

**LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL COMMUNITY PROGRAMME  
POETRY AND PICTURES POETRY WORKSHOP  
MARCH 2021: THE PRICE OF ART**

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**EXERCISE ONE: Warm up writing exercise –  
Sequence Writing**

**SLIDE 1: Barrett Browning Memorial Institute, Ledbury**

Look at my poem about the Elizabeth Barrett Browning Memorial Institute in Ledbury for the town's *Found Voices Poetry Trail*. (attached below, Appendix 1) Notice that I have used the numbers 1-12 in sequence in my poem - (*to* for *two*; *for* for *four*!)

Write a piece/poem that includes numbers from 1-10 ascending or descending in sequence. Think about using the numbers phonetically - *one* can be written *won* or even *wan*; *two* can be *to*, *too*, *tu*; *four* can be *for*, *fore*; *six* can be *sicks*; *eight* can be *ate*; *nine* can be *nein*...

Have fun playing around with words!

**EXERCISE TWO: The theme for this exercise is The Price Of Art**

There has been much excitement in Ledbury recently as a rare painting by the artist Titian has been discovered hanging on the wall of St Michael and All Angels Church in the town. It is potentially worth millions of pounds. It is interesting how placing a large monetary value on the piece can change the way it is viewed and treated.

Our subject today is the price of art. What makes some pieces of art priceless? Does it change our view of artworks if we know how much they are worth financially? Who decides the price? And is it to the detriment or improvement of art appreciation?

In this session, we will look at the Titian painting in Ledbury and the three most expensive artworks in the world (according to these sources) as the inspiration for writing poetry:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most\\_expensive\\_paintings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_expensive_paintings)

<https://wealthygorilla.com/most-expensive-paintings/>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/leonardo-da-vinci-most-expensive-artworks/>

The most famous paintings, especially Old Master works done before 1803, are generally owned or held at museums, for viewing by patrons. Since the museums rarely sell them, they are considered priceless.



**SLIDE 2: *Mona Lisa (La Gioconda)* - Leonardo da Vinci**

*The Guinness World Records* lists Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* as having the highest ever insurance value for a painting. On permanent display at the Louvre in Paris, the *Mona Lisa* was assessed at US\$100 million on December 14, 1962. Taking inflation into account, the 1962 value would be around US\$850 million in 2019.

Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol are the best-represented artists in the list of most expensive paintings. Whereas Picasso and Warhol

became wealthy men, Van Gogh is known to have sold only one painting in his lifetime, *The Red Vineyard*, for 400 francs (approximately \$2,000 in 2018 dollars) in 1890.



**SLIDE 3: *The Red Vineyard* - Vincent van Gogh**

Prices realised for just van Gogh's nine paintings in the top 100 most expensive paintings, when adjusted for inflation to 2017, add up to over US\$900 million.

**SLIDE 4 (below left): St Michael and All Angels Church, Ledbury**

**SLIDE 5 (below right): *The Last Supper* (1576) - Titian (hanging in St Michael's Church, Ledbury)**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-56241825>

<https://www.ledburyreporter.co.uk/news/19135038.ledburys-lost-titian-looks-set-remain-church-major-tourist-attraction/>

<https://www.herefordtimes.com/news/19128095.undiscovered-titian-painting-herefordshire-church-lost-forever/>

<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/titian-painting-church-scli-intl-gbr/index.html>



A discoloured painting which hung in a parish church for more than 100 years has been linked to the Renaissance master Titian. *The Last Supper* was gifted to St Michael and All Angels Church in Ledbury, Herefordshire, in 1909 and has hung there in the church ever since.

Art historian Ronald Moore believes he has now discovered Titian's signature on the canvas during restoration work. "It always had a feel of Titian about it, but I could never identify it... now we have a breakthrough," he said. The tireless work of Moore and assistant, Patricia Kenny, revealed the untitled artwork, a depiction of the Last Supper, was produced in the workshop of Tiziano Vecellio, more famously known as Italian Renaissance master Titian.

After removing centuries of discoloured varnish, they made some incredible discoveries. As well as finding an all-important signature, they identified some of the faces as portraits. Moore said: "It wasn't until I got into the studio and began to examine it that I realized quite how important it was." Mr Moore was approached by the church to research and then restore the vast painting - which is more than 12ft x 5ft - about three years ago. He and Patricia Kenny told CNN they have since spent 11,000 hours trying to establish links with the 16th century Venetian artist.

