

# **Dynamic Synergy**

**How 8 Couples Created  
Exemplary Marriages and Became  
Famous as Working Teams**

## **Emerson Klees**

**A *Possibility Press* Book**

# Dynamic Synergy

**Emerson Klees**

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—*Introduction*—

## **What Does It Take to Be an Extraordinary Husband and Wife Team?**

**I**n recent years, many books, magazine articles, and newspaper columns have emphasized the incompatibilities between men and women. This book is different. It focuses on how married couples worked together as teams, made a bigger difference, and became famous. It shows what married couples can accomplish when both spouses are pulling together.

The lives of the exemplary married couples profiled here provide us with outstanding examples of teamwork—of how they worked together to do greater things than they could have possibly done alone. The environment in which these husband and wife teams strived, and the personal characteristics each partner brought into the relationship, will inspire you and, if you're married, your spouse as well. Even though these couples represent individuals with different personalities, their loving relationships reveal the common elements necessary for phenomenal success.

The diverse areas of endeavor represented by these teams include the creative arts, entertainment, the humanities, science, business, industry, and royalty. The men and women presented here persevered in maintaining a productive working relationship despite, or maybe because of, their personal differences and occasional dissimilar priorities. They contribute their individuality as well as their personal lives for the success of the team. This is the key to how successful couples operate in their relationships—

creating dynamic synergy—causing their combined output to be far greater than it otherwise could have been had they worked separately.

These biographical sketches highlight factors that can enhance the success of any husband and wife team, including:

- Communicating more clearly, openly, and effectively—*with love*.
- Nurturing interests that enhance the team’s dreams, goals, and objectives.
- Focusing on working together superbly—*personally and professionally*—while challenging each other to be and do more.
- Benefiting from each other’s strengths and abilities, while complementing each other’s weaknesses.
- Offering and accepting encouragement and constructive suggestions.

I could have chosen many other husband and wife pairs, however, these couples provide us with particularly outstanding role models, illustrating the dynamic synergy of loving and working as a team. Their lives together are worthy of emulation and doing so can help *you* achieve the healthy balance needed to create a relationship that produces extraordinary love and success.

People get married to be together, but most live separate lives, their careers drawing them apart. Working together as a team, however, can take your marriage to a magnificent level most couples will never experience. You’ll really get to know each other, bond more than ever, enjoy the same friends, and grow through the same challenges, while experiencing the joys of the same victories and dreams come true.

No one set of abilities or qualities can assure the continuing success of a husband and wife team. It depends on their personal characteristics, empathy for and understanding of each other, the environment in which they strive, and their resolve and commitment. But most of all—*it depends on their love for each other!*

**“***H*ow do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach, when feeling out of sight for the ends of Being and ideal Grace. I love thee to the level of every day’s most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise. I love thee with the passion put to use in my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith. I lived with a love I seemed to lose with my lost saints—I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God chooses, I shall love thee better after death.”

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**“***T*ruth is within ourselves; it takes no rise from outward things, whatever you may believe. There is an inmost center in us all where truth abodes in fullness.”

—Robert Browning

—Chapter 1—

## Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**E**ven though she was in poor health and considered an invalid when they met, Elizabeth Barrett's reputation as a poet was greater than Robert Browning's. Rarely leaving her room in her parents' home, Elizabeth and Robert first just corresponded, but it wasn't long before he arranged their meeting through a mutual friend. With a strong respect for the other's poetry, they found they had much in common emotionally. Elizabeth's father had forbidden his children, both sons and daughters, to marry, but since Elizabeth was chronically ill, she was never concerned about the edict—*until she met Robert!*

As love developed between them, Elizabeth's health improved and they secretly married—eloping—moving to Florence, Italy. Predictably, as soon as her father found out, he promptly disowned her. Thankfully, she had a small annuity on which to live, as Robert's income was not sufficient to support them. Nevertheless, they remained deeply in love and had an idyllic marriage.

