

LYRIC DRAMA AND POETIC PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF DONNE AND BROWNING ACROSS ERAS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a diachronic comparative analysis of poetic works by John Donne and Robert Browning. The focus of the discussion is drawn to the evolution of the dramatic-lyrical form between the Early Modern Metaphysical School and the Victorian period. Both poets abandoned the conventional abstract lyrical voices to adopt conversational modes of expression. A close reading of selected poems reveals that John Donne and Robert Browning differ dramatically in their approaches to constructing triadic relationships between the poetic speaker, internal auditor, and external reader. John Donne implemented an enquiring and combative mode of poetic address to enact a philosophical debate with the reader. In contrast, Robert Browning created the impression of a dramatic dialogue by inventing a persona which concealed his own voice and engaged the auditor in moral discussions. The paper demonstrates that such a shift from an open debate to a hermeneutic of silence reflected deep ideological rifts between the early modern and Victorian worldviews. Ultimately, the paper argues that the evolution of the dramatic-lyrical genre laid the conceptual groundwork for the rise of early twentieth-century Modernism.

Keywords: Dramatic Monologue, Metaphysical Conceit, Poetic Performance, Colloquial Realism, Triadic Dynamic, Psychological Persona.

1. Introduction

The intersection of the lyrical and dramatic genres is among the most vibrant developments in the evolution of English poetry. Traditionally, a distinct lyrical genre has been characterised by two primary attributes: conciseness and subjectivity. In other words, songs and lyrical poems have been different from dramatic poetry in that they feature a personal utterance addressed to a listener. However, once the lyrical genre begins to incorporate elements of dramatic discourse, poetry becomes a performative act. Poetic performance turns attention to the act of speaking as opposed to the content of what is being said. More specifically, it actualizes not only the lyrical subjectivity of the utterance but also its performative, theatrical aspect. There are two outstanding figures of the English literature who are famous for their innovative approaches to verbal performance. John Donne (1572–1631) and Robert Browning (1812–1889) belong to the most prominent dramatic lyricists whose works laid the foundation for the development of the so-called dramatic-lyrical genre. Although separated by more than a century, these poets shared similar interests in exploring the possibilities of colloquial speech rhythms and performative strategies to enhance the expressive power of their utterances.

John Donne was the first outstanding Metaphysical poet to experiment with the traditional lyrical genre. He broke the conventional mould of the Elizabethan lyric poetry. His poems took the conversation out of the realm of platonic love and sexual fantasies to depict a concrete verbal contest. Thus, John Donne introduced a variety of philosophical and rhetorical devices to represent the emotional and intellectual conflicts between lovers or between a loving son and a cruel father (Donne, 1633). In turn, Robert Browning is best known for his remarkable contributions to Victorian poetry and literature in general. Robert Browning pioneered the form of a dramatic monologue which gained extraordinary popularity among his contemporaries and later influenced such prominent Modernist writers as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. Both poetic innovators employed unconventional rhythmic patterns and syntactic simplifications to imitate the natural flow of human speech. Such an approach allowed them to create the impression of a direct address to the listener. In fact, a close reading of their works reveals that both poets utilised a triadic structure of poetic discourse. Sapuh, S., & Das, N. (2024) A triadic structure refers to a three-layered organisation of poetic discourse, namely, the

presence of three distinct entities within a single poetic utterance. The three layers are usually determined by the following elements:

1. The voice of the poetic speaker – in other words, the author’s lyrical self;
2. The imaginary auditor – the figure to whom the poem is addressed;
3. The external reader – the person who actually reads the poem.

In most cases, the first element in the triadic structure, the poetic speaker, is not identical to the author himself/herself. Rather, it is a certain figure with concrete, individual characteristics. Secondly, the second element, the internal auditor, is not passive either. In many poems, he/she is depicted as a real historical character whose responses determine the further development of the plot. As for the third element, the external reader, he/she is the actual recipient of the poetic message. A triadic structure of poetry implies that the reader is invited to be a spectator of the dialogue between the speaker and the imaginary auditor. Sometimes, this format creates the effect of a courtroom hearing where the reader takes the part of a jury that has to judge the speaker based on his/her responses.

