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## Narrative Means, Lyric Ends

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## INTRODUCTION

### NARRATIVE, LYRIC, AND TIME

In an 1844 letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed her goals for the poem that would eventually become *Aurora Leigh*:

People care for a story—there's the truth! And I who care so much for stories, am not to find fault with them. And now tell me,—where is the obstacle to making as interesting a story of a poem as of a prose work . . . Conversations & events, why may they not be given as rapidly & passionately & lucidly in verse as in prose . . . I want to write a poem of a new class, in a measure—a Don Juan, without the mockery & impurity, . . . under one aspect,—& having unity, as a work of art,—& admitting of as much philosophical dreaming & digression (which is in fact a characteristic of the age) as I like to use.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 30 December 1844, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836–1854*, vol. 3, eds. Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan (Waco, Tex.: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University, 1983), 49.

Barrett Browning's aspirations raise a number of important questions (besides the conundrum of what, exactly, would be left of Byron's *Don Juan* if one were to excise the "mockery & impurity"). How can a poet satisfy the public in an age that craves both "a story" and "dreaming & digression"? Can a poem achieve artistic unity when its purposes are so multiple and divergent, and through what new aesthetic forms is that unity imposed? What poetic elements are retained in poems that imitate narrative prose? How important is rapidity when telling a story, and why, in the nineteenth century, is poetry more associated with the meandering and the atemporal?

This book attempts to answer such questions by examining the varied and complex interplay between two seemingly antithetical modes, lyric and narrative, in four canonical long poems of nineteenth-century British literature: William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. These four poems are representative of a general trend of generic experimentation with lyric and narrative in nineteenth-century poetry, and demonstrate the range of possibilities in such experiments. I argue that each of these texts uses narrative techniques to create lyrical effects, effects that manipulate readers' experience of time and shape their intellectual, emotional, and ethical responses. I approach the primary texts through the dual perspectives of narratology and poetic theory, two fields that rarely come into contact, yet can reinforce, complement, and critique each other. Although contemporary narrative theory has expanded the range of texts it considers, poetry remains underrepresented and the novel remains the dominant source of examples and case studies. By taking the less common approach of understanding poetry through narratology, I hope to achieve several goals. The first two chapters find strong, unusual structuring devices within two Romantic poems that have often been described as amorphous and accretive—*The Prelude* and *Don Juan*. The final two chapters address Victorian poetry from a context that emphasizes its innovation, its creation of new forms to create new rhetorical effects. More generally, the four poems central to the project serve as case studies of the boundaries and interactions between broad modes and among specific genres, changing our aesthetic and ideological assumptions about lyric and narrative. The analysis of these poems' underlying structures also expands the domain of narrative theory, and qualifies some generalizations that often are based too exclusively on the realist novel. Finally, by connecting specific uses of local poetic features (especially simile, personification, and alliteration) to larger narrative strategies, this book

demonstrates that form at the micro and macro levels can mirror, supplement, or otherwise reinforce each other.<sup>2</sup>

Although lyric and narrative forms abound throughout English literature, the nineteenth century is an especially rich period for the study of these modes because of the confluence of two literary-historical trends: the increasing prestige of lyric poetry, and the increasing popularity of the novel. In the Romantic and Victorian periods, writers as varied as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Mill value poetry for the emotional intensity usually associated with lyric, and view narrative as contingent and subservient. Despite the critical devaluation of narrative, poets, to a greater or lesser extent, incorporate narrative elements. In part, they were responding to the increasing popularity of a new narrative form—the novel. At the beginning of the century, the most popular poems and the most popular novels had similar sales figures. But while the market for poetry remained relatively unchanged, the sales of novels exploded as the century progressed.

The combination of lyric's critical prestige and narrative's popular appeal produced, as the nineteenth century progressed, a heightened sense of the tension between lyric and narrative, and varied and complex strategies for reconciling the two modes. To date, most studies of nineteenth-century poetry which address lyric versus narrative have argued that Victorian poets introduce narrative or dramatic elements to make poetry more objective, as a reaction against the seemingly excessive lyric subjectivity of Romanticism.<sup>3</sup> I take a different approach. This study focuses on the temporal, logical, and figurative aspects of lyric and narrative, aspects that more vividly highlight the tension between the two modes. Whereas narrative requires temporal progression and

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2. I thus hope to overcome the sense of opposition between two types of formalist analysis (one focused on large-scale structure, the other on local style) described by Catherine Gallagher in "Formalism and Time," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 229–31. Gallagher suggests that both approaches are flawed, in that "both versions of form may be said to arrest narrative flow, one by generalizing an enduring pattern toward which the moments contribute and the other by freezing a moment for analysis." Gallagher, 231. I hope that my emphasis on dynamic reader interactions over time will partly mitigate such shortcomings.