Titian was one of Italy's most important High Renaissance artists until his death from the plague in 1576. Mr Moore said his discovery of an under-drawing beneath the painting - done by hand - indicated to him that was something only a "major painter" would do.



**SLIDE 7: *The Last Supper* (Detail) - Titian** Kenny pioneered an innovative technique which revealed “a painting within a painting,” Moore said. She overlaid images by making them identical in size and opaque, enabling them to identify a portrait of Titian and two of his children.



**SLIDE 8: Portrait of Titian** Kenny also removed all “extraneous pigments” to uncover the remains of the signature, added Moore. Using ultra-violet light, they discovered Titian's signature on a jug on the bottom left of the painting. The signature of the ‘Old Master’ Titian means now its value could run into millions.



**SLIDE 9: Titian's signature** Two boys in the painting resemble Titian's children and, based on his research, Mr Moore believes the painting was altered by Titian's son to become a family portrait. “Titian was a very popular and busy artist and I think he just never got time to work on it and finish it,” Mr Moore said. “When Titian died, the plague was around and a lot of people were dying and I think that perhaps influenced his son to turn the

painting into a family portrait.” Mr Moore said one of the heads was “absolutely stupendous in quality”, and he added: “Not many people could have painted it.” Now, it seems, the answers are being brought fully into the light, with the help of science and research.



**SLIDE 10: Painting being taken for restoration** According to Moore, the painting took around 20 years to complete in Titian's Venice workshop between 1560 and 1580. The artist had a large workshop in Venice where artists and writers would congregate and Mr Moore said two or three other artists may also have worked on the piece. When Titian died in 1576, he left behind many unfinished pieces which - like this - might have been completed in his workshop. The workshop, says Moore, was a “close knit group of painters

who could work in Titian's style.” He says he can identify at least five “hands” involved in the painting - displaying “different styles and abilities.” He added: “Titian would surely have created the composition together with probably Francesco, his son.” “Although he instigated the design with his son, it does not mean he painted it completely or even did much of the painting. The exciting part is that this is an undiscovered painting from Titian's workshop,” he said.



**SLIDE 11 - The Restoration** But the painting, which art experts believe was bought by local grandee John Skipp (also spelt Skippe or Skype), back in the eighteenth century, could feasibly have ended up in a skip in more recent times. Speaking at a conference in the church in August 2018, the Rev Keith Hilton-Turvey

said the picture had become “increasingly dark” over the years. Some had even believed that the church “ought to get rid of it”. “It was thought to be of little value or merit, but some of the Friends of the church thought differently,” he said. Speaking to *The Ledbury Reporter*, Mr Hilton-Turvey reflected on the good news, concerning the new discovery, and also its implications. But despite the painting's likely value, it seems that it is set to remain in Ledbury Parish Church, where it will doubtless become a major tourist attraction. He said: “We hope it will help bring more visitors to Ledbury, and the church, to enjoy all we all have to offer.” But he added: “You will understand if I don’t describe what security is in place, or what will be in place.” However, it is a fact that Ledbury's large police station is barely a stone's throw away from the church.

The value of the painting could be astronomical. One Titian work, *A Sacra Conversazione*, sold for \$16,882,500 at Sotheby's in 2011. It is proof that John Skipp had a good eye. He probably acquired the painting when he was on the Grand Tour. This was a lengthy visit to Italy and possibly Greece which was commonly undertaken by sons of the aristocracy, to add a final polish to their education, often after university. The Skipp family were long-term residents of Upper Hall in Ledbury and their numbers included at least one MP and a Bishop of Hereford.

Moore will not comment on how much the painting might be worth, but said: “It's not in good condition but it is unique. It's the first chance we've had in art history to be able to look at a Titian workshop painting done over quite a long period of time.” Ledbury parishioner, Ian Beer, who was one of those who commissioned Moore on behalf of the church, told CNN they now have CCTV and will soon be installing special lighting to illuminate the painting without damaging it. “We are getting more and more visitors from around the world now,” he said. “It has been quite an exciting journey.”