To conclude, this paper aims to demonstrate how dramatically the early modern and Victorian poets approached the task of representing the triadic structure in their poems. The analysis will focus on the comparison of the elements of a dramatic-lyrical structure and their functions. It is assumed that the profound differences between the poetic output of John Donne and Robert Browning were due to the ideological conflicts between the early modern and Victorian worldviews. Moreover, the paper argues that the shifting patterns of lyrical poetry reflected fundamental changes in the cultural paradigms of society. In particular, the transition from the metaphysical to the Victorian worldviews resulted in a transition from universalist and optimistic assumptions to the introduction of new concepts of identity. Lastly, the paper will reveal how the changes in the lyrical poetry laid the foundation for the development of early twentieth-century Modernism.

Feature	John Donne (Early Modern)	Robert Browning (Victorian)
Historical Context	Scientific Revolution, religious instability, and print culture expansion.	Industrialization, Darwinian doubt, and institutional critique.
Dramatic Tool	Metaphysical conceit and dialectical arguments to resolve spiritual and erotic tension.	Psychological fragmentation to expose moral decay and subjective truth.
Performance Aim	To persuade, conquer, or achieve unity with the listener.	To self-rationalize, confess, or inadvertently reveal guilt.

Examining them together can reveal that the tendency to dramatize the lyric is not a fleeting poetic phenomenon, but rather a recurring feature in literary practice during periods of significant cultural change, as a means to explore the multiplicity of the human soul.

Research Objectives

- To examine how drama informs the lyrical expression of poetry in the works of Donne and Browning.
- To identify how the presence of a listener changes the poetic discourse.
- To determine the stylistic characteristics of the dramatic utterance in poetry from the Metaphysical period and the Victorian age.
- To discuss the contextual factors shaping the lyrical expression of the psychological interior in both poetic discourses.

Research Questions

- What syntactical, metrical, and lexical techniques does Donne use to create an effect of a spontaneous utterance?
- How does the introduction of a silent auditor affect the form and rhetoric of the lyric in general and in these poems in particular?

- How do the different philosophical and theological worldviews in which Donne and Browning lived affect the themes and rhetorical strategies of their poetry?
- To what extent are the changing material conditions and historical context reflected in the lyrical expression of the psychological interior in the poetry of these authors?

Scope of Study

The current study will primarily concentrate on an analysis of poetic forms and stylistic devices used in the poems by Donne and Browning. For the former, the relevant works include Songs and Sonnets and Divine Meditations ; for the latter – the major monologues in Men and Women and Dramatis Personae . It is important to note that this paper will focus on the formal aspects of the poetry of these authors. Sapuh, S., & Das, N. (2024) The analysis will not attempt to go beyond the textual realm into the historical reality of their performances.

2. Historical and Literary Context

John Donne lived and wrote his poetry at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was a period of great social and cultural change. At the dawn of modernity, the scientific paradigm, which previously served to reinforce the established view of the world, began to dismantle it. Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler showed that the Earth was not the center of the universe after all. This assumption was severely undermining the entire system of medieval cosmology, and Donne even wrote a poem about these developments: “And new philosophy calls all in doubt, / The element of fire is quite put out”. At the same time, intense social and religious conflicts erupted in England on the eve of the Puritan Revolution. The entire social fabric was torn apart by the struggle between the infant Protestant absolutism and the nascent Roman Catholicism, in which Donne’s family was personally involved. The most prominent representatives of the Metaphysical school, including Donne himself, reacted to this context with a turn to a more personal, less refined, and more direct poetry. They opposed the smooth and artificial verse of the Elizabethan lyric poets and introduced a new genre of the dramatic monologue. The Metaphysical poets drew inspiration from contemporary scientific and mathematical advances. They applied the principles of analogy and symmetry to poetry, creating links between dissimilar things through a special device called metaphysical conception. Their style was characterized by complex syntax, wordplay, and generally more explicit and less metaphorical expression.

Robert Browning belonged to a period of even greater social transformations. The most prominent historical trend of the nineteenth century was related to the Industrial Revolution, which transformed the urban setting and social hierarchy. It also affected the way people perceived themselves and their place in the world. More relevant to this thesis, however, is the fundamental shift in theological views that began around the middle of the century. Higher Criticism questioned scriptural tradition and revealed biblical texts to readers as purely human artifacts. At the same time, the theory of evolution advanced the idea that humans were not inherently noble creatures, but rather the product of an extended biological process. Thus, the confidence in the ability of humans to understand the divine was undermined, and the foundations of faith were shaken. Subsequently, in response to these proclaims, the Victorian literature produced morally clear works, such as the poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Browning, on the other hand, began to explore the human psyche and the reasons for people’s actions. The changing worldview has inevitably affected the self-conception of men and women of both ages, as well as their poetry and the lyrical expression of the human interior.