3. For instance, one of the major premises of Carol T. Christ's study is that "the Victorians and the Modernists find the prominence which they feel that Romanticism gives to the poet's subjectivity burdensome and restrictive." *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2. Isobel Armstrong agrees that the Victorians strived to create a poetic form that is, at the same time, "not only the *subject's* utterance but the *object* of analysis and critique." Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12. Armstrong differs from Christ, however, in viewing the Romantics as engaged in the same struggle to make poetry less subjective, although to a lesser degree. *Ibid.*, 6.

sequentiality, lyric is a suspended moment that stops the time of narrative and focuses instead on the “now” of composition and reception. Within this moment of suspended time, the poet can give free play to thought and emotion, associating ideas and images that would not be linked by the chains of cause and effect that typically govern narrative. The lyric poet can also make use of this freedom from temporal progression to linger on the formal and figurative aspects of language, thus calling attention to it *as* language. In contrast, the interests of narrative cannot afford to dwell indefinitely on the formal beauties of its language: instead, a narrative must make clear what is happening in the story, thus requiring a more straightforward use of language. By concentrating on time’s progression versus timelessness, strict causality versus imaginative association, and the strategic uses of figurative language, I bring into focus the fundamental differences between narrative and lyric, and trace the historical progression of their productive tension in the nineteenth century. Early in the century, the two modes were still largely separate: *Don Juan* is primarily narrative, *The Prelude* is primarily lyrical. In mid-century, the Brownings both attempt to reconcile and balance the two modes in a long poem. Despite their varied structures, these four poems each use narrative methods to achieve lyrical effects: narrative is a means to attain lyric ends.



Western literary theory has a long tradition of distinguishing lyric and narrative, beginning with Aristotle’s influential division of genres. Aristotle discusses several criteria for dividing poetry, including the media of representation, the objects represented, and the manner of representation.<sup>4</sup> The three possible manners of representation are “(a) by narrating (either (i) becoming another [person], as Homer does, or (ii) remaining the same person and not changing), or (b) by representing everyone as in action and activity.”<sup>5</sup> From this springs the long lasting division of poetry into narrative, lyric, and drama. In dramatic literature, the characters are directly represented “as in action and activity,” and are themselves the source of their speech, without the poet as a visible mediator between the characters and the audience. In lyric, Aristotle’s (a, ii) category, the focus is entirely on the poet, who speaks in his own voice—he “remains the same person.” Narrative occupies an intermediate position, because

4. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 2–3.

5. *Ibid.*, 3.

the characters speak, but only through the poet who temporarily adopts their voices and “becom[es] another person.”

These Aristotelian criteria are still influential in 1815, when Wordsworth uses them as the basis for his discussion of genre in the preface to his collected poems. He claims that in narrative poetry, “The distinguishing mark is, that the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself the source from which everything primarily flows.”<sup>6</sup> By contrast, in dramatic poetry, “The Poet does not appear at all in his own person, and . . . action is carried on by speech and dialogue of the agents.”<sup>7</sup> When defining the lyric, however, Wordsworth surprisingly shifts to another Aristotelian criterion—the media of representation: the lyrical contains forms “in . . . which, for the production of their full effect, an accompaniment of music is indispensable.”<sup>8</sup> Here he departs from definitions based on the relationships among characters, poet, and audience, which would have led to a definition of lyric as poetry in which the poet appears exclusively in his own person.

In twentieth-century literary criticism, we can see Aristotle’s influence in Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg’s study of narrative: “By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. A drama is a story without a story-teller. . . . A lyric, like a drama, is a direct presentation, in which a single actor, the poet or his surrogate, sings, or muses, or speaks for us to hear or overhear. Add a second speaker . . . and we move toward drama. Let the speaker begin to tell of an event . . . and we move toward narrative.”<sup>9</sup> Here again, lyric is defined as univocal, drama is a direct presentation of multiple speakers, and narrative filters its presentation through one primary voice. A second set of definitions emerges from their description, however: lyric has a teller but no story, drama has a story but no teller, and narrative has both.<sup>10</sup> We are still left with

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6. William Wordsworth, “Preface of 1815,” in *Wordsworth’s Literary Criticism*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 176.

7. *Ibid.*, 177.

8. *Ibid.* Even when the presence or absence of musical accompaniment is used as the basis of Wordsworth’s generic classification, narrative still falls between drama and lyric, because drama admits music “only incidentally and rarely,” and narratives “neither require nor reject the accompaniment of music.” *Ibid.*

9. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4.

10. Scholes and Kellogg go beyond their basis in Aristotle, however, in addressing the possible tension between the story-teller and the story: “The problem of point of view is narrative art’s own problem, one that it does not share with lyric or dramatic literature. . . . The narrative situation is . . . ineluctably ironical,” but irony “is utterly alien to the lyricist.” Scholes and Kellogg, 240. According to Scholes and Kellogg, irony enters

the question of what constitutes a story. Scholes addresses that question when he offers an alternative definition of narrative: "A narration is the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time."<sup>11</sup> Saying that the elements of narrative are "related by time" makes explicit the temporal relation already implied by saying narrative represents "a sequence of events." By overtly stating the necessity of temporal progression in a story, Scholes more precisely defines his concept of a story and exposes narrative's most fundamental feature. Scholes and the long tradition of Aristotelian approaches to narrative have, in recent decades, been joined by theories focused on narrative structures. The one point on which all narratologists seem to agree is the essential temporality of the form: narratives depict events over time, and these representations must themselves unfold through time.