Having no serious arguments, they strongly supported each other's writing. In Elizabeth's opinion, she hadn't even begun to live until she met Robert. With her advice and editing, his poetry gained wider acceptance than his earlier works, while her poetry improved as well, thanks to his counsel and suggestions.

### **Elizabeth's Early Years**

Elizabeth Barrett was born March 6, 1806, in Durham, England, the oldest of twelve, to Edward Moulton Barrett and Mary Graham-Clarke Barrett. Her father was a wealthy merchant whose family owned a plantation in Jamaica.

Having received no formal education, Elizabeth became a voracious reader and, to a great extent, was self-educated. She even learned Greek by participating in her favorite brother Edward's lessons. Her first poems, including "The Battle of Marathon," were published when she was only 13, her father paying for private printings of her early work.

In 1832, the Barrett family moved to Devon; three years later they moved to London. In 1838, they moved yet again, to 50 Wimpole Street, which was then popularized in Rudolf Besier's play, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*.

After she had published *The Serafim and Other Poems* that year, Elizabeth unfortunately suffered a serious health challenge, possibly a lung abscess, affecting her respiratory system. Receiving a spinal injury while saddling a pony at fifteen, her health continued to deteriorate.

Because of her health, Elizabeth and her brother, Edward, went to the sea of Torquay for a year. Unfortunately, he drowned there while sailing. She and her brother, whom she fondly called "Bro," had been close and, since he had traveled to Torquay because of her, she considered herself at least partially responsible for his death.

In 1841, emotionally broken, Elizabeth returned to London, spending her days mostly reclining on a sofa in her room. Receiving few visitors, she couldn't envision much of a future. Nevertheless, she wrote countless letters and stayed current in the literary world by corresponding with many of the day's scholars and writers.

In 1844, Elizabeth's reputation as a poet grew when her book, *Poems*, was published, consisting of twenty-eight sonnets, selected romantic ballads, and other miscellaneous poems. It not only improved her standing with critics, but also brought her to the attention of fellow poet Robert Browning.

## Robert's Early Years

Robert Browning, the oldest child of Robert Browning, Sr. and Sarah Wiedemann Browning, was born in Camberwell, England, on May 7, 1812.

Robert's father, a bibliophile and scholar who worked for the Bank of England for fifty years, gave young Robert the opportunity to grow up in a home with thousands of books. So even though he attended private schools, which focused almost exclusively on literary and musical subjects, most of his education was received at home, his father being one of his tutors.

Father and son were very close throughout their lives. Robert was also close to his mother, to the extent of sharing illnesses with her when he was a child. His tolerant parents provided an environment that was "sheltered, enclosed, and dependent," making it easy for him to live at home until he finally married at 33.

At 16, Robert attended classes in Greek at London University, deciding poetry was to become his life's work. Since his father was willing to finance his writing, Robert was never challenged by financial problems and grateful for his father's support.

At 21, Robert published *Pauline—a Fragment of a Confession*. While critics gave it a favorable review, it wasn't well received by others. In later years, Robert was so ashamed of this early work that he destroyed all the copies he could find.

Over the next twelve years, Robert became a prolific author, writing *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, *Pippa Passes*, *Bells and Pomegranates*, and five plays—*Strafford*, *King Victor and King Charles*, *The Return of the Druses*, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, and *Colombe's Birthday*. Unfortunately, all had very short runs on stage, while none of his other plays were ever produced.

Even though he wasn't a successful playwright, Robert had a full social life, which included many literary friends. One of them was John Forster of *The Examiner*, the only literary critic to perceive the merit of *Paracelsus*. Another close friend was Scottish historian, critic, and sociological writer Thomas Carlyle. Robert had many women friends as well, but no close attachments—until Elizabeth.

### **Robert and Elizabeth Discover Each Other**

Elizabeth was passionately ambitious and desired to break out of the shell of her illness. Not thinking much of love and romantic passion, she wanted to find someone with whom she could share her love of poetry. When she read *Paracelsus*, she suspected Robert Browning might be that person. While getting to know Robert from his poetry and her interpretation of it, she learned more about him as a man from her cousin, John Kenyon.