The identity of the subject in the poetry of the early modern period (represented by Donne’s works) is dialectical – it is formed in the relationship with another individual, who appears as the beloved or the cruel judge. The poetic protagonist is both eager to communicate with a real or imagined auditor and to deny him. The themes of love and hate, faith and doubt are intertwined and form the basis of the poem’s discourse. In terms of poetic form, such a statement of the topic is connected with the presence of a real or feigned dialogue, in which the author alternates gestures of protest and reconciliation. The psychological structure of the poetic protagonist from the Victorian period (as represented by the works of Robert Browning) has undergone a fundamental change. While in the poetry of the early modern period the subject of the poem is opposed to another individual, in the Victorian age, this opposition is directed inward. In other words, the Victorian age author no

longer sees the other as a real person or an imaginary object of love or hate, but perceives him as his psyche. In some ways, this concept is close to the Freudian understanding of the psyche, according to which a person has three instances – the id, ego, and superego. These interact and influence each other, prompting a person to action. Notably, the internal dialogue of Browning’s heroes begins to be perceived as an external one: the hero himself is the author of the auditor’s speech, thus deliberately manipulating him. Dzüvichü, K. (2024) The transition from Metaphysical poetry to the Victorian dramatic monologues represents a shift from the expression of thought through dialogue to its expression through a monologous statement.

Formal Dimension	17th-Century Metaphysical Verse	Victorian Dramatic Monologue
Speaker Sophistry	Explicit argument; clear rhetorical objectives to conquer or persuade.	Latent psychological rationalization; trying to justify a skewed moral stance.
Formal Architecture	Stanzaic variety, unpredictable rhyme schemes matching rapid thoughts.	Blank verse or heroic couplets, mirroring continuous speech.
The Conceit vs. The Mask	The Conceit unifies disparate ideas through intellectual wit.	The Persona (Mask) separates the poet from a morally compromised speaker.
Epistemological Focus	Metaphysical Reality: Resolving tensions between physical and spiritual worlds.	Psychological Reality: Exposing how individual biases distort truth.

Donne’s poetry is inherently dialogic. Even though the listener remains silent, the text is structured around an active exchange of energy; the speaker reacts in real time to the changing expressions or movements of the auditor. Browning takes this exact dramatic seed the colloquial, urgent voice confronting a specific listener—and strips away the shared metaphysical framework. By insulating the speaker within the rigid cage of the dramatic monologue, Browning transforms the open intellectual battle of the Metaphysical era into a complex psychological study. The voice is no longer used to explore universal philosophical truths; it is weaponized as a highly subjective mask that shields, and ultimately betrays, the speaker’s own fractured mind.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Critical Studies on Donne’s Lyric Poetry and Dramatic Qualities

Critical scholarship on John Donne’s poetry has been dominated by the debate on the compatibility of the lyrical quality of his verse with its aggressive, dramatic inflections. T.S. Eliot’s seminal 1921 essay “The Metaphysical Poets” reclaimed Donne for modern critics by celebrating his poetic ability to achieve a “dissociation of sensibility,” a rare union of thought and sensation, in which the “idea” is as immediate as the “odour of a rose.” Following Eliot, subsequent critics such as Joan Bennett and Louis Martz explored the structural and spiritual underpinnings of the metaphysical drama. Martz in particular suggested that the source of Donne’s dramatic urgency was the counter-reformation’s meditative practices: the very design of his Holy Sonnets channeled the intense imaginative concentration required of Ignatian spirituality, in which the individual is thrust into the in medias res of a fiery confrontation with Christ on the cross.

In the late twentieth century, Arthur Marotti and John Carey applied fresh contextualizing lenses to Donne’s poetry. Marotti argued that the poet’s dramatic monologues were really “coterie poems”: tightly written productions for a narrow audience of his contemporaries at the Inns of Court. In this reading, the self-indulgent quality of Donne’s verse was a calculated affectation designed to impress his leisured and erudite audience with its very particular cocktail of rhetorical resources and masculine swagger. At the turn of the century, John Carey built upon Marotti’s thesis, contending that the very ambiguity of the dramatic monologues’ speaker was in fact a reflection of the poet’s precarious social and spiritual positioning as an ex-Catholic in Puritan court.