*Salvator Mundi* (1605) - Leonardo da Vinci

**SLIDE 12. *Salvator Mundi* - Leonardo da Vinci (\$450.3 Million)**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvator\\_Mundi\\_\(Leonardo\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvator_Mundi_(Leonardo))



Leonardo da Vinci's painting depicts Jesus in Renaissance dress, making the sign of the cross with his right hand, while holding a transparent, non-refracting crystal orb in his left, signalling his role as *Salvator Mundi* (Latin for ‘Saviour of the World’) and representing the ‘celestial sphere’ of the heavens. It is the most expensive painting in the world. It may have been painted for Louis XII of France and his consort, Anne of Brittany, in 1605, during the same period as the *Mona Lisa*. It was later recorded in King Charles I of England’s collection, valued at £30, when Charles’ possessions were put up for sale under the English

Commonwealth. The painting was sold to a creditor in 1651, returned to Charles II after the English Restoration in 1660, and included in an inventory of Charles' possessions at the Palace of Whitehall in 1666. It was inherited by James II, and may have remained with him until it passed to his mistress Catherine Sedley. The painting was auctioned in 1763 along with other artworks from Buckingham House when the building was sold to George III. It was bought by British collector Francis Cook in 1900 for his collection at Doughty House in Richmond. Cook's great-grandson sold it at auction in 1958 for £45 as a work by one of Leonardo's pupils.

In 2005, a group of British art dealers acquired it for \$10,000. It had been heavily overpainted, to the point where the painting resembled a copy, and was, before restoration, described as “a wreck, dark and gloomy”. The consortium believed there was a possibility that this seemingly low-quality work might actually be the long-missing Leonardo original. They spent six years restoring and investigating

the painting before declaring it was by Leonardo himself. They commissioned Dianne Dwyer Modestini at New York University to oversee the restoration.



**SLIDE 13: Photograph after cleaning (2006-7)**

When Modestini began removing the overpainting at the start of the restoration process, she discovered that at some point, a stepped area of unevenness near Christ's face had been shaved down with a sharp object, and also levelled. Using infrared photographs, Modestini discovered an earlier draft of the painting, which had the blessing hand's thumb in a straight, rather than curved, position. The discovery that Christ had two thumbs on his right hand was crucial. This showed that the original artist had reconsidered the position of the figure; such a second thought is considered evidence of an original, rather than a copy, as a painting copied from the finished original would not have such an alteration partway through the painting process.

**SLIDE 14: *Salvator Mundi* (detail of face)**

Modestini noted that colour transitions in the subject's lips were "perfect" and that "no other artist could have done that." Upon studying the *Mona Lisa* for comparison, she concluded that "The artist who painted her was the same hand that had painted the *Salvator Mundi*." The work was subsequently authenticated as a painting by Leonardo.

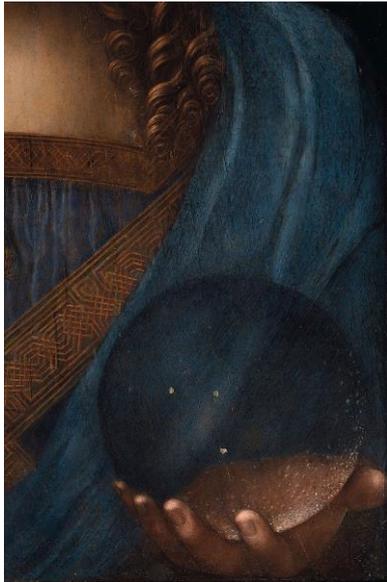


Above Christ's left eye are visible marks that the artist made to soften the flesh with the heel of his hand. The effect of the face—evidently achieved in part by manipulating the paint using the heel of the hand—is typical of many Leonardo works.



**SLIDE 15: Christ's hands, rendered curls of his hair, and drapery are well preserved, close to their original state**

The way the ringlets of hair and the knotwork across the stole have been handled is also seen as indicative of Leonardo's style. Additionally, the hands in the painting are very detailed, something that Leonardo is known for: he would dissect the limbs of the deceased in order to study them and render body parts in an extremely lifelike manner. One of the world's leading Leonardo experts, Martin Kemp, who helped authenticate the work, said that he knew immediately upon first viewing the restored painting that it was the work of Leonardo: "It had that kind of presence that Leonardos have ... that uncanny strangeness that the later Leonardo paintings manifest." Of the hair, Kemp notes: "It's got that kind of uncanny vortex, as if the hair is a living, moving substance, or like water, which is what Leonardo said hair was like."



### SLIDE 16 - The transparent orb

Regarding the orb, in one respect, it is rendered with beautiful scientific precision but the background is undistorted as it would be when viewed through a glass orb. Leonardo painted the orb as if it were a hollow glass bubble that does not refract or distort the light passing through it. The orb in Leonardo's painting, Kemp says, has “an amazing series of glistening little apertures—they're like bubbles, but they're not round—painted very delicately, particularly around the part where you get the back reflections.” These are the characteristic features of rock crystal, on which Leonardo was an avid expert.