In late December 1844, Robert, returning from a trip to Italy, read Elizabeth Barrett's *Poems*. Admiring her work, he learned more about her from his friend, John Kenyon, and then wrote to Elizabeth telling her how much he enjoyed her poetry.

In his first letter, Robert wrote, "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett." Rather than attempting to analyze her poetry, he wrote, "Into me it has gone, and part of me it has become, this great living poetry of yours, not a flower of which but took root and grew. . . . I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart—and I love you too."

Elizabeth replied that she was delighted with "the sympathy of a poet, and such a poet!" She asked him for criticisms of her writing and offered some comments on his: "'Mist' is an infamous word for your kind of obscurity. You are never misty—not even in *Sordello*—never vague. Your graver cuts deep sharp lines, always—and there is an extra distinctness in your images and thoughts, from the midst of which, crossing each other infinitely, the general significance seems to escape."

Robert and Elizabeth corresponded frequently, and over 600 of their letters survive, providing a wealth of personal information. In one of her letters, she offered her views on writing:

"Like to write? Of course, of course I do. I seem to live while I write—it is life for me. Why, what is it to live? Not to eat and drink and breathe, but to feel the life in you down all the fibres of your being, passionately and joyfully. And thus, one lives in composition surely—not always—but when the wheel goes round and the process is uninterrupted."

Initially, Robert's and Elizabeth's letters were about their craft, but soon the relationship began deepening. On May 20, 1845, they met for the first time. After that, he wrote her, concluding his letter with "I am proud and happy in your friendship—now and forever. May God bless you!" Following that letter with one declaring his love, he was moving too fast for her. She responded, "You do not know what pain you give me by speaking so wildly... you have said some intemperate things... fancies—which you will not say over again, nor unsay, but forget at once." He replied that she had misunderstood him, and she accepted his apology.

Robert's letters gave the impression of a man attempting to control an overwhelming emotion. Her letters in response provide a recurring theme—she felt unworthy and feared she would restrict him, believing her poor health would limit his social activity.

Of course, her autocratic father's irrational refusal to allow his children to marry offered yet another hurdle. Elizabeth, the oldest child, was receiving a modest stipend on which she could live, but her sisters, Henrietta and Arabel, did not get anything comparable. They were entirely dependent on their father for support, or on a husband if they went against his wishes and married. Henrietta married, but Arabel remained single and financially dependent upon her father.

Elizabeth held Robert off, viewing him the giver and herself the taker, feeling she was not good enough for him. Ultimately, however, they admitted they were very much in love and decided to get married. Even so, just two months before their wedding, she told him he would be better off if he left her. But, of course, he didn't.

Planning to marry in secret, Robert and Elizabeth waited until her father was away to leave for a honeymoon in Italy. She told her sisters of her plans, but wouldn't allow them to attend the ceremony, knowing that would only upset their father. Her brothers, as well as most of her close friends, were never told about her plans.

Finally married in St. Marylebone Parish Church on September 12, 1846, Elizabeth lived yet another week in her father's house before embarking for France en route to Italy. She said, "I did hate so,

to have to take off the ring.” On September 19, the newlyweds left for Italy.

Robert’s and Elizabeth’s letters provide a comprehensive view of the complexity of their relationship, superbly expressing their feelings. They even corresponded when he was away on a short trip to find a place to stay for the summer away from the heat of Florence. When Elizabeth died, Robert exclaimed, “How strange it will be to have no more letters.”

### **Robert and Elizabeth Support Each Other’s Work**

While living at Casa Guidi in Florence, after the birth of their son, Robert Weidemann Browning (“Pen”) on March 9, 1849, Elizabeth showed Robert poems she had written during their courtship that she had never shared with him. She had traced their courtship from hesitation, doubt, and reservation—to the happiness of love. Since they were personal, however, she suspected he would object to their being published.

