



Love and the “New-Woman” In Robert Browning’s Poetry

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Abstract: This paper analyses Robert Browning’s love poems bringing out feminist issues which are addressed in these love poems like equal fidelity, female oppression and the fight for liberation as well as female assertiveness and the question of inheritance. Love occupies a key position in human existence and even in religion as God is referred to as Love. This paper examines the role of men and women in the love equation in Robert Browning’s poetry. In Browning’s chemistry of love, what place does a woman occupy? Browning’s men, how do they see their women and how do their women see the men in love and life? Using the feminist and biographical literary theories, this paper argues that Robert Browning, consciously or unconsciously influenced by his wife, portrays a “New-Woman” in his poetry. The paper reveals that true love does not know death as some men and women even love their wives/husbands better after their death as Robert Browning did. Such lovers never remarry as Robert Browning did.

Keywords: Love, equality, oppression, fidelity, freedom/liberation, New-Woman/feminist.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses love poems of Robert Browning which highlight feminist issues. These feminist issues are: fidelity for women (and men), female oppression and the fight for liberation on the part of the woman, inheritance and female assertiveness, denunciation of women as objects and equality between a man and woman but with a woman as a leader. Laurelyn Douglas in her article “The Woman Question, the Problem of Love, and Aurora Leigh” says that love relationship is very crucial to feminists. One of the greatest issues of concern in feminist theory is the role women play in relationship. This article by Laurelyn Douglas which focuses on the Woman Question and the problem of love in Victorian poetry does what Kathleen Blake did better in her book *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature*. This is just what this researcher intends to do in this paper: Love and feminism. This work unlike hers will focus on the poetry of a male writer. Hers concentrates on female writers. What role do women play in love relationship in Browning’s love poetry? Is it an active or a passive role? What is Browning’s stand as far as women are concerned in his love poetry?

The word feminism was invented by a French socialist Charles Fourier in the late nineteenth century. He imagined a “New Woman” who would both transform and be herself transformed by the society based on association and mutuality, rather than on competition and profits. His views influenced many women and brought self-emancipation. The word feminist appeared for the first time in English to describe women campaigning about the vote in the 1890s in England [Rowbotham 8]. According to the feminist historian Nancy Cott in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, the term feminism came into use in the 1990s in America to describe activism on behalf of women [Fine 930]. Feminism as a theory aims at interpreting and assessing literature from the female view point. This has come from the realization that the literary canon is androcentric [Davis and Schleifer 449]. Because the literary canon is androcentric or male dominated, women have embarked on re-evaluation, re-reading, re-interpreting, re-visioning, re-writing and revising literary and biblical works. Robin Morgan writes: “feminism itself even without a qualifying prefix can be the subject of debated definitions” [8]. We should think of feminism not as a theory but rather as a body of theories. This explains why Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl entitle their monumental book *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory*

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and Criticism. The pluralistic nature of feminism explains why we have various kinds, perspectives, trends, viewpoints, outlooks or standpoints on feminism like conservative feminism, Marxist, socialist, anarchist, phenomenological, enlightenment, moral crusader, black feminism, ecofeminism, third world feminism, psychological, liberal, post-modernist, Anglo-American and French feminism.

It may be asked what are the characteristics of a feminist text? Any literary work which is written about women, for women, by women and which serves as a forum for women is feminist. A literary work which helps to achieve cultural androgyny, promotes sisterhood, augments female consciousness, has a female audience in mind, discusses sympathetically the situation of women and celebrates women and their works is feminist. Feminist works usually denounce violence against women, the use of women as objects, property, toys or tools, any prejudice, discrimination against women, anti-misogynistic, women-hating attitudes, phallogocentric, masculinist, patriarchal or sexist thinking. It equally represents women as religious, virtuous, or pious, and not as agents of the devil or evil [Eve], that is, “supreme temptress” or “janua diabolic” as in the Dark Ages. A feminist text valorizes or creates matrilineage, preaches equality between women and men, liberty for women, advocates that women should also inherit property, shows a woman expressing her love by wooing a man if she loves him as well as female-assertiveness. Briefly, any work of art which represents women positively is feminist.

FIDELITY AND FEMINISM

Fidelity refers to faithfulness in any love relationship. When a man or woman is faithful, it means he or she will not involve himself or herself in fornication or adultery. Although fidelity in most advanced societies has lost its value, people of those societies still value or appreciate it because it is very difficult to keep to only one partner. A human being by nature always wants to cheat. Fidelity is a virtue not a vice. Even God in the Holy Book recommends only one man to one woman just like all liberal democracies recommend only one vote to one man or woman. In life there will always be temptations to test one’s fidelity to one’s partner. When one resists those temptations, then one is a good man or woman. What is very annoying is that society seems to condone men’s infidelity and condemns women’s infidelity. In the poems “Fears and Scruples” and “Fifine at the Fair”, Browning presents women who are faithful to their lovers. In the poems “Bifurcation” and “Prospice” he presents husbands who are faithful to their wives.

Mary Wollstonecraft has discussed fidelity in her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*¹ which to Kate Millet is “... the first document asserting the full humanity of women and insisting upon its recognition” (65). Fidelity is a thorny issue in feminism. It becomes a problem when men expect women to be faithful and they unfaithful. Men expect women to be monogamous and they polygamous. When a man is faithful to his wife who is also faithful to him, fidelity becomes a positive issue. There is equality here and this is what we call moral feminism. After everything, fidelity is an attribute or a plus to women even if their men are unfaithful.

The image of the woman as unfaithful or a temptress started in the Dark Ages. In the Dark Ages there were *contes gras* or *fabliaux* in which women were ridiculed because they were presented as *janua diaboli*. Christine de Pisan, the first feminist in the Middle Ages attacked *Le Roman de la Rose* which was a work which influenced the way Chaucer presents women in his poetry as unfaithful and untrustworthy. Browning in his poetry unlike Chaucer presents women who are faithful. This was probably influenced by his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning who throughout her marriage life was very faithful to Robert Browning.