However, British art historian Charles Hope dismissed the attribution to Leonardo entirely in a January 2020 analysis of the painting's quality and provenance. He doubted that Leonardo would have painted a work where the eyes were not level and the drapery undistorted by a crystal orb. He added, “The picture itself is a ruin, with the face much restored to make it reminiscent of the *Mona Lisa*.” London's National Gallery exhibited it in 2011. It was the first “discovery” of a Da Vinci since 1909, and became known as the “lost Leonardo”.

After a drawn-out 19-minute long bidding war, it was sold at auction for \$450.3 million in November 2017 by Christie's in New York to Prince Badr bin Abdullah, setting a new record for most expensive painting ever sold at public auction. Prince Badr allegedly made the purchase on behalf of Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism, but it has since been posited that he may have been a stand-in bidder for his close ally and Saudi Arabian crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. The current location of the painting has been reported as unknown. A news report in January 2019 indicated that “no one knows where it is, and there are grave concerns for its physical safety.” A June 2019 report stated that it was being stored on bin Salman's luxury yacht sailing in the Red Sea, pending completion of a new cultural centre in Saudi Arabia. An October 2019 report indicated it may be in storage in Switzerland. It is the only Da Vinci painting in private hands.



*Interchange* (1955) - Willem de Kooning

### SLIDE 17: *Interchange* - Willem de Kooning (\$300 Million)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interchange\\_\(de\\_Kooning\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interchange_(de_Kooning))  
<https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/most-expensive-painting>

Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) was a Dutch-American abstract expressionist artist. He was born in Rotterdam and moved to the United States in 1926, becoming an American citizen in 1962. *Interchange* is an oil on canvas painting by de Kooning. It measures 200 x 175 centimetres (79 x 69 in) and was completed in 1955. It was one of de Kooning's first abstract landscapes, and marked a change in his style under the influence of fellow artist, Franz Kline. In September 2015, it was sold by the David Geffen Foundation to Kenneth C. Griffin for \$300 million, a new mark for the highest ever price for a painting, not surpassed until November 2017 by Leonardo Da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*. It has been on loan at the Art Institute of Chicago.

## Background

The completion of this oil painting occurred in 1955 in a decade within which de Kooning had concentrated much of the early part of the 1950s reworking abstract figure study works of the female figure which he started in 1948.

By 1955, de Kooning had moved away from the human form and continued with the abstract rendering of the architecture and communities of his surroundings in downtown New York. As de Kooning stated in 1956: "I feel more at home in downtown New York than I would feel ... living on Park Avenue. This has no social comment. It is just that the streets are so goddamn quiet. I mean you can find nothing. Maybe it has something to do with my upbringing, I don't know, but I am in the sight of the average man. I will not go up to my studio in a Cadillac." His selection of names for his oil paintings appeared to correspond to references to the neighbourhood where he was living at that time in downtown New York, for example, *Interchange*.

De Kooning sold the painting shortly after it was completed. It was bought for \$4,000 by the architect Edgar Kaufmann Jr., whose father Edgar J. Kaufmann owned Kaufmann's department store in Pittsburgh. In September 2015, David Geffen, an American business magnate, producer, creator of various record studios, film studio executive, and philanthropist, sold *Interchange* for \$300 million to hedge fund billionaire Ken Griffin. As of 2017 this is the second highest price paid for a painting. Griffin paid \$500 million for two artworks, the other being Jackson Pollock's *Number 17A*, to which \$200 million was attributed.

## The Legacy of *Interchange*

So what is it that makes an abstract painting worth \$300 million? Is it the timing of its creation, the relevance of its creator and the stories of the collectors who have owned it? After all, the story of *Interchange* touches the roots of American architecture, the globalization of the art market and the rise and fall of the record industry. And now it is in the hands of a hedge fund manager who founded one of the most powerful global finance firms.

But there is something else that gives it value as well. The Jackson Pollock painting Kenneth Griffin purchased along with *Interchange* was featured in the 1949 *Life Magazine* spread that made both Jackson Pollock and Abstract Expressionism household names. Few paintings more succinctly capture a moment in time. That magazine article was a major reason de Kooning and the other Abstract Expressionists were able to finally make a living from their art. Together these two paintings represent the moment when the United States gave rise to its first native modern art movement. *Interchange* is not only valuable as an object. Its value is in its myth.

