pattie Orr. Thanks to the Margaret Cox Endowment, the notebook was purchased at a Christie's auction on December 5, 2008.

Written in 1839, the marbled notebook contains a handwritten title-page, "MSS. By Elizabeth Barrett," and 68 pages of verse, written mostly on rectos (the front sides of a book's pages), with added or reworked verses on some of the versos (the back, or reverse, sides of a book's pages)—all in a blank book of 117 pages of wove paper, housed in a dark blue morocco pull-off box, by Sangorski & Sutcliffe. This remarkable and extensive concentration of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's early mature verse contains drafts and working manuscripts of 15 poems, with one series of nine sonnets. It offers unique drafts of works whose texts differ from published versions or that are partly unpublished and four wholly unpublished poems.



Interim Director Rita Patteson shares a viewing of the newly acquired EBB notebook with visiting scholar Dr. Scott Lewis, editor of *The Brownings' Correspondence*.

The Library depends on gifts and endowments to make possible such acquisitions of rare and exquisite materials. More commonly, though, patrons are able to serve as extra eyes and ears for the Library through their connections with people, collections and institutions. Recently, a member of the Fano Club became aware of a New Orleans auction that was selling items of special interest to the Library and notified Patteson. "Are you interested?" she asked. Patteson replied, "Of course!" Patrons can also assist by spreading the word about what the ABL collects and attending events that keep them connected to the Library and other patrons.

Save the Dates

April 26-27: The Baylor Chamber Singers Spring Concerts, 3:00 pm Sunday afternoon and 7:30 pm Monday evening. For ticket information on these concerts, call the Baylor University School of Music box office at (254)710-3571.

May 7: Browning Day, 2:30 pm. Michael Meredith, Curator of the Modern Collection in the Eton College Library, will be the guest lecturer. Composer Carlos Colón will present a 20-minute musical program. A reception will follow. Free and open to the public.

May 7: Fano Club Dinner, 6:30 pm, Baylor Alumni Center. Members and invited guests only.

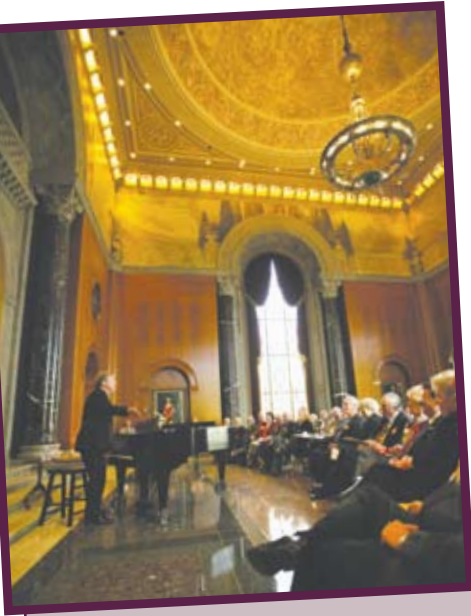
May 8: Special musical program by resident composer Carlos Colón, 7:00 pm. A reception will follow. Free and open to the public.

June 13: String Quartet Concerts, Dr. Gary Hardie, Professor of Instrumental Studies-Music will direct prospective students from high schools. Free and open to the public.

For more information and updates, please visit www.browninglibrary.org or contact Christi Klempnauer at (254) 710-4968.

How Do I Love Thee?

On February 14, love was in the air at the Armstrong Browning Library as guests attended the Valentine's Day Gala featuring Dave Tanner. The event was such a huge success that the ABL has already booked him for the next Valentine Extravaganza. Be sure to make plans to join us on Saturday, February 13, 2010, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. for a very special afternoon with your special someone.



Musician Dave Tanner entertains guests with "The Stories and Songs of Valentine's Day."



After the performance, Os and Marilyn Chrisman enjoy dessert in the Cox Reception Hall.



Grant and Donell Teaff listen during Dave Tanner's performance in the McLean Foyer of Meditation.

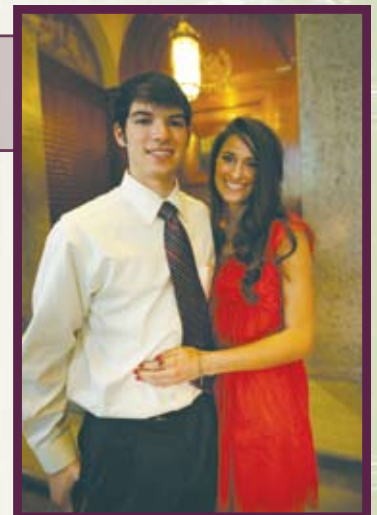


Bruce and Judy Cofer attend the reception after the concert.



Dave Tanner visits with Frances Olson and Martha Sue Miller.

Seniors Ryan Darr and Lillyan Baker are all smiles after the evening's festivities.



Let Me Count The Ways....



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ARMSTRONG BROWNING LIBRARY

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Web site: www.browninglibrary.org

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Become a Guardian Angel Today

The patron organization for the Armstrong Browning Library is called The Guardian Angels, in reference to Robert Browning's poem, "The Guardian Angel: A Picture at Fano." Browning was inspired to compose the poem after viewing Guercino's painting of the same name that hangs in Fano, Italy. In 1946, Dr. A.J. Armstrong, founder of the Browning Collection at Baylor University, initiated this organization of supporters and friends. The Guardian Angel organization is open to anyone interested in helping to build the Library's collections, which are used by Browning scholars from around the world. Your membership ensures the continued growth of the Armstrong Browning Library and its programs.

Benefits of Guardian Angel Membership:

- receive invitations to all of the Library's events
- be a special guest at Benefactors Day
- receive the Library's bi-annual newsletter
- receive a 10% discount in the ABL Gift Gallery

Cost:

- Annual Membership—\$50.00
- Lifetime Membership in The Guardian Angels—\$1,000.00

To become a member or renew your membership, indicate "Guardian Angel Payment" on the note line of your check made payable to BAYLOR UNIVERSITY and mail to: Christi Klempnauer, Armstrong Browning Library, One Bear Place #97152, Waco, TX 76798-7152.



L'Angelo Custode by Guercino
(Giovanni Francesco Barbieri),
1640, Civic Museum, Fano, Italy