The poem “Fears and Scruples” is a dream of a lady about a man she loves. Scruples is an English word which means a weight-unit of twenty grams or hesitation caused by uneasiness of conscience. In this poem it means hesitation caused by uneasiness of conscience. The lady is very faithful to this man. She loves his “letters full of beauty” and his famous action “far and wide”. To her this man who is her lover is a man of action. She has known this through hearsay. His letters to her say he is a man of action: “Only knew of actions by hearsay/ He himself was busied with my betters/ What of that? My turn must come some day”. (9 – 12) “Betters” above suggests the lady’s letters or her sexual organs (vagina, breast) or buttocks. She waited for a long time and the

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time she hoped would arrange things passed. She realised that she had to wait indefinitely. Because she had to wait indefinitely, she finds herself in a puzzle. There are two of such puzzles: Maybe her turn has already passed “passed and passed my turn is” or maybe the man is very busy “He’s so busied!” She has a serious problem: “If I could but muzzle / People’s foolish mouths that gave me pain”. Muzzle in English means the nose and mouth of an animal like a dog. It also refers to the guard of straps or wires placed over this part of an animal’s head to prevent it biting. Figuratively it means to prevent a person, society, newspaper etc. from expressing opinions freely. This last meaning is the one intended in this poem. She cannot prevent “people’s foolish” talk which causes her much pain.

To the public, the letters he has written to her from A to Z are all forgeries – “call them forgery from A to Z!” and his claim that he is a man of action is a lie because all men claim that they are men of action. She refutes what they have said and she knows that her lover will also refute it. She believes strongly that what she is doing is the truth although there are many wet-blankets around her. There is the fear that in her love relationship with this man, she may have a voyeur. Another problem is that “What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?” This means maybe his lover will always wake her up frowning when she is already sleeping. She says she knows that if the above is true, then they will call her lover a monster. What will also happen if her lover’s house has no window? Will she hail him? Lastly “What if this friend happens to be – God”?

This poem shows a woman who is herself, a lady who is not swayed by public opinion. To her this public opinion is misleading. In her, we see a woman who is very firm on her opinion. Successful attempts in life always begin as dreams. Very few women believe their dreams can come true. This is a woman who has an ideal man she wants to love and believes she will find this man. It is always good in life to have a picture of an ideal woman or man you will like to love or marry and believe in. You don’t just love any man who presents himself to you. This is a lesson to all women.

The rhyme scheme of this twelve stanza poem is a b a b. This regular, alternating rhyme scheme shows the speaker’s determination to succeed in her dream or ambition. This regular alternating rhyme scheme also shows that to succeed in man-woman relationship, one has to be faithful or constant. This regular alternating rhyme scheme also shows that in order to succeed in a love relationship, one should follow one’s heart and should not care about what the public says. The public will always talk negatively about any love relationship especially those who are patient and who are calmly waiting for the right man or woman.

This poem is a dramatic monologue. The speaker of this poem is a woman who is talking about her lover and the audience in this poem is “you” which represents the public or the readers. Like “Balaustion’s Adventure” and “Aristophanes’ Apology”, this is one of the rare poems in which Browning allows a woman to speak in her own voice. In most of the dramatic monologues, the speaking voice is that of a man or Browning himself. In order to understand well the poem “Fears and Scruples” and subsequent poems of Robert Browning and Robert Browning himself, we need to know what a dramatic monologue is. Browning’s style in poetry is the use of the dramatic monologue.²

In “Fifine at the Fair” Robert Browning presents a woman who is faithful and the husband who is unfaithful but who wants to justify his unfaithfulness. In this epic-like monologue, the husband is trying to convince or persuade the wife to accept his taking in a second wife who is a gipsy known as Fifine. We are happy that he is trying to convince or persuade her, not imposing as most polygamous men do. Fifine is a very beautiful woman. The husband’s name and the speaker of this monologue is Don Juan and his wife is Elvire. Philip Drew described this poem as “a prolonged monologue by a modern Don Juan about constancy in love in a world of shifting values” (358). To Bozman, this poem is:

The grand theme of the poem is the tension between the forces of stability or fidelity and of adventure or “infidelity” inherent in the living, changing, dynamic man’s relation to woman, to art, and to life itself. The poem debates and does not wholly settle the problem involved. At

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its most absolute sense, between man and wife, between Juan and Elvire (between Robert and Elizabeth?) is vindicated as the sure and everlasting thing. (Bozman XIV)

This poem was inspired by Robert Browning’s love for Lady Ashburton, a wealthy woman. After the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, he proposed marriage to her in a very tactless manner and she refused. Robert Browning told her he wanted to get married to her because of the material benefit it would give to his son Penini and that although he wanted to marry her, his heart was still buried with his wife in her grave in Italy. Fifine in this poem therefore represents Lady Ashburton, Don Juan Robert Browning and Elvire, Elizabeth Barret Browning.

Robert Browning begins this poem by quoting a conversation between Don Juan and Elvire from Moliere’s play *Don Juan*, Act 1, Scene 3 in French which he also translates into English. There is a poem which is a prologue to this great poem entitled “Amphibian”. An amphibian in biology is an animal which can live in water and the land like frogs. An amphibian in Browning’s poem has a different meaning, as Hiram Corson notes. Amphibian is one who unites both lives within himself, the material and the spiritual, in complete concord and mutual subservience – one who “lives and likes life’s way”, and can also free himself of tether, leave the solid land, and unable to fly, swim “in the sphere which overbrims with passion and thought” – the sphere of poetry. Such a person may be said to be Browning’s ideal man.

In this prologue to the poem “Fifine at the Fair” entitled “Amphibian” the poet says that he had a fancy today which has turned to fear. He swam far out in the bay. There he lay and looked at the sun and the noon-sun looked at him. Between him and the sun, no one creature could he see. Then a strange butterfly came floating by him who also lay floating. The butterfly was a “Creature as dear as new”. It was dear and new “because the membraned wings” which were “so wonderful” and “so wide”, as well as “so sun-suffused”, were things “like soul and nought beside”. Then comes this revelation: like a magic wand, a handbreadth overhead and he becomes the owner of the sea and the butterfly that of the sky. In stanza six he says that he will never join the butterfly in its flight because “nought buoys flesh in air” and if the butterfly touches the sea, it will die. He cannot fly just like the butterfly cannot touch the sea. Stanza VII is a rhetorical question about the insect (the butterfly). In stanza VIII the poet undoubtedly rejoices that the air comports so well with a creature which had the choice of the land once. The butterfly in this poem refers to a soul which has left this world. We can say that it is a spirit of a dead person who once lived on this earth. Who is that person? Stanzas IX and X reveal to us:

The soul which had gone to heaven is that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning watching “one” who is Robert Browning in the world who “both lives and likes life’s way”. It should be pointed out here that after the death of Elizabeth Barrett and her burial in Italy, Robert Browning came to England and became a party fan. He became a public man enjoying himself in parties.