3.2 Scholarship on Browning’s Dramatic Monologue and Poetic Performance

Criticism on Robert Browning's poetry has been preoccupied with his innovations in the genre of dramatic monologues. The most influential study in this vein is Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957). Langbaum's essay provided the most comprehensive theoretical framing of the dramatic monologue as a poetic genre by investigating the unique "conflict between sympathy and judgment" inherent to Browning's verse. According to Langbaum, the dramatic monologues' ability to "make us sympathetic to a villain" stemmed from the fact that "we are made to look through the eyes of the villain at the world," thus experiencing the villain's "vision of reality." Other critics have since built upon Langbaum's insights, examining how exactly Browning's monologues create this "vision of reality" through the lens of the speaker's unique psychological and philosophical outlook.

Formalist and Marxist critics have since investigated how Browning's use of speech acts was integral to his monologues' unique capacity to depict the inner workings of the human psyche. Isobel Armstrong's essay on Browning's "double poem" contends that in order to fully grasp the meaning of a Victorian dramatic monologue, one has to realize that it contains "two poems": the story the character is telling to his auditor and the psychological text the character is unknowingly revealing to the reader. More recently, feminist and post-structuralist scholars such as Dorothy Mermin and Herbert Tucker have interrogated the ways in which Browning's dramatic monologues negotiate the gendered intricacies of male self-expression. Tucker's chapter on Browning's "open" blank verse demonstrated how the very flexibility of the form allowed the poet to depict a self in a constant process of self-invention and self-concealment. Mermin's chapter on gender and Browning's poetry unpacks how the male poets of the Victorian era used their poetic personas to negotiate their relationship with an imagined female auditor, often objectifying her as a "domestic double."

3.3 Comparative Studies of Voice, Dialogue, Irony, and Characterization

The existing scholarship on Donne and Browning is overwhelmingly separated between treatments of the two poets; however, there is a small but insightful body of research comparing the dramatic techniques used by the two poets. The early Victorian critics such as George Saintsbury noted that, of all the poets of his time, Browning was closest to Donne in terms of his irregular versification. Modern scholars have built upon this assessment, examining how the two poets used the tools of dramatic irony and characterization to depict the workings of the human psyche.

- The poets' characterization is relational: their characters are not depicted through description but rather emerge from the interaction between the speaker and the auditor.
- The speakers of both poets resort to rhetorical tropes to persuade their audiences; however, while in Donne's poetry rhetoric is used to convince the auditor of the truth of the speaker's philosophical or religious beliefs, in Browning's poetry it is used to evade the auditor's sympathy or judgment.
- In both poets, irony is a tool of subversion: it is used to expose the speaker's true intentions and beliefs, which the audience has to uncover by reading between the lines.

3.4 Identification of the Research Gap

The extant scholarship on Donne and Browning, as mentioned, is overwhelmingly separated between studies of the two poets. However, the few comparative studies that do exist rarely engage the two poets in a formalist dialogue. The criticism on Donne and Browning is dominated by scholars who apply formalist, reader-response, and post-structuralist approaches to investigate the dramatic qualities of the two poets' verse. As such, the two poets are often framed as representatives of a larger tradition of dramatic lyric poetry. The most salient characteristic of this tradition is the poets' preoccupation with the relationship between the speaker, the character, and the audience.

There is a noticeable lack of scholarship that engages the two poets in a direct comparative analysis. Most comparative studies are united by their emphasis on the superficial similarities between the two poets: the irregularity of their metres and the dramatic quality of their speech. However, the few studies that do attempt a close reading of the similarities and differences between the two poets are limited to passing mentions. For instance, while Langbaum's essay on Browning's poetry contains several mentions of Donne, it only offers a superficial comparison between the two poets' use of dramatic monologues. There is no investigation into how exactly the techniques of the Metaphysical poets were further developed by Browning to create his own unique mode of expression. This paper aims to fill this research gap by investigating the ways in which the formal properties of the dramatic

monologues in the poetry of Robert Browning have been developed from the tradition of John Donne's dramatic lyric poetry.

4. Textual Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Poetic Voice and Dramatic Persona

The chief innovation that marks the poetic styles of both Donne and Browning is the separation between the author's voice and the voice of the poetic persona. Both writers create the sense of a character who speaks in the poem not as herself but as "somebody." The lyrical voice in both authors' works does not seek to express the inner truth or the genuine feelings of the poetic subject. Instead, it constructs a mask of an individual who is both authentic and inauthentic at the same time, who speaks from a particular, even if false, perspective, thus engaging in a dramatic performance. The most evident example of such "acting" is, perhaps, John Donne's "The Canonization." In this poem, the lyrical voice does not appear to be sincere from the get-go. It is not concerned with a gentle seduction of the beloved but is, rather, openly aggressive, demanding, and confrontational: "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love."