To the contrary, Robert considered them among the best sonnets ever written in the English language. “When he saw them he was very much touched and pleased—and thinking highly of the poetry did not let, i.e., ‘could not, consent,’ he said, ‘that they should be lost to my volumes [of 1850]’ and so we agreed to slip them in under some sort of veil, and after much consideration chose . . . *the Portuguese*.” This collection of forty-three sonnets was published as *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

While living in Florence, Robert completed two volumes of poetry titled *Men and Women*. Elizabeth worked on *Aurora Leigh*, a long prose poem she described as “the novel or romance I have been hankering after for so long.” She described it to her brother, George, as “beyond question my best work.”

The main character, Aurora Leigh, was born in Italy to an English father and an Italian mother, both of whom died when she was 13. The disciplinarian aunt in England who brought her up wants Aurora to marry her cousin, Romney, but Aurora wants to be a poet. Elizabeth addresses the question of whether women can be happy with

just their art or if they need men to feel fulfilled. Romney then proposes to a poor girl, Marian Earle, who jilts him. Elizabeth builds an intricate plot to tell her “thoroughly modern” story.

Elizabeth told her sister Arabel, “Robert and I work every day—he has a large volume of short poems which will be completed by the spring—and I have some four thousand, five hundred lines of mine—I am afraid six thousand lines will not finish it.” To protect their work schedule, they did not receive visitors until three o’clock. Elizabeth wrote in the drawing room in an armchair with her feet raised, while Robert worked at a desk in the sitting room. The doors to the dining room in between the two rooms remained closed.

Although Robert and Elizabeth edited each other’s completed works, they did not review each other’s daily effort nor did they discuss their work every day. Elizabeth, in particular, had strong feelings about this. She said, “An artist must, I fancy, either find or make solitude to work in, if it is to be good work at all.” Until her work was completed, she kept the details to herself.

Robert and Elizabeth then went to London to oversee the printing of Robert’s *Men and Women*, where Elizabeth helped by reading proofs as they came off press. The effort was quite exhausting for her, but she was convinced this work would enhance her husband’s reputation. As a result, she postponed the completion of *Aurora Leigh*, putting her husband’s work first.

Initially, *Men and Women* was successful, the first edition being an immediate sell out, while American publishers requested reprint rights. With Elizabeth’s help, Robert got clearer in expressing his artistic feelings, causing critics cease calling his work obscure. All the while, Elizabeth also helped him think less of financial concerns and put more emphasis on writing. She considered *Men and Women* a brilliant collection and hoped his peers would acclaim his genius.

When Elizabeth finally completed *Aurora Leigh*, Robert arranged to have it published, acting as her business manager, while both read the proofs in preparing the manuscript for press. Robert then discontinued promotion of his last collection while postponing work on his next book, causing sales of *Men and Women* to sag.

At this point, Robert decided to take drawing and sculpting lessons, since he was not quite as dedicated to writing as was Elizabeth. As a result, over the course of the marriage, his poetic output was not nearly as great as hers was.

Before they got married, he had lived at home, his sister and parents ministering to his needs, leaving him with no responsibilities that could divert him from his writing. After he was married, however, he had to spend time looking after Elizabeth, whose health was always in delicate balance.

Continuing to write poetry while carrying their son, Elizabeth completed the first part of *Casa Guidi Windows*. She encouraged Robert to concentrate on dramatic poetic monologues and give up playwriting. And even though she was concerned he wasn't measuring up to his potential because of his reduced productivity, he considered it temporary.

After their son was born, Robert composed a long double poem titled "Christmas Eve and Easter Day." Elizabeth strongly influenced the theme by suggesting he write from the heart, not the head, conveying his thoughts using a minimum of dramatic devices. She encouraged him to write about his hopes and fears, particularly those of a religious nature.

