



Robert Browning

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Browning

(1812-1889)

Dramatic Monologue

- a form invented and practiced principally by Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Dante Rossetti, and other Victorians, have been much debated in the last several decades. Everyone agrees that to be a dramatic monologue a poem must have a speaker and an implied auditor, and that the reader often perceives a gap between what that speaker says and what he or she actually reveals.

Dramatic Monologue

- In one of the most influential, though hotly contested definitions, Robert Langbaum saw the form as a continuation of an essentially Romantic "poetry of experience" in which the reader experiences a tension between sympathy and judgment. One problem with this approach, as Glenn Everett has argued, lies in the fact that contemporary readers of Browning's poems found them vastly different from Langbaum's Wordsworthian model.

Dramatic Monologue

- Many writers on the subject have disagreed, pointing out that readers do not seem ever to sympathize with the speakers in some of Browning's major poems, such as "Porphria's Lover" or "My Last Duchess." Glenn Everett proposes that Browninesque dramatic monologue has three requirements:

Dramatic Monologue

- The reader takes the part of the silent listener.
- The speaker uses a case-making, argumentative tone.
- We complete the dramatic scene from within, by means of inference and imagination



Dramatic Monologue

- <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/dm1.html>



“Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”

- Trochaic tetrameter
- Atmosphere: Renaissance desire for revenge
- Challenges the monastic principles as a breeder of narrow, selfish spirits

Question

- Explain the hatred in “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”.



“My Last Duchess”

- Heroic couplets
- Pride
- Greediness
- Heartlessness
- Pretense as art connoisseur and polished gentleman

Question

- What are the personalities of the duke and the last duchess?



The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church”


- Ruskin: “I know of no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin.”

Question

- Characterize the bishop.

Question

- Explain the rivalry in this poem.



“Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came”

- Title from Edgar’s song in *King Lear*
- A nightmarish dream of the poet
- The end: to die bravely

Question

- One interpretation of this poem argues that it is an allegory about the ordinary believer's confrontation with mid-nineteenth century religious doubt, and that the evil which must be faced is Despair, which is traditionally the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins. Do you find this reading satisfying and compelling?