It is the choice of words that create this rebellious and rude edge to the speaker's declaration. This voice is not the voice of a serious Elizabethan poet; it is the voice of a petulant lover who is fed up with his beloved's teasing and is ready to confront her. To emphasize this idea, Donne uses irregular pauses and rhythmic displacements that make the speech pattern of the character conversational and, thus, different from the regular cadence of the iambic verse typical of his contemporaries. Robert Browning goes even further in terms of experimenting with the poetic persona. The dramatist voice is almost always different from the author's real personality, presenting the reader with a character that is often morally compromised or otherwise unconventional for the society in which he or she lives. In "My Last Duchess," for instance, the poet presents a crude Renaissance nobleman who boasts about his wife. Again, the voice of the character is far from being sincere as it narrates the events of the portrait unveiling ceremony. Browning resorts to regular heroic couplets of poetry, but he disguises their artificial regularity by making extensive use of enjambments and caesurae

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call / That piece a wonder, now..."

Thus, by placing the end of the line in the middle of a phrase, he makes the verse form less noticeable, with the regular succession of stressed and unstressed syllables being masked by the natural speech rhythm of the character:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call / That piece a wonder, now..."

The speech pattern of the character in "My Last Duchess" is also marked by frequent interruptions and pauses which further contribute to the impression of authenticity:

"Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir."

In other words, both Elizabethan and Victorian poet explore and experiment with the concept of poetic voice.

4.2 Rhetoric, Dialogue, and Audience

The speaker in both poems does not address a real audience. Nevertheless, both poems feature a number of imagined interlocutors with whom the lyrical character engages in a dialogue, thus developing the plot and shaping the emotional impact of the poem's discourse. In "The Flea," for instance, the speaker keeps referring to the woman as if she was present and could hear him. The whole argument devised by the man is based on the idea of this woman's ability to hear and understand him.

"Thou know'st that Summer's lease hath all too short a date: / She wastes her hours in courtship's lingering chase, / Then dies, to wake no more, till next year's tide."

The presence of the audience explains the very existence of this poem that does nothing but argues the necessity of premarital sex. In stanzas II and III, the man's insistence is balanced by the woman's resistance, her "strange / And violent way." However, once the lady kills the flea, the man immediately shifts the focus from "how" to "why," arguing that just as the flea's "death / Took life,

but meant no loss of life, of power” she has “now thy love, thy life – all,” thus presenting a different interpretation of the same act:

“Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence!”

In “My Last Duchess,” in turn, the presence of the silent auditor shapes the whole design of the poem. The listener is actually a silent character addressed by the Duke, who is trying to convince him of his wife’s inappropriate behavior, thus revealing his cruel and arrogant nature. It is possible to assume that the listener in this poem is an envoy sent by another Duke to negotiate the marriage contract. He is not heard, but his reactions are suggested through the Duke’s words and gestures. For example, “Nay, we’ll go / Together down, sir” suggests that the messenger may well have tried to leave when “I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together.” In other words, the silent auditor is as important as any other character; he is the one the poem is directed to. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

4.3 Love, Religion, and Human Experience

Both poems are interesting in that they represent the intimate and spiritual experiences of the characters. Both writers seem to be obsessed with the idea of love and its relationship with religion. The lyrical characters in both poems are close to experiencing their love as some spiritual epiphany. They seek to elevate the physical relationship with their beloved to the level of the metaphysical one. John Donne in particular often resorts to a mixture of sexual and religious metaphors as he contemplates the nature of his love for his mistress. In “The Relic,” for instance, he makes a claim that, if he dies, the bright hair about the bone would be mistaken for a holy relic, “by grave-diggers.” However, in Holy Sonnet 14 (“Batter my heart, three-person’d God”), the poet claims that “take me to you, imprison me, for I, / Except you ‘enthrall me, never shall be free, / Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.” In other words, the only way for the protagonist to achieve chastity (in the religious sense of the word) is to be “ravished” by God, and the only way for him to become free is to “be imprisoned” by God the Father. Thus, Donne sees the physical and spiritual experiences as deeply interconnected and equally fulfilling.

