

---

 ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

## To George Sand

*A Desire*

Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,  
 Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions  
 Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance  
 And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:  
 I would some mild miraculous thunder ran  
 Above the applauded circus, in appliance  
 Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,  
 Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,  
 From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place  
 With holier light! that thou to woman's claim  
 And man's, mightst join beside the angel's grace  
 Of a pure genius sanctified from blame,  
 Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace  
 To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

1844

## To George Sand

*A Recognition*

True genius, but true woman! dost deny  
 The woman's nature with a manly scorn,  
 And break away the gauds and armlets worn  
 By weaker women in captivity?  
 Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry  
 Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn,  
 Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn  
 Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,  
 Disproving thy man's name: and while before  
 The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,  
 We see thy woman-heart beat evermore  
 Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,  
 Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore  
 Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

1844

## A Year's Spinning

## I

He listened at the porch that day,  
 To hear the wheel go on, and on;

And then it stopped, ran back away,  
 While through the door he brought the sun:  
 5 But now my spinning is all done.

2

He sat beside me, with an oath  
 That love ne'er ended, once begun;  
 I smiled—believing for us both,  
 What was the truth for only one:  
 10 And now my spinning is all done.

3

My mother cursed me that I heard  
 A young man's wooing as I spun:  
 Thanks, cruel mother, for that word—  
 For I have, since, a harder known!  
 15 And now my spinning is all done.

4

I thought—O God!—my first-born's cry  
 Both voices to mine ear would drown:  
 I listened in mine agony—  
 It was the *silence* made me groan!  
 20 And now my spinning is all done.

5

Bury me 'twixt my mother's grave,  
 (Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)  
 And my dead baby's (God it save!)  
 Who, not to bless me, would not moan.  
 25 And now my spinning is all done.

6

A stone upon my heart and head,  
 But no name written on the stone!  
 Sweet neighbours, whisper low instead,  
 "This sinner was a loving one—  
 30 And now her spinning is all done."

7

And let the door ajar remain,  
 In case he should pass by anon;  
 And leave the wheel out very plain,—  
 That he, when passing in the sun,  
 35 May see the spinning is all done.

## A Musical Instrument

1

What was he doing, the great god Pan,<sup>1</sup>  
 Down in the reeds by the river?  
 Spreading ruin and scattering ban,<sup>2</sup>  
 Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,  
 5 And breaking the golden lilies afloat  
 With the dragon-fly on the river.

2

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,  
 From the deep cool bed of the river:  
 The limpid water turbidly ran,  
 And the broken lilies a-dying lay,  
 10 And the dragon-fly had fled away,  
 Ere he brought it out of the river.

3

High on the shore sat the great god Pan  
 While turbidly flowed the river;  
 15 And hacked and hewed as a great god can,  
 With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,  
 Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed  
 To prove it fresh from the river.

4

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,  
 20 (How tall it stood in the river!)  
 Then drew the pith,<sup>3</sup> like the heart of a man,  
 Steadily from the outside ring,  
 And notched the poor dry empty thing  
 In holes, as he sat by the river.

5

“This is the way,” laughed the great god Pan  
 (Laughed while he sat by the river),  
 “The only way, since gods began  
 To make sweet music, they could succeed.”  
 Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,  
 30 He blew in power by the river.

6

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!  
 Piercing sweet by the river!  
 Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!  
 The sun on the hill forgot to die,

1. God of woods, fields, and flocks, having a human body with goat's legs, horns, and ears. According to legend, a nymph, Syrinx, when escaping from Pan's pursuit of her, was metamorphosed into a reed in a stream. One version of the legend (the one used here) has Pan making this single reed

into a shepherd's pipe, in shape like a flute. In another version, he makes a pipe out of seven reeds in a row, an invention named in honor of the nymph.

2. Curses, malediction.

3. Central tissue.

35 And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly  
Came back to dream on the river.

7

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,  
To laugh as he sits by the river,  
Making a poet out of a man:  
40 The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—  
For the reed which grows nevermore again  
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

1860

1860