

12 nov 2020 - The Victorian Age

Victorian Poetry started as a revival of Romanticism but soon mirrored the sense of uneasiness that characterized the Victorian Age.

The most important poets were **Alfred Tennyson** and **Robert Browning** and they felt a moral responsibility through their poems towards their public.

Robert Browning

He is outstanding because he created a new kind of poem, called **Dramatic Monologue**.

The Dramatic Monologue was not invented by Browning, but he actually inherited it from past writers, especially from Shakespeare; he wrote, especially in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* long soliloquies, that are extended passages recited by one person; they are addressed to no-one in particular, but to the audience at large.

Through the soliloquy the character reveals his faults, his thoughts to the audience, while giving the impression that he is speaking to himself.

Browning chooses this poetic form because it gives him the possibility of **psychological exploration**; but he transformed the soliloquy into a **monologue** by means of the following devices:

1. he turned the soliloquy into a complete lyrical poem with a precise metrical structure;
2. he avoided any autobiographical reference, by introducing a third person, a speaker, who speaks about himself or about someone else;
3. he replaced the audience with one or more silent listeners, to whom the speaker addresses;
4. he called his monologues **dramatic**, in the sense of *theatrical* (in fact they are dramas with characters) and *crucial* (because the speaker is caught in a moment of crisis);
5. Browning preserves the **dramatic irony**, present in Elizabethan Soliloquies, since the speaker does not realize that what he is revealing to the listeners is excessive and dangerous;
6. he made his characters not only individuals but stereotypes (symbols of a category or of an age);
7. he decided to use blank verse, which is *unrhymed iambic pentameter*, but the punctuation respected the line of thought, and this gave the impression of spoken language;
8. he set his monologues in a distant historical period, because he didn't want to be involved.

Browning was a very prolific author; he wrote a lot of poems, plays and books, but most of

his works are **obscure**, and the most remarkable are his collection of poems, such as *Dramatic Lyrics*, and *Men and Women*.

In these *Dramatic Lyrics* there is a subgroup titled *Madhouse Cells*, where he analyses the personality of mad people, the psychology of crazy people.

The two most famous poems are *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover*.