Some structural approaches only imply, but unambiguously imply, the necessity of temporal relations in narrative by focusing on events, which are themselves changes in time. For example, Seymour Chatman reiterates the Structuralist and Russian Formalist distinction between "story" and "discourse," between the content of a narrative and the textual performance through which the content is expressed, and then contends that a story is composed of "events" and "existents" (the former being subdivided into "actions" and "happenings," the latter into "characters" and "settings").<sup>12</sup> Other structural analyses more explicitly discuss the temporality of narrative. Gérard Genette evaluates narrative according to three broad categories: temporal relations, mood, and voice. The much greater length of analysis given to temporal relations, and their subcategorization into order, duration, and frequency, suggest the primacy of temporal aspects of narrative.<sup>13</sup> Peter Brooks, in his psychoanalytic approach to narrative structure, is sensitive to plot's development in time: "Plot as I conceive it is the design and intention of narrative. . . . We might think of plot as the logic or perhaps the syntax of a certain kind of discourse, one that develops its propositions only through temporal sequence and progression."<sup>14</sup> Temporal progression is

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narrative only when a written tradition begins, and it would not have been an important feature when literary composition was a primarily oral process. Scholes and Kellogg, 51.

11. Robert Scholes, "Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 205.

12. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19. On events, see especially 43–95.

13. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). See especially 33–160.

14. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), xi.

also important for Meir Sternberg, who defines narrative as dominated by “the play of suspense/curiosity/surprise between represented and communicative time.”<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricoeur goes even further. For him, time is not just the medium through which narrative conveys its content. Rather, time gives narrative its central meaning, and narrative makes time intelligible.<sup>16</sup>

Some theorists require a stronger link than mere temporal succession in order for a group of events to qualify as a narrative, and argue that succession must be joined by causation. Narrative events do not just follow each other in time; they logically follow each other based on concepts of cause and effect. In *S/Z* Roland Barthes identifies five codes through which literary texts signify, and two of them require temporal progression and causality. The proairetic code is the logic of minimal sequences of actions, of one action or part of an action probably implying another based on our knowledge of “the ‘already-done’ or ‘already-read’” of experience.<sup>17</sup> The hermeneutic code is composed of “all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution.”<sup>18</sup> It gives the actions of a narrative a more resonant meaning. The proairetic and hermeneutic codes provide a narrative with an armature of cause and effect, though for Barthes, this is a negative characteristic.<sup>19</sup>

Although Barthes sees a strong sense of narrative causation as something to be minimized in literary texts, many critics recognize the importance of causality but do not judge its value negatively. Paul Ricoeur, for instance, argues: “Every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story

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15. Meir Sternberg, “Telling in Time (II): Chronology, Teleology, Narrativity,” *Poetics Today* 13.3 (Fall 1992): 529. For Sternberg, however, the interplay between the time of story and the time of discourse is even more important than temporal progression per se: “What distinguishes narrative effects as such from all others is less their play over time than their interplay between times.” Sternberg, 519.

16. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

17. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 19.

18. *Ibid.*, 17.

19. Barthes believes “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text”; texts that invite such productivity from the reader are writerly texts, and those that foreclose it are denigrated as readerly texts. Barthes, 4. Barthes associates these two codes and their emphasis on causation with the readerly, rather than with the writerly, text. Barthes, 181–82.

as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events.<sup>20</sup> For Ricoeur, narrative texts link time with causation, which can help extract “significant wholes” and greater meaning out of “scattered events.” There are, however, dissenting voices on the necessity of causation in narrative. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes: “I would like to argue that temporal succession is sufficient as a minimal requirement for a group of events to form a story. My argument is based on: (1) the . . . suggestion that causality can often (always?) be projected onto temporality; and (2) the counter-intuitive nature of [requiring causality]. If . . . we posit causality and closure . . . as obligatory criteria, many groups of events which we intuitively recognize as stories would have to be excluded from this category.”<sup>21</sup> I agree that temporal succession is the only truly essential feature of narrative. Clear causal connections between events are not strictly necessary in a narrative mode. But a text has a higher degree of narrativity, and is more satisfying *as* a narrative, if it invites the reader to infer causal connections.<sup>22</sup>

Just as narrative is marked by temporal succession, lyric is marked by the absence of noticeable temporal succession. Jonathan Culler offers an influential definition of lyric based on its atemporality in his essay “Apostrophe.” Culler suggests that “one [can] distinguish two forces in poetry, the narrative and the apostrophic, and . . . the lyric is characteristically the triumph of the apostrophic.”<sup>23</sup> The importance of apostrophe,

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20. Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980–81), 174.

21. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), 18.

22. James Phelan suggests the central elements of narrativity are “the introduction and complication of instabilities involving the characters and the [reader’s] judgments associated with those instabilities.” *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), 225. Causation may be important for both the instabilities and the judgments, but it is not the only contributing factor to narrativity.

23. Jonathan Culler, “Apostrophe,” in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 149. Although apostrophe’s atemporality is most important for my purposes, other aspects of Culler’s analysis have inspired further critical debate. Barbara Johnson has applied Culler’s ideas to argue that the rhetoric in political debate and poetry about abortion resembles the rhetoric of apostrophe in its emphasis on (and ambiguity about) animation, and in the breakdown of a clear binary of *I* and *thou*. See “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): 185–99. J. Douglas Kneale follows the tradition of classical rhetoric in defining apostrophe as a turning away from the original, proper auditor to address someone or something else; as a result, he argues that Culler discusses not apostrophe but rather address, exclamation, and prosopopoeia. Nonetheless, Kneale admits that “what Culler has to say about the temporality of apostrophe is useful.” “Romantic Aversions: Apostrophe Reconsidered,” *ELH* 58 (1991): 161.

and its resistance to narration, stem from its detachment from temporal succession:

