

PR 4222

A4

1913

copy 2

PR 4222

A4

1913

cpy 2

Unfinished Draft of a Poem which
may be entitled
“Æschylus’ Soliloquy”

PR 4222

.A4

1913

Copy 2

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1913

All rights reserved

✓ Unfinished Draft of a Poem which
may be entitled
“Æschylus’ Soliloquy”

BY
ROBERT BROWNING

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1913

All rights reserved

Copy R

PR4222
.A4
1913
Copy 2

COPYRIGHT, 1913,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

©CLA357464

uoz

J
R

UNFINISHED DRAFT OF A POEM
WHICH MAY BE ENTITLED
'ÆSCHYLUS' SOLILOQUY.'

At the sale of the Browning MSS. on
May 2, 1913, this MS. was catalogued as:

Lot 188. Browning (R.) Auto. Draft of
a poem, in blank verse, 4 pp. 8vo., un-
finished and perhaps unpublished, appar-
ently intended for 'Aristophanes' Apology,'
but not used, beginning:

'I am an old and solitary man.'

This description is correct in so far as
the poem has never before been published.
Closer examination showed, however,
that this is not a draft for 'Aristophanes'
Apology,' but a soliloquy of the aged
Æschylus, just before the prophecy as to
his death was fulfilled by an eagle dropping
a tortoise upon his head.

The poem has been printed according
to the original MS., now in the British
Museum, as it reads with the poet's vari-
ants and queries. In line 56, 'Dephos,'
is obviously a slip of the pen for 'Delphos,'
and in line 59 'rush' seems the best in-
terpretation of an illegible word, of which
the MS. contains many. — EDITOR.]

I AM an old and solitary man
And now at set of sun in Sicily
I sit down in the middle of this plain
Which drives between the mountains and
the sea
Its blank of nature. If a traveller came
Seeing my bare bald skull and my still
brows
And massive features coloured to a stone,
The tragic mask of a humanity
Whose past is played to an end, — he
might mistake me
10 For some god Terminus set on these flats
Of broken marble Faunus. Let it be.
Life has ebbed from me — I am on dry
ground —
All sounds of life I held so thunderous sweet
Shade off to silence — all the perfect shapes
Born of perception and men's images
(imagery?)
Which thronged against the outer rim of
earth
And hung with floating faces over it
Grow dim and dimmer — all the motions
drawn
From Beauty in action which spun audibly
20 My brain round in a rapture, have grown
still.
There's a gap 'twixt me and the life once
mine,

Now others' and not mine, which now soars
off
In gradual declination — till at last
I hear it in the distance droning small
Like a bee at sunset. Ay, and that bee's
hum
The buzzing fly and mouthing of the grass
Cropped slowly near me by some strange
sheep
Are strange to me with life — and separate
from me
The outside of my being — I myself
Grow to the silence, fasten to the calm 30
Of inorganic nature . . . sky and rocks
I will pass on into their unity
When dying down into impersonal dust.
Ah, ha — these flats are wide!
The prophecy which said the house would
fall,
And thereby crush me, must bring down
the sky,
The only roof above me where I sit
Or ere it prove its oracle to-day.
Stand fast ye pillars of the constant
heavens
As life doth in me — I who did not die 40
That day in Athens, when the people's
scorn
Hissed toward the sun as if to darken it
Because my thoughts burned too much for
the eyes
Over my head, because I spoke my Greek
Too deep down in my soul to suit their
case.
Who did not die to see the solemn vests
Of my white chorus round the thyme
Flutter like doves, and sweep back like a
cloud
Before the shrill lipped people . . . but
stood calm
And cold, and felt the theatre wax hot 50
With mouthing whispers . . . the man
Æschylus
Is gray I fancy — and his wrinkles ridge
The smoothest of his phrases — or the
times
Have grown too polished for this old rough
work —
We have no Sphynxes in the Parthenon,
Nor any flints at Dephos — or forsooth
I think the Sphynxes wrote this Attic
Greek —
Our Sophocles hath something more than
this
(Cast out on — their rush — I would
not die) ?
At this time by the crushing of a house 60
Who lived that Day out . . . I would go to
death
With voluntary and majestic steps
Yon thundering on the right hand. Let it
be.

