

poems. (In *The Athenaeum* on 20 March 1869 he hailed *The Ring and the Book* as not only the supreme poetical achievement of its own time but England's 'most precious and profound spiritual treasure ... since the days of Shakespeare'.)

- 1 Annie Egerton Smith, who saw much of Browning and his sister and was his regular companion at concerts, died on 14 September 1877. 'La Saisiaz', occasioned by her death, was completed in November 1877 and published in May 1878.
- 2 I have been unable to trace these lines in Buchanan's published works.

Browning's 'loathing and contempt for poor Walt'

Robert Buchanan

On one occasion, when I was lunching at [Browning's] house, I was unsuspecting enough to avow my deep admiration for the American Poet, Walt Whitman. No sooner had I done so than I found that I had loosened an avalanche.

No words were strong enough, no terms indignant enough, to express my host's loathing and contempt for poor Walt, and chiefly on moral grounds! As far as I was able, I stuck up for the defence of the man whom I revered this side of idolatry; but it was of no use, I was buried under the attack of Browning's copious vocabulary, and could only pant for breath. The squabble, the first serious one I had ever had with Browning, lasted until I rose to go, very glad indeed to get out of range. The next morning, to my amazement, I received a letter from the poet, which, for reasons of propriety, I am unable to print verbatim. The mischief was out, however. Although it did not appear that Browning had studied Whitman at all (which was singular seeing what an omnivorous reader Browning was) he was ready to pass judgement on him and to condemn him to instant execution, simply on the score of some miserable and possibly garbled quotation carried to him at secondhand.

Harriett Jay, *Robert Buchanan*, pp. 114–15

Notes

Given Buchanan's hostility to Browning there may be at least an element of exaggeration here. Buchanan believed that his 'admiration for another modern poet was resented as an act of disloyalty' in view of his printed praise of Browning's work.