If one puts into a poem *thou shepherd boy, ye blessed creatures, ye birds*, they are immediately associated with what might be called a timeless present but is better seen as a temporality of writing. Even if the birds were only glimpsed once in the past, to apostrophize them as ‘ye birds’ is to locate them in the time of the apostrophe—a special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say ‘now.’ This is a time of discourse rather than story. So located by apostrophes, birds, creatures, boys, etc. resist being organized into events that can be narrated, for they are inserted in the poem as elements of the event which the poem is attempting to be.<sup>24</sup>

The lyric mode shares these characteristics of apostrophe. Lyric creates a timeless present, an indefinitely suspended moment, which contrasts with narrative’s past progression of events. Rather than emphasizing the time of the story and distancing the reader’s encounter with the text from the time of the events, lyric emphasizes the time of discourse, creating a sense of immediacy among the reader, text, and content. Since a lyric is composed of “the set of all moments at which writing can say ‘now,’” it de-emphasizes the passage of time required to read it and instead creates the illusion of a simultaneous apprehension of the poem’s elements and meanings. Apostrophe as a figure and lyric as a mode have another, more subtle, means of resisting narrative temporality. Culler argues that the *you* being addressed is constituted by the addressing *I* in apostrophe, so the real relationship is of the mind to itself rather than between the self and an object. This internalization within the mind of the poet resists narration, and the causality and passage of time associated with it.<sup>25</sup> Rather than encouraging the reader to forge connections

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24. Culler, “Apostrophe,” 149.

25. *Ibid.*, 148. This claim about apostrophe is similar to Paul de Man’s objection to the symbol. According to de Man, the sympathetic apprehension of objects in a symbol is problematic, because sympathy applies “to the relationship between subjects rather than to relationships between a subject and an object. The relationship with nature has been superseded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject toward itself.” “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., Theory and History of Literature, vol. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 196. The symbol is mystifactory because it creates the illusion that the speaker can borrow the temporal stability of the natural world, and that image and substance can simultaneously coincide. de Man, “Rhetoric,” 197, 207. The symbol is suspicious, then, precisely because it appears atemporal.

of cause and effect as narrative does, lyric connects its material based on the subjective mental associations of the poet.

These characteristics are rarely, perhaps never, present in a pure and absolute form, though. Even the most canonical of brief Romantic lyrics display some narrative elements, but their focus on subjective mental associations and their apostrophic atemporality give them a higher degree of lyricality than narrativity. Although Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" implies a crucial narrative event in the gap between its two stanzas—Lucy's death—the emphasis falls not on what caused her death, but on its current emotional impact on the speaker. He has, at some point in the past, undergone a radical change in attitude and belief, but his current understanding seems lasting and timeless, even though *what* he understands is the inexorability of time. The three stanzas of Keats's "To Autumn" present three views of the season, corresponding to early, mid, and late autumn, and each stanza contains actions and gestures toward temporality. The overarching tone suggests the speaker accepts the temporal change of autumn's departure, and yet this acceptance is communicated through repeated apostrophes to autumn and closes with a vista explicitly located in the poem's "now."<sup>26</sup> In some sense, all poetry combines lyric and narrative elements, but the four poems discussed in the following chapters are much longer and more complex experiments in formal hybridity.

Culler is not alone in defining lyric based on its predominant atemporality. Susan Stanford Friedman makes similar claims of subjective associationism and a suspended present moment when she argues, "As a discourse of subjectivity, the lyric is said to 'resist' narrative. A narrative may stand implicitly behind the lyric moment, but the lyric itself exists in a timeless present, outside history."<sup>27</sup> Peter Brooks contrasts lyric with narrative by emphasizing the former's illusion of simultaneous discourse, and Sharon Cameron places lyric discourse outside the time of action and discusses its concern with timelessness.<sup>28</sup> Rimmon-Kenan implies that lyric does not feature temporal succession when she notes that "narrative fiction differs from other literary texts, such as lyrical poetry or expository prose. Unlike the latter, narrative fiction

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26. For a discussion of temporality in "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," see de Man, "Rhetoric," 223–25. For the temporal aspects of "To Autumn," see the chapter on the poem in Helen Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983).

27. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.2 (Fall 1986), 204.

28. Brooks, 20; Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 243.

represents a succession of events."<sup>29</sup> I agree with this strand of criticism, identifying lyric as focused on the time of discourse, an indefinitely suspended present moment. I differ from Culler, however, in placing much less emphasis on apostrophe as a figure through which lyric atemporality is manifested.

Treating lyric as a mode rather than a genre and defining lyric based on its atemporality provide a powerful complementary category to narrative as it is defined by much current theory. Perhaps the only point on which all narrative theorists agree is the essential temporality of narrative forms, their dependence on the passing of time in both the stories they tell and the discourse through which they are told. This project's emphasis on temporality, and its search for the peculiar narrative structure of each long poem studied, may seem to lend itself to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope—the expression in literature of a particular set of temporal (and spatial) relations. While some of the poems I study share important features with specific chronotopes described by Bakhtin (for instance, *The Prelude* shares traits with the stoic autobiography, and *Don Juan* resembles an adventure novel of ordeal), Bakhtin's methodology and terminology have certain limitations that prevent me from adopting them. First, Bakhtin focuses on the novel rather than on narrative more generally, and he seems hostile toward lyric because he perceives it as ideologically conservative.<sup>30</sup> Second, Bakhtin emphasizes the level of story and temporality as it is experienced by characters, whereas I want also to consider the level of discourse and the temporal experience of readers. Finally, I hope to show the variety of lyric-narrative interactions in a time when the traditional genres analyzed by Bakhtin are breaking down.