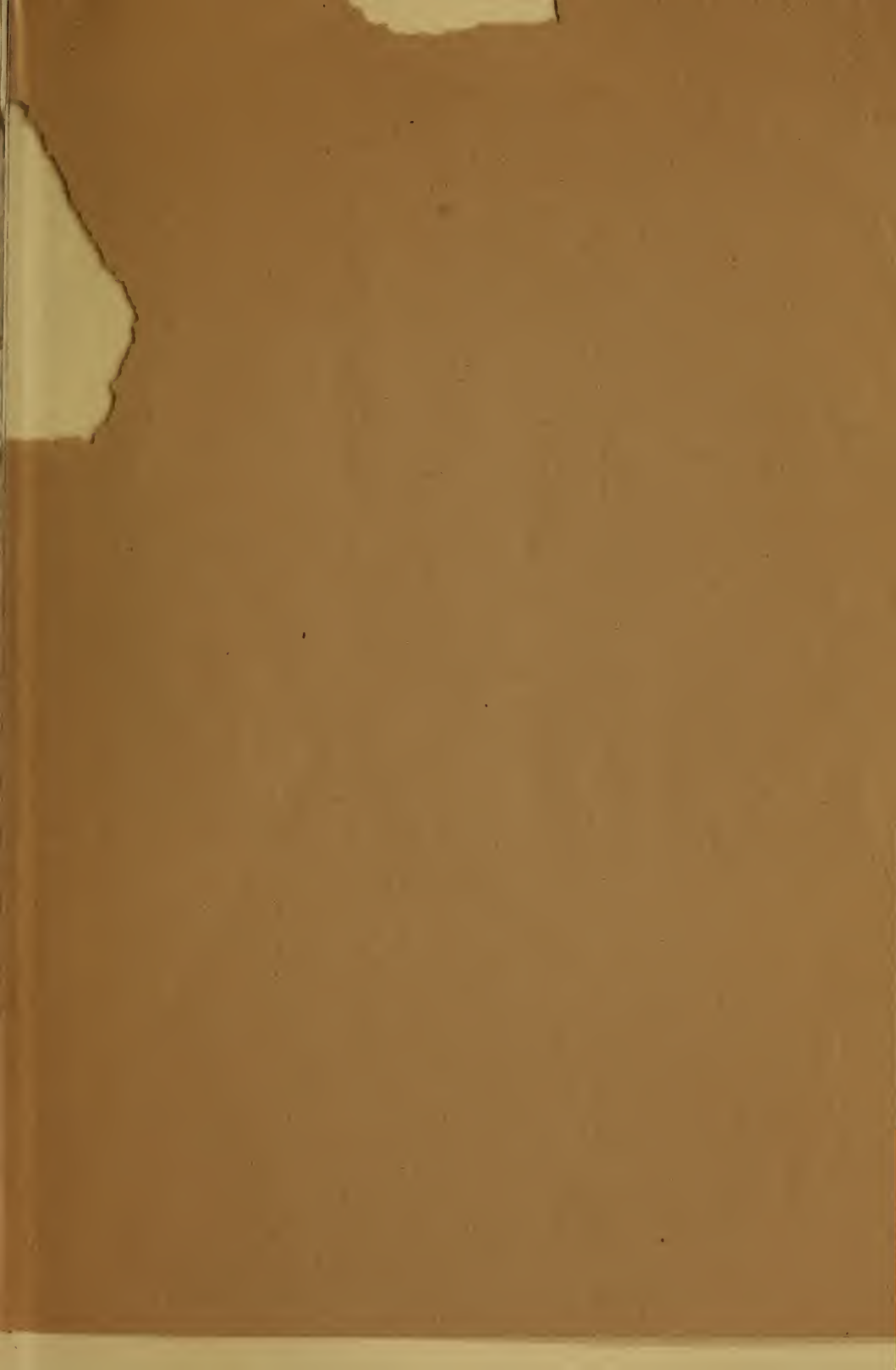
12/8/13

'ÆSCHYLUS' SOLILOQUY'