In stanza XI the poet talks about “the weather / Is blue, and warm waves tempt / To free oneself of tether”. Blue weather and “warm waves” are signs which prompt or invite the mystic in this poem to transcend. Tether is a metaphor for the body. Dust is a euphemism for the physical body. In the shape which overbrims with passion and thought, refers to the mystical world. The sea becomes a mystical means or way to transcend from this world to the mystical or spiritual world of thought and passion. In this mystical world, the sea becomes the sky. It is at this level that he can substitute his quest for the heaven with poetry. Poetry we all know is the combination of passion and thought. His thought and passion which is poetry is also his thought and passion for the butterfly, for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In a mystical mood, he knows he cannot fly like a butterfly. He can only swim. When swimming he can forget the problems of this world, this world which is noisy and dusty. Swimming takes him to the world of thought and passion. With thought and passion, he can know himself and also show his concern, love or admiration for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. This prologue sounds or reads like a mystical union between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the shape of a butterfly.

The poem “Fifine at the Fair” begins with Don Juan urging his wife Elvire to go and watch a stage performance with him. The actors are from France. These dancers are girls including Fifine.

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In stanza XII, Don Juan cares very much for his wife and home. He is a caring husband. He knows that he is a don, a duke, a knight sitting beside a golden fleece which is a symbol of greater ambitions and nobility. All of the above titles and golden fleece indicate wealth. He is a wealthy man reinforced in the text by the adjective “rich”. He will abandon this “career”, rank or profession of the don, duke or knight to care for his home and wife “Have hearth and home” because he does not want his wife and all women “womankind” to appear “without as multiplied a coating as protects / God – fearing householder”. This means that he wants to act as a fence to protect his wife and other women, knowing very well that a good husband should also be a “God – fearing householder”. When we have a good husband like him and a good wife who is reasonable and hard – working, the household, the family becomes a rich, happy and modern one. “God – fearing householders” refers to both husbands and women who should believe in God. When we have a husband and a wife who are God – fearing, the household becomes a blessed one. Don Juan will want womankind to become in all respects “God – fearing householders”, subsistent or living by brain skill and by hard-labour ; win their bread by whatever way they can, provided it is done honestly. As long as this is done honestly, he Don Juan, will support her with his own money. “Win your bread whatever way you will” is a powerful feminist statement which encourages or means that women should do whatever they can do to earn money or a living provided it is done honestly and in a God – fearing manner, men will support them. Women in their household chores must use their brains or reason and their hands. Hand – labour here also means that women can employ domestic servants to help them in the house. Hand – labour refers to workers in general.

In stanza XVI, we are told that Fifine is a “sexless and bloodless sprite”. Fifine is Don Juan’s queen. A sprite is an elf, a fairy which is a mean and mischievous creature as the poet says. This sprite is sexless and bloodless. Bloodlessness reinforces the mysterious nature of a fairy which is non – human. Sexless is used by Don Juan to justify his attraction for Fifine and to make it appear that he is not guilty of adultery if he goes out with her. Fifine is “free” and “flower-like too” like an elf and loves law and is self-contained. Lady Ashburton who was a widow, was a very free woman and was as beautiful as a flower. She was also wealthy, and showed evidence of “self-sustainment”. Fifine stands for the image of a free woman who is not limited by the control of men. Sexless and bloodless equally suggest the Victorian attempts to control female sexuality. In stanza XVIII, Don Juan says “I Think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine”. It is Elizabeth Barrett Browning that he loves and not Louisa, Lady Ashburton who is represented here by Fifine.

In stanza XX, the poet through Don Juan introduces Helen on the stage “See, Helen! Pushed in front o’ the world’s worst night and storm / By Lady Venus’ hand on Shoulder!...” Furthermore the poet writes: “Hush, - O I know, Elvire ! Be patient, more remain!” Why does the poet introduce Helen to the scene at this moment? Stanza XXVI gives the answer. Don Juan introduces Helen because he wants Elvire to judge herself. Elvire to him is like the true Helen who never saw Troy but sat safe and far away by a great river-side. Fifine who is on the stage is like the fake Helen who fled from Greece with Paris, came to Troy and caused the ancient war. This ancient and fake Helen like Fifine is a phantom wife of the true tearful Elvire who is his wife sitting by his side. In stanza XXVIII, Don Juan continues – he tells Elvire who now is cheerful after being tearful. What Don Juan is saying is that he is not angry with Elvire for nothing. He knows that Elvire has undergone trials and as such when compared to Fifine she is a better beauty. The fact that Don Juan is attracted to Fifine shows him as being attracted to external things. She has realized that this was a mistake on her part to judge her husband as such because “---, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures” which means that if such temptations do not happen, one’s wife will never really know how much one loves her. From stanzas XVII and XVIII, we gather that Don Juan wants to convince Elvire by saying that she is the true Helen who never saw Troy but who sat safe and far away by a great river side and who was able to watch the fake Helen who caused the tragedy in the ancient world. This fake, fabricated Helen who caused the war is like Fifine, a “phantom – wife” to her.

We should be reminded that Don Juan and Elvire are watching Fifine on the stage. Fifine is a phantom. The true Elvire is tearful. In stanza XXVIII, Elvire is no longer tearful but smiling for she has discovered the truth – she is

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still the best of the beauty in review – Ffine throws more light on her beauty: “That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures”. He compares Ffine to Helen in stanza XXX. Don Juan in stanza XXXIII wants Elvire to love him now as she did in the past. He knows that a human physiology changes with time as she or he grows old but the soul retains all. It also makes in such a way that old treasures are magnified. True love defies chance, the wind, change and the rain. It strikes deeper and bears its fruit even in the storm in a rocking world.

In stanza XXIV Don Juan says: “did Nature grant but this - That women comprehend mental analysis”. Nature which is personified above means God. Nature refers to the force or forces controlling the phenomena of the physical world. Nature here reminds us of the Wordsworthian philosophy of pantheism which is a belief that God is everything and that everything is God. It also means a belief in and worship of all gods. God or Nature did grant that women should understand mental analysis, which means that women are reasonable, they are not only emotional as they have always been portrayed stereotypically in the binary operation philosophy. Women also use their reason. Women if they “Comprehend mental analysis” means that they are good or even better psychologists or psycho-analysts.