Because I want to apply aspects of narrative theory to texts that usually are unaddressed by or tangential to narrative theory, I pare down the idea of narrative to what I take to be its essential features. I can thus temporarily discard other common tenets of narrative theories that are based on the nineteenth-century novel, freeing me from the constraint of forcing narrative poems to fit a model potentially alien to them. To make lyric a complementary term to my definition of narrative, I pare down

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29. Rimmon-Kenan, 2.

30. For instance, Bakhtin denigrates the transcendence, subjectivity, and isolation usually associated with lyric: "man's image was distorted by his increasing participation in the mute and invisible spheres of existence," and "the personal and detached human being . . . lost the unity and wholeness that had been a product of his public origin." M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 135.

lyric to its essential simultaneity. In doing so, I treat other features commonly attributed to lyric (brevity, intensity, sincerity, subjectivity) as less essential, perhaps even unnecessary.<sup>31</sup> And this could induce the objection that I am emptying traditional definitions of lyric of their meaning, or even suggesting that specific poems long taken as exemplars of the lyric do not actually fit the category.

I would like to avoid these negative consequences by maintaining a distinction between lyric as mode and lyric as genre. The lyric genre is a narrower category: for a poem to be generically lyric, it must be written primarily in the lyric mode and have at least some of the additional attributes mentioned above. Clearly, many poems in the literary tradition fit this more narrow definition of lyric. And clearly it is often useful to have even narrower definitions of lyric subgenres. There are still, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, poems that are recognizable as sonnets, odes, elegies, and songs. But there are also an increasing number of generically hybrid poems, some so hybrid as to defy generic categorization at all. As Dorothy Mermin has said, "Disdain for genre rules was common in the nineteenth century: the Victorians wrote poems in all sorts of strange and nameless forms without worrying about how to define them."<sup>32</sup> In these cases, the broader category of mode can provide a powerful framework to elucidate underlying structures that do not fit traditional generic categories; the four chapters that follow each provide an example of the modal approach's usefulness.

Taking lyric and narrative as complementary modes based on their respective simultaneity and temporal progression has another result that may seem troubling: it eliminates drama as a third category on the same hierarchical level as the other two. Most narratologists implicitly subsume drama under narrative, seeing them both as structurally similar,

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31. In *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* Sarah M. Zimmerman similarly treats lyric as a mode (rather than a genre) and questions some of the characteristics commonly attributed to lyric, arguing against the critical equations "solitary = asocial, sincere = antitheatrical and introspective = disengaged." She also recognizes the lyric's focus on the present moment and its associationism. She notes, "Two of the mode's qualities—a sense of immediacy and of intimacy—combined to create a poetics of presence." And Zimmerman finds that the critical tradition from John Stuart Mill through M. H. Abrams has made "Romantic lyricism . . . the poetic vehicle for psychological processes: the digressions of recollection and the associative mechanisms of reflection." Her study differs from mine, however, in its emphasis on subjectivity rather than temporality, its focus on biographical contexts, book production, and contemporary reception, and its choice of primary texts. See Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 36, 31, 17.

32. Dorothy Mermin, "Genre and Gender in *Aurora Leigh*," *The Victorian Newsletter* 69 (Spring 1986): 8.

essentially temporal forms that use two different media of presentation. Although I generally agree with this classification of drama as a subspecies of narrative, I do not therefore see the specific medium of drama and its conventions of presentation as unimportant. I also recognize the possibility that some dramatic works may minimize the importance of time, and hence become more lyrical in nature.

By now, it should be clear that this project has a distinctly formalist emphasis. Since the 1990s, literary criticism, and nineteenth-century studies in particular, have experienced a resurgence of interest in the formal features of literary texts. In the roughly two decades prior to this revival, formalist approaches to literature were often subordinated to ideological considerations, and sometimes dismissed as apolitical and escapist evasions of social meanings and historical contexts. Two identifiable varieties of New Formalism have responded to this perceived neglect of form. Marjorie Levinson has suggested the label “normative formalism” for those critics who advocate “a sharp demarcation between history and art” as a “backlash” against New Historicism, and has adopted Susan Wolfson’s term “activist formalism” for “a new formalism that makes a continuum with new historicism.”<sup>33</sup> The latter responds to Herbert Tucker’s call for more critics to adopt what he termed a “Cultural Neoformalist” approach, one which would benefit from the gains of New Historicism and cultural studies but would also attend to the cultural implications of “detailed textual signifiers,” and to Caroline Levine’s call for “strategic formalism” within cultural studies.<sup>34</sup> My work may not be as pervasively historicist as the activist criticism called for by Tucker and Levine, but I see the relationship of my work to more historicist approaches as complementary rather than oppositional, and for that reason I do not consider myself a “normative formalist.” *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends* makes the implicit argument that attention to form is

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33. Marjorie Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?” *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007): 559. The latter approach is evident in such groundbreaking texts as Isobel Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* and Susan J. Wolfson’s *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). I have elsewhere discussed the current revival of formalist approaches in “Productive Convergences, Producing Converts,” in *Whither Victorian Poetry?* ed. Linda K. Hughes, spec. issue of *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 (Winter 2003): 500–504. For an extended discussion of the history of formalist movements and reactions against them, see Wolfson, *Formal*, 1–30. For a briefer discussion that places more emphasis on the continuities among New Criticism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, and Neoformalism, see Susan J. Wolfson, “Reading for Form,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (2000): 1–16.

