

The Poetry of Robert Browning

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INTRODUCTION 1

Changing Perspectives in Browning Criticism

The introduction gives a brief overview of Browning's life and major works and his changing critical fortunes, followed by an outline of the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER ONE 8

Romanticism: Browning and Shelley

This chapter surveys criticism on Browning's response to Romantic poetics, covering his own critical prose and its interpretation by Philip Drew and Thomas Collins. It presents readings of Browning's ambiguous attitude towards Shelley's poetics by John Maynard, John Stuart Mill, William Clyde DeVane, Herbert Tucker, Michael Yetman and Harold Bloom, who vary in their conclusions about how and when Browning overcomes the influence of this literary predecessor.

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Romanticism: Debt and Defiance

This chapter contrasts analyses of Browning's response to Wordsworth by John Haydn Baker and Lawrence Kramer. It also discusses Clyde Ryals' and Patricia Diane Rigg's readings of Browning in terms of Romantic irony. Catherine Maxwell's interpretation of Browning's ideal of the imperfect in relation to the Romantic sublime is contrasted with Herbert Tucker's deconstructive approach to the same concept. While David Latané examines Browning's Romantic elitist aesthetics through the lens of reader-response criticism, Britta Martens focuses on his engagement with Romantic self-expressive poetics.

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The Dramatic Monologue: Form and the Reader

This chapter concentrates on formal definitions of the dramatic monologue by Ina Beth Sessions, Michael Mason, Alan Sinfield and Philip Drew. Robert Langbaum's influential reader-centred definition of the genre is juxtaposed with E. Warwick Slinn's reading of it as creating a fictional identity, Ralph Rader's emphasis on the genre's poetic form and Cynthia Scheinberg's feminist approach. The chapter also covers criticism on the role of the genre's audience both within and outside the text by John Maynard, Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, Dorothy Mermin and Lee Erickson, and analyses of the genre in terms of speech act theory by Cornelia Pearsall and Slinn.

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The Dramatic Monologue: Causes and Context

This chapter focuses on approaches which situate Browning's development of the dramatic monologue within various literary and cultural contexts, including Isobel Armstrong's concept of the 'Victorian double poem', J. Hillis Miller's foregrounding of the Victorian Crisis of Faith, Loy Martin's Marxist reading and Britta Martens' analysis of the genre in the context of social change and other prose genres. Special attention is paid to the genre's relationship with Victorian psychology, as explored by Ekbert Faas, Michael Mason, Ellen O'Brien and Barry Popowich with reference to psychiatry and by Gregory Tate with reference to Victorian theories of mental processes.

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Aesthetics: Realism and the Grotesque

This chapter presents critical appreciations of Browning's realism by Walter Bagehot, John Woolford and E. Warwick Slinn and the related issue of Browning's use of the grotesque, as discussed by Bagehot, Woolford, George Santayana and Isobel Armstrong. Readings of Browning's famous painter poems are also covered, including David DeLaura's and Laurence Lerner's focus on the political and religious

Browning scholars celebrating the poet's Bicentenary, suggests where scholarship about the poet may be heading at a time when the emphasis of Victorian studies is shifting from traditional literary analysis to cultural studies.

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