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Essay on the feminist elements as you find in the poem My La Last Duchess by Robert Beowning

Dramatic monologue refers to a type of poetry. These poems are dramatic in the sense that they have a theatrical quality; that is, the poem is meant to be read to an audience. To say that the poem is a monologue means that these are the words of one solitary speaker with no dialogue coming from any other characters. Think of one person standing alone on a stage speaking to an audience. Certainly, you are part of that audience, but the poem usually implies that the speaker is mainly talking to a specific person(s).

The reason poets choose to write poems like this is to express a point of view through the words of a character. However, the tricky part is that often the opinions stated by that character are not the same as the views of the poet. Most of the time, the speaker is trying to convince someone of something, and may or may not be telling the whole truth. Sometimes what the speaker doesn't say is just as revealing and interesting as what he or she does say in the poem.

Here's an excerpt from the dramatic monologue, "My Last Duchess," by Robert Browning

The Dramatic Monologue is the most important kind of that sub-division of objective poetry which we have called dramatic, which is dramatic not because it is to be acted on the stage, but because it gives the thoughts and emotions not of the poet but of some imagined character. they are monologues because in them only one character speaks throughout (Mono) means 'one'). The poet's identity is merged with that of the dramatic personage, and the poet speaks through his mouth, so to say. Robert Browning is the most important writer of dramatic monologues in the English language.

The dramatic monologues may be used for the study of character, of particular mental states and of moral crises in the soul of the characters concerned. In his monologues, the poet Browning depicts an amazingly wide variety of characters,

taken from all walks of life, cowards, rogues, artists, scholars, Dukes, cheats, beggars, murderers, and saints like Pippa, all crowd his picture-gallery. His characters belong not to any one country and to a number of countries and ages.

In each monologue, one character is at the centre, and the substance of the monologue consists of what passes within his soul. Cazamian calls them, “soul reflectors”, or “studies in practical psychology”, for they provide us with a peep into the inner working of the mind and soul of these characters. Besides these main figures, in each monologue, there are some minor figures who are briefly but distinctly sketched with a few deft touches. They are the listeners for most of the time, but they also perform the dramatic function of the interlocutor from time to time and thus provide the reason or the cause for the speaker’s mood or his self-analysis. Thus in *Andrea Del Sarto*, Andrea is the speaker, Lucrezia is the listener, and her lover and the three rival artists are also introduced indirectly. Often the nature background is skilfully interwoven with the mood and temper of the speaker, and in this way, the total effect is heightened. In the poem mentioned-above, the speaker’s references to the Autumnal grey nature-background are used to heighten his own mood of depression and world-weariness. In each monologue, the speaker is placed in the most momentous or critical situation of his life and the monologue embodies his reactions to his situation.

The monologues have an abrupt, but very arresting opening, and, at the same time, what has gone before is suggested cleverly or brought out through retrospective meditation and reflection. Thus *My Last Duchess* opens with a reference to the picture of the dead Duchess, with a clear indication that it is being shown to someone. Similarly, this abrupt beginning may be followed by self-introspection on the part of the speaker, and his moods, emotions, reflections, and meditations may be fully expressed. The speaker’s thoughts range freely over the past and the future, and so there is no logical and chronological development. The past and the future are focused on the present and the unity is emotional rather than logical.

Examples of Dramatic Monologue:

My Last Duchess by Robert Browning

My Last Duchess (1842), written by Robert Browning is a dramatic monologue which deals with the Victorian social issues about the condition of woman. The poem explores the class consciousness and the Victorian morality code where a woman is strictly adhered to certain social norms. Browning also presents the male dominion and sketches the character of the speaker in the form of a monologue as well as the insights into the character of the Duchess. As a feminist poem, one can observe that the woman is objectified for a male gaze and desire as well as the oppression faced in the patriarchal society which Browning tries to establish in the poem.

The important features of the dramatic monologue is the presence of a speaker and the listener. The speaker in the poem is considered to be the Duke of Ferrara and the listener is the guest who came to visit the Duke. The setting is presented in the form of a monologue where the guest is drawn attention to the portrait of Duchess and the listener is told that the painting is done by Fra Pandolf. The psychological aspect is clearly drawn in the poem where the image of the painting evokes a sense of emotion attached with it which creates an inner conflict in the mind of the guests who feel its deep, passionate and earnest glance of the Duchess.

However, it throws insight into the social realism as a dramatic monologue. The Victorian era was a class conscious society and especially the woman were bounded to certain conventional norms. The Duke in the poem recollects his past knowledge about the Duchess and objects her actions and behaviours. She was portrayed as an immoral woman who equally shows respect to others and smiles at other man. Her actions and behaviour seem impulsive and immoral to the Duke and hence the Duke stopped her smiles which is presented euphemistically to show that she was killed. It clearly exemplifies the Victorian ideals of “Angel in the house” where a woman needs to be chastise and pure in the society. The

objectification of woman is also presented in the poem where a woman's image on the portrait is used for a male gaze and desire while establishing the male superiority. The Duchess was presented as an immoral woman but her image is objectified to others to show the Duke's wealth and social status.

Moreover, Browning sketches the character of the Duchess through a dramatic monologue. The character of the Duchess is sketched by the reminiscing process of Duke's opinions and views. The Duke tells his guest that the Duchess liked everything and everyone she saw which reflects that she was sleeping around with other men. He even says that her response was kind and gives equal honour with the same blush on her cheeks which he objects to claiming that she is passionate or over emotional. He even further argues that she gives equal amount of smiles to other men who pass her which he tries to sketch her as an immoral woman. The Duke also represented her as a woman who disrespects her own social position for which she equally gives importance and smiles at others in contrast to the Duke highlighting that he would lower himself if he argues with the Duchess about her behaviour.

Lastly, the entire process of the Duke reminiscing about the character of Duchess delineates the character of the Duke which becomes an essential essence of the dramatic monologue. Browning sketches the character of the speaker or the Duke which shows the social realism of male's attitude towards women. The Duke's dislikes about the Duchess manners of thanking other men and being ignorant towards her social status reflect the Duke as a sexist man who is stereotyping the Duchess personality and her kind attitude in a negative perception. One can also observe the character of Duke as a typical man who shows power along with dominion. The Duke's resistivity to bow down to others and her objection towards the Duchess giving equal values and smiles to others shows him a man of dominion and superiority through his power and social status. The sycophantic character of the Duke is seen when he flatters the generosity of the guest's master

so to acquire the dowry which he can extract from the marriage to which he lies saying that the Duke wants the Count's beautiful daughter and not the dowry.

'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning is a chilling poem about the value of women in a duke's life.

In the first lines of the poem, the speaker tells the reader that an emissary is visiting who is trying to negotiate a new marriage for the Duke. He also describes how he was recently married, inspired by a portrait of his late wife. He suggests that she did something he didn't approve of and that her behavior displeased him. Finally, the Duchess died and now the Duke is left to choose a new bride.