34. Herbert Tucker, “The Fix of Form: An Open Letter,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27.2 (1999): 535, 533; Caroline Levine, “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies,” *Victorian Studies* 48.4 (Summer 2006): 625–57.

a necessary element in understanding literary texts, but that formalist approaches should not exclude other considerations. Formal analysis must be among our array of available critical techniques, because form is capable of augmenting, complicating, qualifying, or undermining a text's more obvious surface meanings. Without an acute sensitivity to the subtleties of form, we are in danger of mistakenly extracting from a work explicit meanings or implicit ideologies which unduly distort and oversimplify the text. In some cases, texts that have been denigrated as unreflective transmitters of ideology may be shrewdly resisting their ideological content through their formal construction, and constructedness.<sup>35</sup>

This monograph also participates in the newly emerging critical interest in lyric-narrative hybridity.<sup>36</sup> Peter Hühn, for example, has fruitfully applied to lyric poems a range of narratological concepts, including general categories of the temporal relations between story and discourse.<sup>37</sup> Recently James Phelan has analyzed lyric-narrative hybridity from a rhetorical perspective using several twentieth-century texts, and Heather Dubrow and Monika Fludernik have each begun to theorize lyric-narrative interactions using Renaissance poetry.<sup>38</sup> Dubrow calls for more attention to cooperation (rather than competition) between the lyric and

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35. In this I agree with Wolfson that "any view of poetic artifice that perceives only its power to occlude or mystify misses . . . the capacity of poetry to strengthen critical understanding by engaging attention with its constructedness, making a reading of its forms fundamental to any reception of or quarrel with its power." Wolfson, *Formal*, 4.

36. I discuss this emerging work at greater length in "Lyric Narrative Hybrids in Victorian Poetry," *Literature Compass* 4.3 (May 2007): 917–34.

37. Peter Hühn, "Plotting the Lyric: Forms of Narration in Poetry," in *Theory Into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, eds. Eva Müller-Zetzelmann and Margarete Rubik (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 147–72. Hühn claims that poetry theory and criticism is "deficient" and "unsatisfactory" compared to the methodological achievements of narratology, yet he does not address the existing criticism on the poems he uses as examples. Hühn, 147. I disagree with Hühn's dismissal of poetic theory, and I have benefited greatly from the sophisticated criticism available on Byron, Wordsworth, and the Brownings.

38. See chapters 7–9 of James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction*; James Phelan, "Progression and Audience Engagement in Lyric Narratives: 'Now I Lay Me' and 'Doc's Story,'" in *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*, 158–96 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); James Phelan, "Rhetorical Literary Ethics and Lyric Narrative: Robert Frost's 'Home Burial,'" *Poetics Today* 25.4 (Winter 2004): 627–51; James Phelan, "Character and Judgment in Narrative and in Lyric: Toward an Understanding of Audience Engagement in *The Waves*," in *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*, 27–42 (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1996); Heather Dubrow, "The Interplay of Narrative and Lyric: Competition, Cooperation, and the Case of the Anticipatory Amalgam," *Narrative* 14.3 (October 2006): 254–71; and Monika Fludernik, "Allegory, Metaphor, Scene and Expression. The Example of English Medieval and Early Modern Lyric Poetry," in *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*, eds. Eva Müller-Zetzelmann and Margarete Rubik, 99–124 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

narrative modes, asking critics to recognize that “rather than attempting to impede, suppress, or supersede each other, lyric and narrative may further common agendas.”<sup>39</sup> In each of the following chapters, we shall see examples of the two modes cooperating when narrative is used to further lyric agendas.



Although it is possible to apply temporal definitions of lyric and narrative productively to literature of any period, the nineteenth century is an especially rich period for the study of these modes because of lyric poetry’s rise in prestige during the Romantic period, and the novel’s rise in popularity in the Victorian era.<sup>40</sup> Traditionally, lyric poetry is viewed as brief and intense, while long poems are assumed to have narrative interest to sustain their length. Wordsworth famously states, “All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” thus equating worthy poetry with the emotional intensity usually associated with the lyric.<sup>41</sup> This attempt to give prestige and merit to the emotion associated with lyric is reiterated when he contrasts his poetic project to the popular (and hence, for Wordsworth, suspect) narrative poetry of the time. He comments on the *Lyrical Ballads*: “I should mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.”<sup>42</sup>

The “feeling” of lyric is of greater importance than the “action” of narrative. Shelley also denigrates narrative, viewing the elements of a mere story as mechanical and arbitrary, whereas poetry expresses the

39. Dubrow, 256.

40. While poetry continues to be identified with the lyric in the Victorian period, it also becomes socially marginalized. At the same time, the novel’s literary merit and social importance is increasingly recognized. For an excellent discussion of this complex phenomenon, see Dino Franco Felluga, *The Perversity of Poetry: Romantic Ideology and the Popular Male Poet of Genius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). As he argues, “What we witness in the movement from the Romantic into the Victorian period . . . is an important turning point in the fate of the nineteenth-century poet: whereas the novel had previously been singled out as dangerous and perverse . . . by 1826, thanks to the growing critical acceptance of historical and domestic novels after Scott and Austen, the rhetoric of pathology became increasingly disentangled from the novel and applied instead to poetry.” Felluga, 107.

41. William Wordsworth, “Preface and Appendix to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802),” in *Wordsworth’s Literary Criticism*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 72.

