

BROWNING'S DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

General Definition: a discourse in verse; one that is *uttered* by a character who speaks in his or her own voice, though not necessarily a completely honest voice. The character is dramatized and has a distinct personality (which is almost always, at least in part, a mask of the self rather than the naked self). The character is not the poet, though sometimes the character may be Browning's ventriloquist. The dramatized character—or monologist—usually addresses the discourse to a distinctive auditor, who may or may not be actually present in the scene but who influences the manner and the content of the discourse.

--a quest for the self; sometimes an anti-quest, in which the speaker deepens rather than triumphs over self-deceptions

--a gap between what the character says and what the character means so that an unconscious projection of identity is often present

--as a form, the d.m. stands between the historical contingency of the self and lyric self-presence (h. tucker)

--sympathy vs. judgment

--the speaker at a moment of crisis (but not always aware of this)

--the discourse is always rhetorical in its function

--speakers often tell a smaller truth in order to suppress a larger truth

--the listener is often a threat to the speaker

--the speaker attempt to evade the active agency of the other; they conceive that they either do or can control the other's responses

--the reader has to re-create the monologue as a dialogue (by grasping the rhetorical function)

--artists and creators, a favorite type of subject for Browning's monologues, usually choose life over art; for Browning (unlike Tennyson) art is no refuge from spiritual crisis; thus, like D. G. Rossetti and Carlyle, Browning usually devalues his own art in the face of a reality that overwhelms it (McGowan)