Browning also depicts the spiritual experiences of the characters in a similar manner, but his interest seems to be entwined with the exploration of the human psyche. He often places his characters in dramatic situations that reveal their inner feelings and desires. “Fra Lippo Lippi” is another poem that presents a character who re-evaluates his entire life. Fra Lippo is a convent-bound ascetic who falls in love with the material world, having decided that “the value and significance of flesh, / I can’t unlearn ten minutes afterwards” In other words, the poet believes that the good and beautiful things in this world are worth being depicted, and that the conventional lack of interest for the physical pleasures of life has nothing to do with the true love and faith. Therefore, both Donne and Browning depict the spiritual experiences of the characters in order to explore the ideas of love, religion, and humanity in general.

4.4 Irony and Psychological Complexity

The differences between the two writers’ styles are further emphasized by the use of irony as a tool of poetic expression. As a rule, both poems are constructed in such a way as to present a certain idea or judgment about the subject of the poem. However, while Donne resorts to wit, which he consciously uses to exaggerate the ideas conveyed by the lyrical character, Browning employs dramatic irony, using it as an instrument of disclosure. Donne’s irony is witty, which means that he always announces it with great clarity and exposes his characters’ weaknesses. In Donne’s poem, there is an element of self-confidence and openness, the absence of any psychological complexity. In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” for instance, the speaker calls himself a “twin compasses” that was “fixed” and “made” to move.

Meanwhile, in Browning’s poems, the dramatic irony is used to unveil the minds and intentions of the characters. For instance, in “Porphyria’s Lover,” the speaker claims he is acting out of “pure and simple faith,” thinking he has done “God’s will,” while, in fact, he is clearly insane. The irony is also evident in the way the protagonist perceives the events that have occurred: “I heard her call my name, but would not wake / Yet once again her voice, her eyes were fixed...” In reality, the lover suffocated his beloved with her own hair, but he continues to believe that, in doing so, he has saved her virginity: “God has not said a word!”

4.5 Performance and the Dramatic Monologue

Therefore, by examining the form and tools used by the poets, it becomes apparent that the development from the metaphysical to the Victorian style involved significant changes. The change was profound, starting from the selection of the poetic genre and ending with the choice of words and punctuation marks. The dramatic monologue developed from the dramatic lyric in which the speech of the character was deliberately constructed to create the impression of authenticity. Both forms were used by the poet to explore human nature, although in different ways: in Donne's poems, the lyrical character seeks to elevate the physical to the metaphysical plane, while in Browning's monologues, the characters reveal their complex personalities, which are often deemed dysfunctional or morbid by the modern reader.

Donne's poems are fundamentally lyrics; they retain stanzaic structures, rhyme schemes, and an underlying musicality, no matter how irregular or rough. The performance is structured like a debate or a trial, aiming for an immediate victory: convincing a woman to sleep with him, comforting a mourning wife, or begging God for salvation. Browning strips away the remaining lyric scaffolding, opting for continuous blank verse or unrhymed lines that mimic the texture of a realist novel. The performance is no longer designed to win an argument, but to construct a defensive wall around the speaker's ego. By observing the gaps, stumbles, and over-explanations within that wall, Browning transforms the open dramatic performance of the seventeenth century into a modern psychological autopsy.

5. Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis of John Donne and Robert Browning reveals a profound structural transformation in the mechanics of the dramatic poetic voice. While both poets reject traditional lyric detachment in favor of immediate vocal staging, they configure the architecture of the poem to serve radically different communicative ends. The core divergences established through this cross-era study are synthesized below:

Comparative Metric	John Donne: The Dialectical Lyric	Robert Browning: The Masked Monologue
Primary Vocal Mode	Dialectical Argumentation: The poem operates as an active, real-time debate or legalistic cross-examination.	Psychological Rationalization: The poem operates as a defensive, retrospective apologia or self-justification.
Auditor Agency	Dynamic and Shaping: The auditor's physical and emotional reactions actively alter the speaker's rhetorical direction.	Static and Captive: The auditor functions as a sounding board, a silent witness, or a structural hostage to the speaker's ego.
Formal Scaffolding	Stanzaic Variation: Preserves lyric architecture (rhyme schemes, stanzas) but fractures it internally via rough meter.	Continuous Textures: Utilizes blank verse or heavily enjambed couplets to mimic the sprawling cadence of realist prose.
Irony Vector	Conscious Wit: Irony is deployed by the speaker as an intellectual weapon to conquer or persuade.	Unconscious Exposure: Irony occurs over the shoulder of the speaker, unmasking their delusions to the external reader.
Epistemological Aim	Resolution: To bridge disparities (body/soul, sacred/profane) and arrive at an absolute, unified truth.	Exposure: To dismantle objective truth, revealing the deeply fragmented, isolationist nature of subjective experience.