42. *Ibid.*, 73.

necessary and universal. He states, "There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts which have no other bond of connection than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds."<sup>43</sup> A decade later John Stuart Mill reiterates the contingent nature of narrative and the higher value of emotionally intense lyric poetry. He claims, "There is a radical distinction between the interest felt in a story as such, and the interest excited by poetry; for the one is derived from incident, the other from the representation of feeling. In one, the source of the emotion excited is the exhibition of a state or states of human sensibility; in the other, of a series of states of mere outward circumstances."<sup>44</sup> To make his preference for poetry of emotion even clearer, he then goes on to locate interest in narrative with children and childish races. In 1846 Edgar Allan Poe places such value on emotional intensity in a poem, intensity that can be only briefly sustained, that he declares a long poem is an impossible contradiction in terms.<sup>45</sup>

Despite this declaration of impossibility, many nineteenth-century writers composed long poems. And despite the preeminence given to lyric, these poets, to a greater or lesser extent, incorporated narrative elements into their long poems. Why might this be the case? One possibility is that the epic may have carried lingering prestige, that this long narrative form was still viewed as the final and highest achievement of a poet striving for greatness. A second possibility is that poets were responding to a new narrative form, one that gradually rose in popularity and prestige as the nineteenth century progressed—the novel. The century opened with the sensational popularity of Sir Walter Scott for both his narrative poetry and his historical novels. Between 1805 and 1830, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* sold 44,000 copies; *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* each sold 50,000 copies between their dates of publication (1808 and 1810, respectively) and 1836.<sup>46</sup> Sales figures for some of his novels are

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43. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966), 281.

44. John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties," in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1, eds. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 344–45. Mill's essay is better known by the title "What Is Poetry?"

45. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in *Selections from the Critical Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. F. C. Prescott (New York: Gordian Press, 1981), 153.

46. All sales figures in this paragraph are taken from: Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 383–87.

roughly equivalent: from 1814 to 1836 *Waverly* sold about 57,000 copies, and from 1818 to 1836 *Rob Roy* sold over 40,000. Half a century later, Tennyson was the best selling of the now canonical Victorian poets, and his sales figures were of the same order of magnitude as Scott's, although Tennyson's poems may have sold more rapidly. *In Memoriam* sold 60,000 copies in the first few years after its 1850 publication, and by 1869 *Idylls of the King* had pre-publication orders amounting to 40,000 copies. These figures are impressive, but as the century progressed they were dwarfed by the sales of some novels. From 1837 to 1863, Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* sold 140,000 copies in book form alone, and by 1879 it had sold 800,000 copies. In 1871, the penny edition of *Oliver Twist* sold 150,000 copies in only three weeks. Perhaps the biggest sales sensation of the century was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which, in the year after its publication in 1852, sold one and a half million copies throughout the British empire.<sup>47</sup>

Given the increasing critical prestige afforded to lyric, and the increasing popularity of the novel as the preeminent narrative form, poets felt a heightened sense of the conflict between lyric and narrative as the nineteenth century progressed. The chapters that follow examine manifestations of the tensions between lyric and narrative in some of the varied and complex poems produced from this conflict. The confluence in the nineteenth century of a strong critical preference for lyric and a strong popular interest in narrative also suggests a literary climate in which older generic hierarchies were being reevaluated, and new generic experiments were likely to occur. Indeed, nineteenth-century England saw the revival and elevation of older forms (the ballad, the sonnet), and the creation of several well-defined new genres (the conversation poem, the dramatic monologue). It also saw the creation of many hybrid forms, works which have largely defied critics' attempts at generic classification: the four texts at the heart of this study are among the most prominent examples, but there are countless others. For this reason, I believe an examination based on the broader categories of modes, rather than more narrow definitions of genres and subgenres, is especially fruitful, providing the critical flexibility necessary when dealing with formal experimentation. By stating that nineteenth-century England is a particularly fertile period for the study of this topic, I in no

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47. Though as Dino Felluga reminds us (citing sales figures from Altick), the 1790s witnessed sensational sales of some nonfiction prose: Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* and Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* may have sold in the millions. Felluga, 61. Book sales were impeded, however, by paper shortages during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, spurring publishers to produce costly editions of poetry marketed to the upper ranks. Felluga, 61–62.

way mean to imply that experiments combining lyric and narrative are exclusive to this period. On the contrary, I hope to engage other scholars in a dialogue about the usefulness and applicability of a modal study of lyric and narrative in other texts and periods.

Of course, choosing a period of particular interest was not the only constraint needed to define the scope of this project. This study is further delimited based on the size of the texts to be examined: long poems—more precisely, poems of comparable length to novels and epics. These texts are of sufficient length to arouse expectations of strong narrative development to sustain the reader's interest. Their extended duration also pushes the limits of lyric, and not only because specific lyric genres are typically very short. The author of a long work, especially one that requires many sittings to read, written in the lyric mode may find it difficult to maintain the illusion of a suspended moment of time. To write a work of this length in this period virtually requires generic experimentation and innovation, because the epic tradition faced several new challenges. Lyric had become more highly valued, the individual had become a more central focus, and modern times had encroached on the mythic past. As Herbert Tucker has convincingly shown, throughout the nineteenth century, poets continued to write epics, and to address contemporary culture through them, but they required great adaptability and creativity (and the freedom offered by poor sales) to do so.<sup>48</sup>