On January 1, 1852, Elizabeth was quite pleased when Robert made a New Year's resolution to write a poem every day. He began with "Love Among the Ruins, Women, and Roses," and "Childe Rolande," but his writing wasn't sustained. Staying in Paris at the time, Elizabeth encouraged him to resume his contacts with society, even though she was not able to accompany him. She was content to experience social activity vicariously through him, enabling him to stay current with the Paris social scene.

Attending social events proved to be a great outlet for Robert when Elizabeth's health restricted her mobility, so talk became an important ingredient of the couple's relationship. They knew as long as they could be together and communicate freely, Elizabeth's delicate health wouldn't harm their marriage. This openness guarded them greatly when it came to minor disagreements. Elizabeth wrote

to Robert's sister, Sarianna, "The peculiarity of our relationship is that even when he's displeased with me he thinks out loud and can't stop himself."

Robert's and Elizabeth's marriage was incredibly solid and enduring. The few disagreements they did have primarily involved viewing friends from different perspectives. While Elizabeth could learn about the nature of people from Robert, she stayed with her own evaluation of friends.

Robert and Elizabeth retained their own identities, thought independently, and were exciting conversationalists. Neither tried to convert the other to their own image of a marriage partner. Robert wrote to his brother-in-law, George, "I shall only say that 'Ba' [his nickname for Elizabeth] and I know each other for a time and, I dare trust, eternity.... We differ..., we quarrel sometimes about politics, and estimate people's characters with enormous difference but, in the main, we know each other, I say."

### **Elizabeth's Death and Her Place in History**

Elizabeth's health deteriorated further during the last three years of her life. When she finally appeared to be slipping away, Robert summoned the doctor.

Seeming to be asleep, he nonetheless whispered in her ear, "Do you know me?" She murmured, "My Robert—my heavens, my beloved!" She kissed him repeatedly and said, "Our lives are held by God," as he laid her head on the pillow. She tried to kiss him again. However, no longer able to reach him, she kissed her hand and extended it to him.

Robert asked, "Are you comfortable?" She sighed, "Beautiful." As she fell asleep again, he realized she should not be in a reclining position when a cough was coming. When he raised her to ease the cough, she began to cough up phlegm but then stopped. Robert thought she might have fainted as he saw her brow contract as though in pain, and then relax. She looked oh so very young. Then their servant, Annunciata, who realized she was dead, said, "Her last gesture a kiss, her last thought of love."

Robert's friends expected him to break down completely after the loss of his beloved. However, he remained in control, partly because Elizabeth had died so peacefully in his arms. Robert knew his friends felt concern for him, and he was extremely grateful for the fifteen years he and Elizabeth had together. He also knew she had more to give, but appreciated the rare union and success that they had. Friends were also concerned about Pen, who had been as close to his mother as a son can be. He, too, held up well and was actually a consolation to his father. Robert told his sister, Sarianna, that Pen was "perfect to me."

Elizabeth's place in literary history couldn't have been summarized better than by essayist and poet Alice Meynell:

The place of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in English literature is high, if not on the summit. She had an original genius, a wonderful heart, and an intellect that was, if not great, exceedingly active. She seldom has composure or repose, but it is not true that her poetry is purely emotional. It is full of abundant and often overabundant, thoughts. It is intellectually restless... she "dashed" not by reason of feminine weakness, but as it were to prove her possession of masculine strength.

Her gentler work, as in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, is beyond praise. There is in her poetic personality a glory of righteousness, of spirituality, and of ardor, that makes her name a splendid one in the history of incomparable literature.

Only 55 when she passed away, Elizabeth had nevertheless accomplished the goals she had set as a young girl—to produce lasting poetry that made a significant contribution to society. She had even influenced many other poets, including Emily Dickinson, before she died.

Elizabeth's finding Robert to love and having her love reciprocated was more than she had ever hoped for, while having a son at forty-three only added to her joy. She truly appreciated her good fortune in being a poet, wife, and mother, but also in supporting Robert in making the mark in poetry of which she knew he was capable.