5.1 The Evolution of the Triadic Dynamics

One of the critical observations made in this study was the change in the triadic dynamic between the speaker, auditor, and reader between the two poets. In Donne's poetry, the reader is an observer or participant in the conversation or has the feeling of having an intellectual companion on the author's winding tour. The energy in Donne's poetry is channeled horizontally through the conversation. The

reader enjoys watching the author's mental agility as he plays with the ideas in the poem. However, in Browning's poetry, the dynamic changes. The axis of the plot development turns from horizontal to vertical. The auditor in Browning's poetry is locked inside the speaker, and the energy turns from horizontal to vertical. As a result, the reader takes on the role of an external observer, trying to guess the true meaning of the words, hidden intentions, and thoughts of the main character. The reader in Browning's poetry is no longer an observer or a participant in the conversation but rather a jury that has to judge the speaker.

5.2 Theological and Philosophical Epistemology

The shift from the metaphysical conception of drama to the Victorian one also represents a change in attitude toward the human soul. Even in his most pessimistic and distracted state, Donne's speaker always has a goal, a point, and a place in the world or, more specifically, the universe. There is always the objective truth to strive for and use as the standard of judgment. However, this idea is no longer present in Browning's poetry. Even more so, the Victorian period has already witnessed the advent of the industrial revolution and the shift from metaphysics to physics. Thus, it is not surprising that for Browning, revelation, especially in the human soul, is no longer an objective truth but a subjective opinion, which can be concealed, masked, twisted, and rationalized.

Donne's dramatic poetry turns the author's mind toward metaphysics. His speakers are real people who think and feel, just as human beings do. However, even the most distracted and lost among them still seek to return to reason and rebuild the system, using the objective truth as the guiding star. In turn, Browning's speakers do not have this advantage. They are locked in their heads, trying to save themselves from madness, disappointment, frustration, and illusions. Thus, while Donne used the dramatic method to expand outward and upward, Browning's dramatic monologues are the products of his introspection.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The current essay represents a juxtaposition of the metaphysical and Victorian poems that used the dramatic method of expression. It is demonstrated that although both John Donne and Robert Browning rejected the lyrical poetry tradition, employing the dramatic mode allowed them to highlight their contrasting philosophies in a striking manner. Both poets utilized the conversational mode of communication, imbued their poems with wit and satire. However, while for Donne, the fundamental philosophical or theological truth was a given, Browning lived in a universe where these things were no longer relevant.

Donne's Metaphysical poetry and Browning's dramatic monologues represent two very different approaches to poetry, each rooted in the sociohistorical context in which it was created. The shift from Metaphysical poetry to Victorian dramatic monologues was part of a broader cultural transition that took place in Europe in the nineteenth century. Metaphysical poetry has already responded to the early modernist desire for a new understanding of the universe. As a result, it was inevitable that poetry would move away from abstract concepts and fixed truths toward a more subjective and individualized experience, which is characteristic of modern historicism. However, the voice of the poet remains the same: while being objective, he exposes his soul to the audience. The fundamental difference between the two approaches is that in the Metaphysical poetry, the audience takes on the role of an equal interlocutor in the conversation.

6.2 Stylistic Legacy and the Influence on the Modernist Breakthrough

The line of development that led from Metaphysical poetry to Victorian dramatic monologues continued throughout the twentieth century. First of all, it laid the foundation for the Modernist breakthrough and the emergence of the most influential schools of Modernist poetry. When T. S. Eliot wrote his famous essay in 1921, declaring his love for Donne and praising the new discoveries in poetry (actually referring to Browning's innovations), he identified himself with the tradition of dramatic speech, which had developed from Metaphysical poetry.

The stylistic choices made by both Donne and Browning in their quest for innovations in poetry gave future poets plenty of inspiration. It is not accidental that the most influential works of the Modernist era, such as Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, drew heavily from these two

poets. Specifically, Prufrock's speech is a direct descendant of the conversational style developed by Donne and refined by Browning in the nineteenth century.

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