*Interchange* also speaks to a technical change in the way de Kooning painted. De Kooning was known for violently attacking his canvases, thrusting his brushes so dramatically against them that he would often puncture their surfaces. He would also work his paintings repeatedly, over long spans of time, scraping the paint away and adding more layers, giving them a sense that they were simultaneously overworked and yet never finished. Influenced by the style of painter Franz Kline, de Kooning began incorporating techniques such as quickly-made gestural marks into his paintings. *Interchange* is a prime early example of the resulting artistic shift de Kooning underwent in the mid-1950s.

Stylistically, *Interchange* marks one of the most transformative eras in the career of one of the most important abstract artists of the 20th Century. *Interchange* was painted right when the fortunes of de Kooning and his contemporaries were undergoing a massive change. They were becoming financially stable, many for the first time, meaning they had the opportunity to make new choices, both professionally and personally. For de Kooning this manifested in a gradual taming of his

notoriously wild lifestyle, culminating with a move to a farmhouse in East Hampton. Creatively, it manifested in the start of an 11-year period spent painting abstract landscapes, of which *Interchange* was one of the first.



*The Card Players* (early 1890s) - Paul Cézanne

**SLIDE 18: The Card Players - Paul Cézanne (\$250 Million)**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Card\\_Players](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Card_Players)

<https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2012/02/qatar-buys-cezanne-card-players-201202>

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/65546/15-things-you-should-know-about-cezannes-card-players>

When Qatar's Royal Family bought one of Cézanne's five versions of this scene in 2011, they paid double the existing record for an artwork at auction. The men who posed for the painting included farmhands on Cézanne's estate, who may have been surprised by the price their depiction reached.

*The Card Players* is a series of oil paintings by the French Post-Impressionist artist Paul Cézanne. Painted during Cézanne's final period in the early 1890s, there are five paintings in the series. The versions vary in size, the number of players, and the setting in which the game takes place. Cézanne also completed numerous drawings and studies in preparation for *The Card Players* series.

The series is considered by critics to be a cornerstone of Cézanne's art during the early-to-mid 1890s period, as well as a "prelude" to his final years, when he painted some of his most acclaimed work. Each painting depicts Provençal peasants immersed in their pipes and playing cards. The subjects, all male, are displayed as studious within their card playing, eyes cast downward, intent on the game at hand. Cézanne's portraits have been noted for their lack of drama, narrative, and conventional characterization. Other than an unused wine bottle in the two-player versions, there is an absence of drink and money, which were prominent fixtures of the genre.

The models for the paintings were local farmhands, some of whom worked on the Cézanne family estate. Each scene is depicted as one of quiet, still concentration; the men look down at their cards rather than at each other, with the cards being perhaps their sole means of communication outside of work. One critic described the scenes as "human still life", while another speculated that the men's intense focus on their game mirrors that of the painter's absorption in his art.

While there are, in total, five paintings of card players by Cézanne, the final three works were similar in composition and number of players (two), causing them to sometimes be grouped together as one version. The exact dates of the paintings are uncertain.

These three versions of *The Card Players* eliminated spectators and other "unnecessary detail" and displayed only the "absolute essentials": two players immersed in their game. The scene has been described as balanced, as well as naturally symmetrical with the two players being each other's "partner in an agreed opposition". The man on the left is smoking a pipe, wearing a top hat with a downcast brim, in darker, more formal clothing, seated upright; the man to the right is pipeless, in a shorter hat with upcast brim, lighter, more loosely fit clothing, and hunched over the table. Even the cards themselves are contrasting light and dark hues. In each of the two-player paintings, a sole wine bottle rests in the mid-part of the table, said to represent a dividing line between the two participants as well as the centre of the painting's "symmetrical balance". Cézanne created a substantial number of studies and preparatory drawings for *The Card Players* series. Over a dozen initial sketches and painted studies of local farmworkers were made by Cézanne in preparation for

the final paintings. It has been speculated his models sat for the studies rather than the finished works themselves, and the painter possibly sketched preliminary work in a cafe.

Is the painting, created at the cusp of the 20th century, worth it? Well, Cézanne inspired Cubism and presaged abstract art, and Picasso called him “the father of us all.” That said, “\$250 million is a fortune,” notes Victor Wiener, the fine-art appraiser. “But you take any art-history course, and a *Card Players* is likely to be in it. It’s a major, major image.”