Don Juan in stanza XXXVIII tells Elvire :

But no, play out your *role*
I’ the pageant! T’ is not fit your phantom leave the stage:
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage
Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance
Claim to ... equality: nay, but predominance.
In *physique* o’er them all, where Helen heads the scene
Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Ffine. (575 – 582)

Role and physique are words which are italicised in the above quotation. This is for emphasis. Don Juan wants Elvire to play out her role in the pageant which is a public entertainment or celebration. He wants her to show that she is equal in role to Helen and Ffine. Above all, he wants her to show that physically she is more than Helen and Ffine. Pique means hurt the pride or self-respect of Ffine and Helen. Ffine and Helen are all the phantoms of Elvire.

In stanza LXVIII, Don Juan tells Elvire that they should not detest Ffine because she is the one who has helped them to change the place and also because she is the one who has made them have cultivated minds.

In stanza LXIX, Don Juan says:

Still sour? I understand!
One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan –
That Woman does the Work: I waive the help of Man.
Why should experiment be tried with only waves,
When solid spars float round?...
Why is there not the same or greater interest?
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray
Were recognition just your object as you say,
Amid this element o’ the false? (1151 – 1162)

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One thing is certain: women do the work. Don Juan will not insist on the help of Man. “Waves” is a poetic image referring to the sea and “spar” is a kind of non-metallic mineral easily cleavable or split. Waves will be a metaphor for men and spars a metaphor for women. Why should we only use men for experiment when there are many strong women around? This assertion is further reinforced by another rhetorical question – why is not the same or even greater interest in the strong spouse, man or husband as in the pretty partner, woman / or wife? This means that we should focus the same interest in women like we do on men. We should even devote more time to women than men since they are the ones who do the work. Women want a recognition of their rights or existence.

Don Juan tells Elvire in stanza LXV: “In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read,/As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,/...Here, why must it be still a woman that accosts? (1166 – 1170). Accosts means solicit, go up to and speak first, especially, a stranger in a public place (of a prostitute). Hell here is not negative as in hell fire which is the biblical one. Hell here is the hell of ghosts or the spiritual world. In all descents to hell or the spiritual world, Don Juan has read, when a phantom which is either a friend to a man or an enemy goes to hell, the woman is the one who accosts it. This shows that women are very powerful and present in the spiritual world. The spiritual world is not a male’s world as some of us are tempted to think. We know that heaven is a place of a male God and male angels.

In stanza LXXI, Don Juan makes the most powerful feminist statement in this long poem about the strength of women. Women are the sun which is the centre of the planetary system

and men rotate round the women as satellites. It is not the man who is the sun, but the woman. This shows a reversal of the roles of men and women – men who ought to be the sun and women who ought to be the satellites as we have shown in the binary thinking philosophy or concept of man active, the sun, high, the sky and the woman passive, the moon, low, the earth. Women are the leaders – what the poet calls the guide. Women rule the men as Chinweizu says in his book. This is also a reversal of roles because in most cases and societies, men rule women. In this poem we can say that the poet is advocating a matriarchy to replace the usual and present patriarchy.

In stanza LXXIV, Don Juan says of men and women – Man is the complete and high-level ingrate – an ungrateful person. Brine is very salty water which we find in the sea. It can also be considered as the sea itself. Rillet is a small stream or brook. The word rillet comes from the noun rill which is a small stream or brook. The suffix “let” in English denotes something which is small like in piglet, leaflet or booklet. A woman is a small stream that flows into a large sea which is a man. Through marriage, a woman’s identity is swallowed up by the man’s. She takes his name. Thus a woman is a small stream that flows into a large sea which is the marriage with man in which she loses her identity. That is why the poet talks about death. This leads us to and reminds us of the concept of *femme couverte* who was civilly dead in the eyes of the law. When the stream joins the sea they form one person and that person is the sea. When a man and a woman get married, they become one person and that one person is always a man – the master of the house. When the stream joins the sea, it loses all its former attributes and characteristics of being as soft as snow and as clear as silver. That is the plight of women starting from Fifiine to Elvire. When we look at a brook just like a young and independent woman, the brook is very clear and clean but when it joins the sea or the man, it is exploited and it loses its identity for it has completely been swallowed by the large sea. Man is the sea and all women are small brooks which converge to the sea. The brook exists only for the sea. They cannot exist for themselves. We can see this as Browning’s critique of the whole institution of marriage.

If you are to deal with womankind, Browning suggests, you have to abandon strategem, trick or deception for strategy. You also have to throw off disguise and you must also tell the best of act like an angel and reveal the best of yourself “Your best self revealed at uttermost”. That is the focus of stanza LXXVI.

In stanza CXXIX, Don Juan says “Fifiine, the foam – flake, she: Elvire, the sea’s self means”. Fifiine we know is the phantom of Elvire. In stanza CXXXI he says “Elvire is land not sea - /The solid land, the safe...” Land is a place

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“where man / Living creatures like to live....We are safe”. This means that Don Juan is safe with Elvire who is the land which is solid and concrete. The sea is a very hostile environment for man– the place is cold and has salty undrinkable water. Fifi represents this sea. It means that with Fifi, Don Juan will not be safe as he is with Elvire who is the land.

The poem “Fifi at the Fair” has an epilogue entitled “The Householder”. In stanza CXXXI, Don Juan says to Elvire : “The calm contemplative householders that we are ?/ So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide :”

This poem suggests a conversation between Robert Browning – the householder and Elizabeth Barrett Browning his dead wife who has come back on earth to talk with him. The poem has four stanzas of eight lines each. The last line of each stanza is devoted to what she says and that is why it ends “quoth She”. The “s” in she is written with a capital letter, signifying that she is now like a supreme being, a spirit, a goddess to the poet. The last line of stanza III is “And was I so better off up there? Quoth She”. The last line of the last stanza (stanza four) reads : “I end with – love is all and death is nought ! quoth She”.

In the first stanza the poet writes :

Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone :
Dreary, weary with the long day’s work :
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone :
Tongue – tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk ;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
Half a pang and all rapture, there again were we !
“What, and is it really you again ?” quoth I :
“I again, what else did you expect ?” Quoth She. (1 – 8)

The words “late”, “lone” and “above”, “all rapture” tell us that this poem is a mystical communication between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

In stanza II, the poet urges Elizabeth Barrett Browning to go away quickly (hie) from this old house where every crumbling brick is “embrowned” with sin and shame – “Quick, in its corners ere certain shapes arouse !”