In the four poems under examination in this book, length is accompanied by complexity and varied modal interactions. I begin my study with Lord Byron's *Don Juan* because it stands on one extreme of my dichotomy: it is a primarily narrative poem with little overt lyricism. But it is by no means a simple poem. *Don Juan* is seemingly exhaustive (and exhausting) in its proliferation of narrative subjects, narrative conventions, and digressions from narrative. Byron's commitment to multiplicity even extends to plot lines and similes. The poem repeatedly describes what might have been, elaborating on plot lines it itself does not take. Byron also frequently provides many options in his similes, giving a long list of objects to which a simile's subject could be compared. The effect of this narrative and poetic proliferation, I argue, is to highlight the arbitrariness of these events and comparisons, which then

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48. Herbert F. Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790–1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

draws attention to the author's choice in the act of writing. Narrative conventions are used, then, to foreground the time of composition, the suspended moment of lyric. In addition, the poem's focus on the narrator's ennui-laden present suggests that the poem itself is a method of passing the time: *Don Juan* frantically gallops forward in a vain attempt to put as much as possible behind, to fill an insatiable present moment, and to find oblivion in the future. Byron's poem shows that lyricism can be seemingly endless (rather than necessarily brief) and deliberately heard (rather than seemingly overheard).

A complement to *Don Juan* is provided by William Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude*. This book-length lyric poem, which is the focus of my second chapter, gets very little of its impetus through usual narrative means. Each of *The Prelude's* episodes begins with a very basic narrative but is essentially a subjective lyric experience, and initial plot movement gives way to a suspension of time. The individual lyrics, in turn, are unified by a radical model of narrative underlying the poem, a model that takes to a new extreme tendencies latent in confessional literature. Wordsworth constantly directs his readers to process the text prospectively—to look forward to the endpoint as they read the poem, rather than to confer retrospective significance at the end of the reading process. This unusual narrative structure has an associative logic that unites each episode to the final goal, rather than a causal logic that would directly link each episode to the next. Prospective reading allows the series of short lyrics to function together as one long lyric, restructures the presentation of time, and creates a more equal distribution of knowledge between the author and his audience. For modern readers, *The Prelude* also serves as a striking counterexample to narrative theory that assumes narrative is essentially a retrospective mode for the reader, assumes that full and confident understanding can be conferred only by the ending.

In chapter 3 I turn to a Victorian verse-novel that strikes an even balance between lyric and narrative—Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Barrett Browning alternates between forwarding the plot and adding lyric delay; for every small step forward in the narrative, a lyric pause follows, creating discrete but regular motion. Barrett Browning's incessant use of similes provides another, more subtle, method of advancing the plot while introducing elements that call attention to its status as poetry. In a simile, the tenor and vehicle, the literal and figurative elements, are kept separated by "like" or "as," keeping them more grammatically distinct than is the case in a metaphor or symbol. A simile's literal meaning is explicitly stated and is a discrete unit, thus leaving its

relation to the plot remarkably clear. But a figurative element is added, allowing for self-consciously poetic moments with all the formal play and virtuosity of lyric. *Aurora Leigh's* greatest complexity, however, lies in the changing times at which Aurora composes her story, and this is the focus of much of my analysis. Because she writes her story in distinct stages, with crucial events happening between bouts of writing, Aurora takes on the varied conventions of the (typically feminine) narrator of a diaristic novel, the (typically masculine) retrospective narrator of autobiography, and the (ambivalently gendered) spontaneous lyric poet. The complex interactions of these conventions emphasize the aesthetic and ideological limitations of each, arguing for the necessity of the generic hybridity the poem embodies. Barrett Browning thus sometimes exposes narrative conventions to promote the purposes of lyric, and sometimes exposes lyric to promote narrative.

In my final chapter I examine Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*—a twelve-book poem that reveals all the key elements of the story in book 1. The same material is worked over twelve times, narrated by ten separate speakers. Lyric and narrative are given different emphases by different speakers; I choose three books as notable case studies. Nonetheless, all the dramatic monologues which comprise the text share some important features: each emphasizes the act of storytelling at least as much as the story events, and each draws the reader's attention to the discourse which noticeably unfolds in time, presenting a gradual revelation, often implying different responses from an interlocutor at different points in time. I argue that the genre of dramatic monologue shares with lyric a focus on the time of discourse, but gives the discourse the developing temporality of narrative, rather than aspiring to the seemingly simultaneous meaning of lyric. In the case of *The Ring and the Book*, the temporal movement across monologues, from the occasion of one to that of the next, mimics on a larger scale the moving time of discourse within a single dramatic monologue. I also note the frequent and obtrusive alliteration common in all twelve books, and suggest that readers attribute it to Browning rather than to his characters, focusing their attention on the author's poetic craft. The work as a whole creates a triple vision of time: the reader is simultaneously aware of the time of the story being narrated, the time of each character's act of narration, and the time of Browning's writing. The multiple retellings also create a reading experience that mimics the experience of epic myth, allowing the audience to hear a familiar story with familiar episodes, and analyze each episode for the ways in which it demonstrates a character's exemplarity, and the ways in which it leads to (or delays) the story's ultimate end. But

the reader of *The Ring and the Book* searches for characters' exemplarity, not in the actions of the narrative, but rather in their motivations and thought processes—internal, subjective states which are standard topics of lyric. Browning's success at fully incorporating narrative elements while subsuming them to more internalized, lyric interests, and his focus on the influence of the narrator, are important precursors to key aspects of the Modernist novel and point to the wider importance of Victorian poetry.