Now look at the following poems:

*O Money!* - W H Davies

<https://interestingliterature.com/2019/02/the-best-poems-about-money-everyone-should-read/>

The self-described ‘supertramp’ and poet, W H Davies, captures money’s allure well in this poem: ‘When I had money, money, O! / I knew no joy till I went poor; / For many a false man as a friend / Came knocking all day at my door.’ However, Davies concludes on a bittersweet note: ‘But now I have no money, O! / My friends are real, though very few.’

*Money* - Philip Larkin

<https://interestingliterature.com/2019/02/the-best-poems-about-money-everyone-should-read/>

Larkin’s attitude about life tended to be that whether or not we use it, it goes. So it was with spending money: the unspent money lying in his bank account reproaches him for letting it lie there wastefully, but Larkin knows deep down that spending his money will not bring happiness. There is something depressing about money: ‘It is intensely sad.’

### **EXERCISE THREE: Priceless Poetry**

Write a poem/piece inspired by the theme and/or the artworks and artists we have explored. Here are some suggestions for ways in to the writing:

- Choose an image to work with. Write a sentence or two about why you chose this image, how it makes you feel, and/or what it makes you think about.
- Next, write a detailed description of the image. Be sure to include words that indicate size, shape, colour, light/shade, objects, figures, etc.
- Finally, write a poem in response to your image. If you need inspiration, look back at your answers above.

There are many different ways to go about writing your poem. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a poem about your thoughts and feelings as you experience the artwork. Consider the relationship between money and art. Does it change your appreciation / experience of the artwork?
- Speculate about how or why the artist has created this artwork.
- Write from the point of view of a person or object in the image – if an object, bring it to life and make it think and feel like a human being.
- Write a poem from the point of view of the artist / someone depicted in the artwork.
- What is being revealed and what concealed in the artwork?
- Imagine what was happening while the artist was creating this work.
- Write a poem about your own or someone else’s experience that is triggered by any of the artworks / the theme.

Your poem could be written in the style of a poem we’ve looked at, for example, with a song-like quality, or repeated chant or refrain (*O Money!*); a specific verse and rhyme structure (*O Money!* and *Money*); different voices ‘speaking’ within the poem (*Money*)

And, of course, you may write a poem about the theme in your own way and in your own style!

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ENGLAND**



## Appendix 1

### **Barrett Browning Memorial Institute, Ledbury, by Sara Jane Arbury**

*With thanks to Wilfred Owen*

BARRETT BROWNING INSTITUTE, THE HOMEND  
COMMEMORATES ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING,  
POETESS, WHO SPENT HER CHILDHOOD IN THE  
DISTRICT. BUILT ON SITE OF THE OLD TANNERY.  
OPENED BY SIR HENRY RIDER HAGGARD, 1896.

(plaque inscription)

One man with a pull of will began this building, rising  
hour by hour, a memorial to Elizabeth Barrett Browning,  
the Poet Laureate of Hope End. Reading rooms and libraries  
warming the course of patient knowledge with open fireplaces  
and literature, science, art – three holy glimmers of enlightenment  
purposed for the people of Ledbury. Subscriptions paid in pounds  
and penny pieces, brought into being by fellowships and friends;  
this institute was theirs, is ours, will be yours. A common sense of future,  
from the high five of the Youth Drop-in to the upgathered potential  
in patterns of peeled paint, cracks and cobwebs, relaxed floorboards,  
specks that in the sun-shafts turn to words, *O Life, Life, let me breathe,  
let me count the ways I could love this town*. It may seem at sixes and sevens,  
but sidelong ideas flock, pause, and renew, circle like swifts  
around the clock tower, light and clear – what shall we do here?  
Centre stage, Bye Street widened by eight feet to accommodate,  
unlocked with a golden key, deep thinking in silentness of duty,  
the clock dials face the compass, strike the steady running of hours  
that fall like ninepins and stand again, from golden east to bronze west.  
This building shows a slow grand age, a well-mannered mix  
of timber and stone befitting the almshouses, the flourish of the town.  
Substantial, full again with expectations of quick municipal activity,  
a principal amongst the ten a penny coffee shops. Imagine the view  
from the top of the tower, the crest of roofs, trees, a last hill,  
your hands resting on the misty panes behind the eleventh hour...  
Barrett Browning, she knew the meaning of a people's building,  
the cogs, wheels, mechanisms that invigorate, tick it into civic motion,  
keep it going, keep it going, from larger day to huger night,  
before time's careless, carefree break at twelve.