In stanza III Browning recounts his difficult life on earth and ends this stanza with these lines : “If you know but how I dwelt down here ?” quoth I : / “And was I so better off up there ?” quoth She”.

The fourth and last stanza is a kind of epitaph of Robert Browning –

“Help and get it over ! Re-united to his wife
(How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know?)
Lies M., or N., departed from this life,
Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.
What I’ the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try !
Affliction sore long time he bore, or what is it to be ?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end ! quoth I :
I end with – Love is all and Death is nought ! Quoth She. (25 – 32)

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It is evident that after the death of Robert Browning, he re-united with his late wife given the mystical communion and communication he had with her in this poem and other poems.

The poet asks the question : “What is the way of final flourish ? Prose, verse ? Try !/ Affliction sore long time bore,...” After the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning published poetry that flourished and made him famous although at the same time, he bore the affliction of the death of his wife. Although she was dead and buried, they were still a married couple and communicated mystically.

After the death of his wife, Browning never remarried because he considered that he was still married to her. Although Elizabeth Barrett Browning had died and gone ahead, she is still in love with her husband Robert Browning. Death does not prevent their love. The poem ends with the message that true and durable love does not know or is not defeated by death. This is another rare poem in which Robert Browning drops off his mask of the dramatic monologue and speaks in his own voice.

This poem has four stanzas of eight lines each with rhyme pattern a b a b c d e c e. This regular rhyme scheme and stanzaic pattern show that regular and true love conquers everything – even death. The regularity of the rhyme scheme and stanzas show this strong durable and flourishing love between the speaker of the poem and his beloved departed wife.

When one takes a look at Browning’s presentation of women, one realises that for most of the time his women are faithful unlike Chaucer’s or Eliot’s who are unfaithful. As Steve Ellis has remarked, Chaucer’s presentation of women especially the Wife of Bath has what he calls the “perpetuation of medieval anti-feminism tradition” (49).

In the poems “Bifurcation” and “Prospice” Robert Browning presents husbands who are faithful to their wives or lovers. In these two poems, the speaker is Robert Browning who is talking about his love and respect for his departed wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The poem “Bifurcation” like “Fears and Scruples” was written in 1876. The poem has two epitaphs and envisions life after the one on earth, that is life in heaven. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861 before Robert Browning. In this poem Robert Browning writes his own epitaph and that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

In the first stanza of the poem he says : “We were two lovers ; let me lie by her, / My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe - / ‘I loved him,...’ (1 – 3). The poet says that his reason has urged him to prefer duty to love, reject the tempter’s bribe of rose and lily. Where each path diverges, he has to choose between duty and love. Love here represents the love of other earthly women which is further reinforced by his rejection of the tempter’s bribe of rose and lily from other beautiful women. He has chosen duty which means he has decided to remain faithful to his dead wife.

Choosing love means he “must pace to life’s far end” and choosing duty means he will “plod the worn cause way arm-in-arm with friend”. The poet remarks that truth turned falsehood. He realised that he loathed a flower, caressed the ear of his “deafish friend” as he continued to laugh while coughing at the same time. Deep in his “heart of hearts there hid” the confidence “that heaven repairs what wrong earth’s journey did” “when love from life – long exile comes at call”. He adds that nobody doubts that in heaven “Duty and love, one broad way, were the best –” but on earth they are separate and one has to choose only one. The poet makes his own choice which is “I chose the darkling half and wait the rest/ In that new world where light and darkness fuse”, “new world where light and love fuse.” “Darkling half” means he decides to die. No one can go to heaven without dying.

The second stanza like the first stanza is made up of twenty lines. The poet now gives us his epitaph : “Inscribe on mine – “I loved her...” In this stanza, there is again the opposition between love and duty : “Love’s track lay / O’er sand and peddle, as all travellers know”, “Duty led through a smiling country, gay / With greensward where the rose and lily blow”. The poet now presents to us these striking lines which could be seen as the last words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Robert Browning.

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*Our roads are diverse : farewell, love !” said she ;
“T is duty I abide by ! homely sward
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me !
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted !” (25 – 30).*

The above lines are italicised to show what the woman says to Robert Browning. The poet now presents to us the problem of all men whose wives have died –

... But man needs must prove,
Keep moving – whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love ?
No stone but I was stripped by, stumbling – block
But brought me to confusion (30 – 34)

Star in this poem is a metaphor for the woman who has died and gone before. Since she has died and gone before, she still communicates mystically with her lover on earth. She guides this lover and therefore is like a star to him.

The line “Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love ?” shows a man caught between the forces of fidelity / Good / God / the Super-ego and the forces of infidelity / Evil / Satan / the Id. Should he remain loyal or disloyal to his dead wife ? This was the great problem of Robert Browning after the death of his wife. After the above confusion, the poet fell and lay flat and after, rose and cried “All’s well !”. This means that the forces of fidelity (the Super-ego) have defeated those of infidelity (the Id). That is why he concludes :

Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne’er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, where of – since here
One must suffice a man – why, this one must”. (37 – 40).

The last stanza is made up of two verses “Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint/The simple – which holds sinner, which holds saint !”. In this relationship, Robert Browning can be labelled as the sinner because he wanted to become unfaithful and his wife, the saint because she had always remained faithful to him throughout her married life.

The rhyme scheme of this poem is regular. The first and second stanzas rhyme “a b a b c d c d e f e f g h g h i j i j” and the last two lines rhyme in a couplet a a. The rhyming couplet at the end shows that the forces of fidelity have won those of infidelity. This war or conflict between the forces of fidelity and infidelity in the two – twenty – stanza lines is exemplified by the alternating rhyme scheme a b a b c d c f e f e f g h g h i j i j.

The poem “Prospice” as most critics agree is one of the poems in which Robert Browning drops off the mask of the dramatic monologue and speaks in his own voice, of his love for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He uses the romantic subjective pronoun “I”. This poem shows Robert Browning’s determination and fearlessness to die and join his wife in heaven – “Then a light, then thy breast,/ O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,/ And with God be the rest !”. Hiram Corson also shares the same point of view about this poem. He says the speaker

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in this noble monologue is one who having fought a good fight and finished his course, lived and wrought thoroughly in sense, and soul, and intellect, is now ready and eager to encounter the “Arch – Fear”, Death ; and then he will clasp again his beloved, the soul of his soul, who has gone before. He leaves the rest to God. This poem is written in a single block of twenty-eight lines rhyming alternating. This alternating regular rhyme scheme shows the speaker’s determination and fearlessness to die. There is abundant use of the caesura for most of the lines end in periods , commas, some in semi-colons, few in full stops, colons and exclamation marks. The use of these punctuation marks show the speaker’s slow, sure and steady determination and confidence to confront death and meet his cherished wife.

