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The Dramatic Monologue (review)

Eyal Segal

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## New Books at a Glance

**Elizabeth A. Howe, *The Dramatic Monologue*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996. xix + 166 pp.**

Elizabeth Howe characterizes her book on the dramatic monologue as “a guide to the genre for students and other interested readers” (ix). The book’s first chapter is meant to provide an overview of the genre, and the three following chapters are devoted to a discussion of the corpus of dramatic monologues by individual poets and to a close analysis of representative poems with a view to illustrating the genre’s various characteristics and its development over the years.

The basic criterion Howe employs in her definition of the dramatic monologue is common to various critical approaches she surveys, namely the separation between speaker and poet and the distance created between the two. In this separation the dramatic monologue fundamentally differs from the lyric: the dramatic monologue embodies the phenomenon termed by Mikhail Bakhtin “double voicedness” because of the refraction of the poet’s voice through the speaker’s, resulting in a simultaneous presence of (at least) two different voices in the text. Throughout the book, in the theoretical part as well as in the analyses of specific poems, Howe discusses a variety of ways the distance between poet and speaker in the dramatic monologue is established and contributes to the overall meaning of the poem.

Apart from the dramatic monologue’s double voicedness, Howe emphasizes what she terms its “novelistic qualities,” the presence of a strong narrative element (usually the gradual unfolding of the speaker’s life story), as well as a realistic setting particularized in both time and space. Howe also claims that the “dramatic” quality of the dramatic monologue tends to be expressed, among other things, in the existence of strong tension and conflict, whether between the speaker and the external world or within the speaker himself or herself.

Following the definition of the genre, the rest of the first chapter is devoted to a short survey of the origins and development of the dramatic monologue. This includes a speculative discussion of the reasons for the genre's birth and flowering in Victorian England (starting in the 1830s) of all places and for its failure to acquire a significant presence outside English (and American) literature.

The book's second chapter, "The Victorians," focuses on the work of the two major founders and practitioners of the genre, Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and includes close readings of Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" and Tennyson's "Tithonus." In this context Howe discusses the many differences in tone, atmosphere, setting, characterization, and language between the styles of the two poets. Chapter three examines the age of modernism by looking at representative works by Ezra Pound ("Marvoil") and T. S. Eliot ("Portrait of a Lady"). For both poets the writing of dramatic monologues against the background of the Victorian tradition of the genre constituted an essential stage in their early development. Chapter four begins with a survey of dramatic monologues by other twentieth-century poets (e.g., E. A. Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Lowell, and Randall Jarrell) and concludes with close readings of "A Servant to Servants" by Robert Frost and "A Pre-Raphaelite Ending, London" by Richard Howard.

Together with its appendix, including a bibliographical essay, Howe's book offers a useful introduction to the genre of dramatic monologue for nonspecialists.

Eyal Segal, Tel Aviv

**David Richter, *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996. xi + 242 pp.**

In this book Richter attempts to tell the history of the Gothic novel from 1764, the year of publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, to the 1820s, notably including the 1790s, when the genre became a major force in English fiction. Richter's book reflects an acute awareness of the meta-historiographical problems concerning the possibility of writing literary history in general and history of genres in particular. Although for the last two decades the Gothic has drawn much attention in literary criticism (especially feminist criticism and criticism interested in popular fiction), Richter claims that the great majority of critics have avoided any serious attempt to write a literary history (as opposed to a mere "chronicle") of the genre.

Richter himself suggests a pluralistic approach to the writing of literary history and employs no fewer than three distinct modes of historiography,