### **Life After Elizabeth**

After Elizabeth passed away, Robert and Pen returned to London, living in Paddington for the next twenty-five years. Robert visited Italy again, but could never bring himself to return to Florence. Initially quite lonely, he eventually regained his enthusiasm for life, resuming his literary connections. When his *Dramatis Personae* was published in 1864, he was lionized by his peers.

In 1866, Robert's father died, and his sister, Sarianna, moved in with him to run his household. Robert never remarried, although he had many close women friends. The following year, Oxford University awarded him a Master of Arts degree "by diploma," and Balliol College elected him an honorary fellow.

In 1868-69, *The Ring and the Book*, based on a court case in Florence, was published in four volumes and generally regarded as Robert's masterpiece. He versified the arguments of counsels for the prosecution and the defense as well as the gossip of the busybodies, telling the story with the detail of a court recorder. Finally hailed as "a great dramatic poet," Elizabeth's dreams for Robert had come true.

In 1881, Dr. Furnival and Miss E. H. Hickey formed the Browning Society. Robert continued receiving honors including an L.L.D degree from Cambridge University in 1879, the D.C.L. from Oxford University in 1882, and an L.L.D degree from Edinburgh University in 1884. In 1886, he also became foreign correspondent to the Royal Academy.

Privacy was important to Robert during his 28 years as a widower. He destroyed the letters of his youth, as well as all letters he had sent to his family, but he couldn't destroy his wife's letters to him or his letters to her. However, he wasn't quite sure what to do with them either.

In the end, he left the letters to his son, Pen, who, in 1899, published them. Robert continually promoted Elizabeth's work, realizing that part of his popularity was because he was the widower of the great Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Pen eventually settled in Venice, where Robert and Sarianna vis-

ited him every year. At about 5 p.m. on December 12, 1889, while visiting Pen, Browning said to his nurse, “I feel much worse. I know that I must die.” To Pen, he said, “I am dying. My dear boy; my dear boy.” He became unconscious around 8 p.m. Two hours later at his bedside, Pen and Sariana saw a “violent heaving of his big chest” and then no more movement.

After Robert’s body was transported to London for burial in Westminster Abbey, it was proposed that Elizabeth’s body be disinterred from the cemetery in Florence and buried alongside her husband. However, Pen decided her grave should be undisturbed.

Here is biographer and critic Leslie Stephen’s insight into Robert’s poetry:

He was little interested in the historical or romantic aspects of life. He takes his subjects from a great variety of scenes and places—from ancient Greece, medieval Italy, and modern France and England; but the interest for him is not the picturesque surroundings, but of the human being who is to be found in all periods ... he is interested in the real comedy and tragedy of life.

It can hardly be denied that his intellectual ingenuity often tempts him to deviate from his true function, and that his observations are not to be excused because they result from an excess, instead of a deficiency of intellectual acuteness. But the variety of his interests—aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical—is astonishing, and his successes are poems which stand out as unique and unsurpassable in the literature of his time.

Robert certainly lived up to Elizabeth’s hopes and dreams. Although he wasn’t very productive at writing poetry during their marriage, he created a body of quality poetry in his later years after she had passed away. Even though the Brownings would have been notable poets without the advice and help of each other, their individual work was certainly enhanced by the suggestions and encouragement of each other.

Other loving/working relationships may have equaled that of the Brownings, but few have been so well documented. They were for-

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tunate to have had what they had, even if it was only for 15 years. Their loving relationship and working together provide us with a sterling example of dynamic synergy worthy of our emulation.

**“***With us, it’s very simple: Gracie takes the lead on stage; I take it off stage. We both have our own departments. She stays in hers, and I’m into everybody’s. Gracie’s had always been the greater acting talent; she is the star, but you’d never know it. She has always allowed me to advise her, direct her, and to speak for us. One thing I don’t do for her—she thinks for herself, and when she’s made up her mind, that’s it.”*

—George Burns