FEMALE OPPRESSION AND FIGHT FOR LIBERATION

Female oppression in Browning’s poems takes the form of men defining spaces for women in which case the woman’s place is in the home, inheritance to male children, and through the denunciation of women as objects. However, as Browning reveals, the women in his poems are capable of overcoming female oppression through female assertiveness, seizing the rights of inheritance and proving to be better leaders than men. The poems “Natural Magic” and “Cenci” reveal the above-mentioned theme in man-woman relationship, that is, oppression and the fight for liberation on the part of the woman.

In “Natural Magic”, the man is presented as the oppressor and the woman as the “freedom fighter”. This poem shows that the woman’s place is at the home – a conservative feminist position. However, at home, she shows how productive she is. The Victorian philosophy of gendered spaces or separate spheres where men occupied the public spheres of politics and commerce and the women the domestic sphere is implicitly captured in this poem. In this poem, a man locks up a woman in a bare room and when unlocking the room, he finds her and the room “over fruited” and “over flowered”. In the second stanza, the poet says that this is not a fairy-tale but something that he feels. He took all the precautions not to allow her enter the room with weed, there was no May to sow and no June to reveal it. Now she is enshrined in these blooms of her own bringing, which are the fruits of her own bearing. The rhyme scheme of this short lyric is regular. Each of the two stanzas has nine lines each rhyming a b c b a d d a. This means that the stanzaic pattern is also regular like the rhyme scheme. This regular rhyme scheme and stanzaic pattern show the woman’s determination to grow in spite of the oppression of the man.

The poem “Cenci” deals with a woman who wants to assert herself in a male dominated society and a society which is discriminatory against women. She rebels against the custom of handing property to the eldest son when the husband dies. When the husband dies in this poem, she inherits the property herself. This act of hers, brings the tragedy we find in the poem.

“Cenci” is a poem which sets out to add more information to an earlier poem written by Shelley talking about Beatrice. This information is contained in the first stanza of the poem where he concludes : “Thus I unroll you then the manuscript”. The poet tells us that “Searching in the archives here, /I found the reason of the Lady’s fate”. To the poet those who love the work would like the little news and the person who lauds the poem of Shelley should lend an ear to him :

Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell, Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide
With Paolo his own brother – he whose crime
And flight induced “those three words – she must die” (32 – 37).

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In stanza two, the poet gives the message of this poem –

God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Grace (44 – 47).

Starting from stanza three, we are given the real story of the widow Marchesine Constanza who disinherits her own son.

Many times
The youngster, - having been importunate
That Marchesine Constanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty, -
And meeting just as often with rebuff, -
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady – thus. (48 – 57)

When she does this, there is war between her on the one hand and her eldest son supported by the brother to the late father on the other side. The eldest son kills the mother and runs away from their home. The son starts his murder strategy by writing to Onofrio Santa Croce who was then an authoritative lord by telling him that their mother was a "Contamination – wrought / Like hell-fire in the beauty of their house". Moreover, she suffers from a disease which is "About to bring confusion and disgrace / Upon the ancient lineage and high fame / O' the family, when published". As the son is "Duty bound", he asks his brother "What a son should do?". His brother Marchese dell Oriolo hears this by letter when he is absent from his land, Oriolo. His answer is :

It must behove a son, - things haply so, -
To act as honour prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers' – here advice broke off. (75 – 78)

Fortified by this advice, Paolo (the son) who kept his mother company in her domain Subiaco, straightway dared his whole enormity of enterprise and falling on her, stabbed the lady dead, "Whose death demonstrated her innocence".

The poet says that this widow was a very pretty woman in spite of her age .God knows how to catch a culprit,the poet says. The son is later on killed by another "blood hungry man" in the part of the world where he fled to .The matricide we are told, takes place at the same time the case at the court which tried to unveil the death of the father of this house came to a close. The court concluded that the father Count Francesco Cenci was killed by the whole family – the mother, sons and daughters. That is why the poet writes : "Thus patricide was matched with matricide". The father was killed, may be, because he oppressed the whole family. That is why all of them participated in killing him. Since the court does not punish any of them, it means that they were right to kill

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him. The father was wrong. The killing of the father in this poem is symbolically the killing of patriarchy. When the patricide takes place, the mother wants now to replace it with matriarchy where the mother dominates. She does not see how patriarchy can be replaced by another patriarchy where the eldest son becomes the new leader of the family when the father dies. On the other hand, the elder son and his brothers want to maintain this patriarchy.

The murder of the mother is reported to the church. The Cardinal says they should check the house of the brother to the late husband who might have connived with the eldest son. The officers sent by the church search the house of Onofrio and find the letter the run-away man who killed his mother wrote to Onofrio and his reply. The brother to the late husband who went to do sport is arrested on his return – “caught and caged”. The Cardinal instructs Tarverna the Governor and the Judge to make sure that Onofrio is sentenced to death. He should have control over everything – He, the Cardinal should be the President, the Inquisitor, and he should scrub the floor or the position of Justice and even “go try / His best in prison with the criminal”. The Cardinal further instructs them that he will reward them after consulting the Pope who is his relative. The name of the Cardinal is Aldobrandini.

The Governor and the Judge do just what the Cardinal wanted and instructed. Onofrio is condemned to death. He bids farewell to the Christians and earns a praise from the populace as a good Christian. The Cardinal says he is “nephew to the Pope”. Onofrio is beheaded.

We are told by the poet at the end of the poem that the Cardinal wanted Onofrio to be condemned to death because they were rivals over a woman who prefers but the latter to the former. The Cardinal had seen the ring he gave to this woman as a token of love with Onofrio who was “pricked with pride”. Onofrio was infact what the poet calls “a harmless simpleton”. The ring issue annoyed the Cardinal.