I am an old and solitary man
 Mine eyes feel dimly out the setting sun
 Which drops its great red fruit of bitterness
 To-day as other days, as every day
 Within the patient waters. What do I say?
 I whistle out my scorn against the men
 Who (knell) his trilogy morn noon and
 night
 And set this tragic world against the sun —
 Forgive me, great Apollo. — Bitter fruit
 10 I think we never found that holy sun
 Or ere with conjurations of our hands
 Drove up the saltness of our hearts to it
 A blessed fruit, a full Hesperian fruit
 Which the fair sisters with their starry eyes
 Did warm to scarlet bloom. O holy sun
 My eyes are weak and cannot hold thee
 round!
 But in my large soul there is room for thee.
 All human wrongs and shames cast out
 from it, —
 And I invite thee, sun, to sphere thyself
 20 In my large soul, and let my thoughts in
 white
 Keep chorus round thy glory — Oh the
 days
 In which I sate upon Hymettus the hill
 Illissus seeming louder: and the groves
 Of blessed olive thinking of their use
 A little tunicked child and felt my
 thoughts (?)
 Rise past the golden bees against thy face
 Great sun upon the sea. The city lay
 Beneath me like an eaglet in an egg,
 The beak and claws shut whitely up in
 calm —
 30 And calm were the great waters — and the
 hills
 Holding at arm's length their unmolten
 snows
 Plunged in the light of heaven which
 trickled back
 On all sides, a libation to the world.

There I sate a child
 Half hidden in purple thyme with knees
 drawn up
 By clasping of my little arms, and cheek
 Laid slant across them with obruded nose
 And full eyes gazing . . . ay, my eyes
 climbed up
 Against the heated metal of thy shield
 Till their persistent look clove through the
 fire
 40 And struck it into many folded fires (?)
 And opened out the secret of the night
 Hid in the day-source Darkness mixed with
 light.
 Then shot innumerable arrows in my eyes

From all sides of the Heavens — so blind-
 ing me —
 As countless as the norland snowflakes fell
 Before the north winds — rapid, wonderful,
 Some shafts as bright as sun rays nine
 times drawn
 Thro' the heart of the sun — some black as
 night in Hell —
 All mixed, sharp, driven against me! and
 as I gazed
 (For I gazed still) I saw the sea and earth 50
 Leap up as wounded by the innumerable
 shafts
 And hurry round, and whirl into a blot
 Across which evermore fell thick the shafts
 As norland snow falls thick before the
 wind (? flakes fall)
 Until the northmen at the cavern's mouth
 Can see no pine tree through. I could see
 nought
 No earth, no sea, no sky, no sun itself,
 Only that arrowy rush of black and white
 Across a surf of rainbows infinite
 And through it all Homeros the blind man 60
 Did chant his vowelled music in my brain.
 Drove { piercing? ? }
 { pressing? } and blinding and as-
 tonishing
 And then it was revealed, it was revealed
 That I should be a priest of the Unseen
 And build a bridge of sounds across the
 straight
 From Heaven to earth whence all the Gods
 might walk
 Nor bend it with their soles (?)
 And then I saw the Gods tread past me slow
 From out the portals of the hungry dark
 And each one, as he passed, breathed in 70
 my face
 And made me greater — First old Saturn
 came
 Blind with eternal watches — calm and
 blind —
 Then Zeus — his eagle blinking on his wrist }
 To his hand's rod of fires — in thunder rolls } ?
 He glode jon grandly — While the troop
 of Prayers
 Buzzed dimly in the { mist } of his light
 { shadow }
 With murmurous sounds, and poor be-
 seeing tears.
 And Neptune with beard and locks drawn
 straight
 As seaweed — ay and Pluto with his Dark
 Cutting the dark as Lightning cuts the sun 80
 Made individual by intensity.
 And then Apollo trenching on the dark
 With a white glory, while the lute he bore
 Struck on the air



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 386 851 5



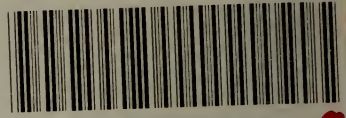
PR 4222

A4

1913

copy 2

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 386 851 5



Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5