

'Silent' Women in Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues

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ABSTRACT

Robert Browning was one of the two most famous Victorian poets, who became well-known particularly for his dramatic monologues. Mostly set in the Renaissance Italy, they usually present a male speaker with artistic inclinations who, caught at a crucial moment of his life, unconsciously reveals the deep and dark secrets of his character to a silent listener. In his two most successful monologues, 'My Last Duchess' and 'Andrea del Sarto', Browning deals with the relationship between life and art, men and women, power and weakness. His male speakers, the rich and arrogant Duke of Ferrara and the weak and passive Andre del Sarto, ironically called 'the faultless painter', look back at their lives and talk about their past desires, plans, ambitions and regrets, which were significantly influenced by the relationship they had with their wives. Although we are not given the opportunity to hear the voices of these 'silent' women whose characters are presented to us only through their husbands' words, we still manage to get a pretty good idea about their position in the patriarchal Victorian society and the roles they were supposed to play. This paper will try to examine different relationships between these two pairs of husbands and wives, as well as to explore the stereotypes used in the presentation of women such as 'the angel in the house', 'the fallen woman' and 'the femme fatale'.