The Cardinal here is unfaithful as the Cardinal in Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. In this play Julia is Castruccio’s wife and at the same time the Cardinal’s mistress. In Act – Two – Scene – Four when she visits him in Rome, the Cardinal says : “Sit thou art my best of wishes”. This reveals the love relationship that has been going on between the Cardinal and Castruccio’s wife. The Cardinal is described as an angler who has “hooked and hauled ashore his bait”, a boy of such “stark staring lunacy”.

When Onofrio was beheaded, he left one child behind who was a daughter named Valeria. She was a girl who had a good soul and body which was doomed to a shorter life by her father’s fate. When she died, the Marquisate returned to the Orsini House from where it came.

The poem “Cenciaja” thus deals with the consequences of a widowed woman who disinherits her eldest son and puts the property of her late husband under her control. Margaret Fuller in “The Great Lawsuit : Man versus Men : Woman versus Women” exposes the plight of married women. She does not hold property on equal terms with men ; so that if a husband dies without a will ; the wife, instead of stepping at once into his place as head of the family, inherits only a part of his fortune, as if she were a child, or ward only, not an equal partner. In some extreme cases, she is not even given anything as inheritance.

What we see in the above poem is what really happened in England and America in the nineteenth century as Gubar and Gilbert point out :

Most fortunes in England (and America as well) devolved upon eldest sons and in England great estates were frequently “entailed” upon the male line, so that in the absence of sons some distant male relatives would inherit a man’s property – precisely the situation which triggers the comic action of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (172).

Generally in society men consider women as objects, and not as subjects. They men like the subjects in any sentence initiate action and women like objects receive the action. They talk about women and women are

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talked about. The women do not talk. An object is something which has no feeling and is not independent. It belongs to somebody and that somebody is the man. In feminist theory we also refer to this phenomenon as the principle of the “other”. The women belong to the “other” class or group. We know that the “other” group is usually marginalized and considered as inferior. When a woman is considered as an object or a commodity, it means that she has no feeling and can be disposed of at any time or moment.

The poem “A Pretty Woman” is a satirical poem denouncing the use of women by men as commodities. As Isobel Armstrong says in the “Victorian Poetry of Sexual Love”, this poem

“A Pretty Woman” from *Men and Women*, is a dancing satirical social lyric about the way in which men use sexual fantasies. Male fantasies trap women in conventional roles and men take revenge upon women when they do not react to conventional expectations “Shall we burn up, tread that face at once / Into tinder ?” When a girl refuses to respond to the sexual demands made to her. (284).

The quotation “Shall we burn up, tread that face at once / Into tinder,…” is taken from stanza XIV. The verse “And that infantine fresh air of hers !” reminds us of the fact that women are usually considered by men as infants who can be manipulated the way the men want. Men can always make a woman to become what they want her to be.

In stanza II the poet writes : “To think men cannot take you, sweet”, “And so keep you what they make you, Sweet”. The word sweet suggests that women exist for men. A woman cannot exist for her own sake. Women should always be pretty and beautiful for man’s sake. A woman was made for a man and nothing else. After all, the prefix “wo” means made out of man and therefore she is meant for him.

In stanza III the speaker says why women like men : Women like men for three reasons – a glance, the sake of word and the sake of a sword . This means that a woman likes a man because of the way he looks at her, or because of what the man can do. In the past, men who were popular and who could vote, were those who could defend their countries , towns or clans. In the past, he who had the sword, had the power. Today the gun has replaced the sword. It is not like today that those who are popular are footballers and musicians. Using the sword means one is a soldier. Today those who have power are those who have the brain and money. Why women like men for three reasons, men on their turn make women theirs. A woman cannot refuse to love men otherwise they will sanction her. This is one bad aspect of patriarchy. A woman’s duty is to love.

The relationship between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning is effectively portrayed in another poem, “By the Fireside”. The poem “By the Fireside” is a fifty-three stanza poem of five lines in each stanza rhyming a b a b a. In this poem we see a man (Robert Browning) who loves his wife (Elizabeth Barrett Browning). His wife also loves him “with his loved and loving companion”. She is his guide as expressed in stanza VI : “I follow wherever I am led, / Knowing so well the leader’s hand”. He has confidence in the leadership of his wife. This means that women can also be good leaders.

The last three lines of stanza VI read : “Oh woman-country, wooed not wed, / Loved all the more by earth’s male – lands, / Laid to their hearts instead !”. “Woman – country” refers to Italy, a physical geographical place which we can locate. “Wooed not wed” means that many people like Italy but they do not want to naturalise. Italy is a country which is loved by many countries which are male. Italy we are told by the poet is a female country. Italy ,the poem says,is like a woman who is liked by everybody but nobody wants to marry her. The above comparison has meaning if we link it to the first two verses of that stanza : stanza VI : “I follow wherever I am led / Knowing so well the leader’s hand”. With these two lines we can say that Italy is a mental country in which women are leaders and men are the led. In this kind of country, men can only love women and cannot marry them because women will be the ones who will marry men. When a woman has the capacity to lead men, she will be or is loved by all men. When you know her capacity like Robert Browning knew the capacity of his wife

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning, you just have to follow her sheepishly. That is why the speaker says in stanza XXVIII “You must be just before, in fine, / See and make me see, for your part./ New depths of the divine.” Through a woman, you can see or go to heaven.

Equality is expressed again in this poem when Hiram Corson says the speaker or the poet and his wife or mistress “walked side by side, arm in arm, and cheek to cheek”. This is captured in stanza XXXIII where the poet writes : “Hither we walked then, side by side / Arm in arm and cheek to cheek.” This is a poem in which Browning expresses his love for his wife who is his perfect wife (My Leonor). This is in stanza XXI : “My perfect wife, my Leonor : Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too, / Whom else could I dare look backward for,”

CONCLUSION

In this paper, using the feminist and biographical theories we set out to demonstrate that in some love poems of Robert Browning, inspired by the relationship he had with his late wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning, he presents a “ New- Woman” in his poetry who is very different from a traditional or past woman. Browning presents to us some of the positive attributes we get from women or we see in women like fidelity in a love relationship, the fight for liberation on the part of the woman who is oppressed and female self-assertiveness when an occasion calls or demands it. He also denounces those men who use women as sex objects. Using his relationship with his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning as an example of fulfilled love, he also shows us that a woman can be a good leader in a man-woman relationship which is built on equality. He also uses this relationship to demonstrate that we should celebrate a woman’s beauty. Using again his relationship with his late wife, he shows that true love does not know death or that true love is never defeated by death. We learn that true lovers love their late spouses better after their departure. Like in the bible where it is said that the greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself, in marriage one should love one’s spouse as oneself thereby promoting the idea of equality in love as seen in the relationship between Browning and wife.

