

'De Gustibus - ' by Robert Browning

Overview:

- The title of this poem is part of a quotation, "*de gustibus non est disputandum*", or, "there is no arguing about taste." Indeed Browning repeatedly juxtaposes his own taste regarding England and Italy, suggesting that he has a split sense of loyalty between the two places. This personal poem also adopts a very lyrical style which gives it a kind of rambling quality. Whilst Browning adores the changing of the British seasons (especially Spring) and the unspoiled beauty of the idyllic countryside, he also believes that Italy is part of his identity as his new home. He clearly feels torn and cannot decide where his heart lies.

Context:

- In order to marry his soulmate, Elizabeth Barratt, Browning had to elope to Italy. The union was forbidden by both families.
- This was published in 1855 - Browning's wife died only 6 years later and he moved back to England (suggesting that his yearning never went away).

Structure/form:

- The much shorter verse about England, which comes first, may suggest that the English countryside and rural stereotype was his first love. However the much larger second verse, which focuses on Italy, might suggest that he is now devoted to Italy and it is a large part of his current life.
- Unordered/non-chronological structure - Browning frequently lapses into flashbacks.
- Use of parentheses to create a conversational tone and informal register. Also adds information and to the poem and suggests that it is a stream of thoughts that pop into his head. Exclamatives are also used to portray his passion and excitement.
- Fairly random and erratic rhyme scheme - used in verse one to build up momentum.

Language analysis:

- "*Cornfield...poppies...bean-flowers...blackbirds*" - all these words portray typical Romantic imagery and the beauty of the traditional English countryside. This list also highlights Britain's temperate climate and fertile soils, compared to the "*douth*" (drought) in Italy which bakes insects.
- Browning suggests in the first verse that young couples who may frolic in "*coppice*" (woods) should be allowed to enjoy themselves whilst they're still young. This is a very clichéd idea, which could portray the deep burning passion that Browning feels towards Barratt.
- "*Your ghost will walk...in an English lane*" - this implies that when Browning dies his soul will return to England, his home. However this is directly