NOTES

In this essay : *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft urges women to be virtuous, respectful, have dignity and do not pretend. They should go in for friendship in marriage and not slavery. They should not marry only to please the husband but to be virtuous and respectful. If she decides to be single, let her observe these virtues very rigorously. She says women should not be “gentle”, docile and possess spaniel – like affection. She should not be a toy, a rattle to jingle in a man’s ear in marriage. She attacks Rousseau who says women have a fondness for clothes and were born to please men. She says women should not sacrifice the strength of the body and mind to beauty. She attacks the patriarchal society for conditioning women to be ever anxious about secondary things. They are also conditioned to be victims of excess sensibility since their senses are inflamed. And their thoughts are calculated to excite emotion and when they do reason, their conducts are deplorable. She attacks the notion that women and girls “are the sweet flowers that smile in the walk of man”.

2.A dramatic monologue is a combination of two words dramatic and monologue. The dramatic means that it could be acted out, and is a form of drama while monologue defines it as a speech that one person makes either to themselves (himself / herself) or to another. A dramatic monologue is written to reveal both the situation at hand and the character herself or himself. It is a poem in which a single speaker (who is the poet or who is not the poet) utters the entire poem at a critical moment. The speaker has a listener within the poem, but we too are his / her listener, and we learn about the speaker’s character from what the speaker says. In fact, the speaker may reveal unintentionally certain aspects of his or her character. From his or her own knowledge of the historical or other events described, or else by inference from the poem itself, the reader is eventually enabled to assess the intelligence and honesty of the narrator and the value of the views she expresses. This type of dramatic monologue since it depends on the unconscious provision by the speaker of the evidence by which the reader is to judge her or him, is eminently suitable for the ironist. Browning’s characters reveal to us many of their feeling and thoughts of which they are unaware.

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Browning’s dramatic monologues have some characteristics which we must master. Susan Tichy says each dramatic monologue should display : 1) a speaker, 2) an identified audience, 3) an occasion, 4) interplay between speaker and audience, which takes place in the present, and 5) revelation of character. Glenn Everett gives three requirements of a Browning dramatic monologue : 1) the reader takes the part of the silent listener, 2) the speaker uses a case – making, argumentative tone and, 3) we complete the dramatic scene from within, by means of inference and imagination.

A dramatic monologue is different from a soliloquy and an aside: a soliloquy is a form also used by Browning in which the speaker does not address any specific listener, rather musing about to himself or herself. A dramatic monologue is different from the soliloquy in that it has an implied listener in the poem who by extension is the reader or us. The two have the same purpose. The purpose of the monologue and the soliloquy is not so much to make a statement about its declared subject matter, but to develop the character of the speaker. An aside refers to words spoken aside, especially on the stage, words that other persons on the stage are supposed not to hear. Soliloquy and aside were the inventions of the Elizabethan stage. We see them in the plays of Shakespeare. Browning’s models were the soliloquies in the plays of Shakespeare and the poems of John Donne.

Robert Browning stood at the head of what is known as the psychological school in poetry. In his poetry we see his interest in what we call psychology, that is, in the scene from within, by means of inference and imagination. He is interested in the conscious and unconscious working of the mind. He is interested in studying bad, obsessive, and abnormal states of mind. Browning is interested in the human mind as something that could be dissected and understood : To him certain motivations produced certain actions. As a poet Browning is speaking of the pathology of the mind. There are no conclusions. He is just revealing the psyches and the unconscious motivations of his characters.

William J. Rolfe and Heloise E. Hersey confess that Browning’s poetry is certainly very hard reading like Cowley’s and Donne’s. A great deal of difficulty in reading his poetry arises from its purely dramatic conception and form. They maintain that the man Browning is not to be found in his poems except inferentially, like Shakespeare in his dramas. The author of the article “The Dramatic Element in Browning’s work” in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* thinks differently. He intimates that of not one of Shakespeare’s creations can we say “Here’s the author himself” of scarcely one of Browning’s can we say “Here the author is not”. Browning this author reiterates, in writing to Elizabeth Barrett, called the poems “mere escapes of my inner power, like the light of a revolving light house leaping out at intervals from a narrow chink”. This takes us to the argument whether Browning is an objective or a subjective poet. He is the two. That is he is an objective – subjective poet.

It should be noted that Robert Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue. He only perfected it. The dramatic monologue started in the Classical period with Ovid and Theocritus. Ovid’s poems are written as if they were letters from Helen to Paris, from Paris to Oenone. In Theocritus we have a monologue comparable to those of Browning (Eliot 100). *The Encyclopedia Britannica* reveals that many Old English poems are dramatic monologues like “The Wanderer” and “The Seafarer”. The form it says is also common in folk ballads. Chaucer in the public confession of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath in the *Canterbury Tales* uses it. Shakespeare uses it in the form of soliloquies and asides. Wordsworth and Coleridge use it in what they call “Conversation Poems”. Byron also pioneered it in his poetry – a genre combining the confessional element of intensely lyrical poetry with the objectivity of a dramatic monologue. Tennyson even used it in the Victorian period before Browning in poems like “The Lotos – Eaters” (1833), “Ulysses” (1842) and “Tithonus” (1860). Browning’s contribution to the form is one of subtlety of characterization and complexity of the dramatic situation, which the reader gradually pieces together from the casual remarks or digressions of the speaker.

Isobel Armstrong claims that women invented the dramatic monologue in her book *Victorian Poetry, Poetics and Politics* in 1995. In an anonymous article on-line: *ENGLIO 15_Inventing Modernity : Victorian Poetry :*

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Lecture 2 : Science and the Crisis of Faith, the author thinks that the dramatic monologue in Browning’s hands actually carries an ironic critique of patriarchal attitude and this equally is the opinion of this researcher. He says that the Victorians used the dramatic monologue because of changes in the way of looking at Man that were brought by science and the challenge to traditional religion. Men made by a male God, looked at others especially women as inferiors. Man was made in the image of God and this explains the use of “I” in most of the Romantic poetry. With Victorian doubt, the emphatic “I” had to give way to something which became the dramatic monologue. The dramatic monologue was “the greatest formal innovation in Victorian poetry”. The other was what Tennyson called the idyll.

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