

# Robert Browning

1812-1889

- Rebellious eccentric spirit: vs middle-class and protestant background of his parents
- Influence of P. B. Shelley's – his Romantic side
  - Idealism – search / goals to achieve
  - Atheism (till he recovered his faith)
  - Love for Elizabeth Barrett, elopement to Italy (15-year “exile” – 1846-1861)

- The other side: away from subjective expression and confessional art
- Interest in the theatre (Historical tragedy: *Strafford*; friends with Macready)
- Failure as dramatist YET pioneer “dramatic monologue” in poetry
- Appreciated by Modernists and Imagists for his solution to the eternal tension between artist’s need to express his subjectivity and yearning for objectivity

# The Dramatic Monologue

- Speaker  $\neq$  Poet
- Addressee: a silent interlocutor AND the reader
- Speaker's story: entire or **relative** truth?
- Irony gap and omissions: we sense there's something beyond/behind his words
- Reader's response: ambiguous between sympathy and judgement (hermeneutic crisis)

## ■ A new style and diction

- Prosaic

- Colloquial

- Broken syntax: e.g. use of dash

- ❖ Character's mental flux (proto interior monologue)

- ❖ Mirror of mental fragmentation, scepticism and insecurity of the time

## ■ Browning's talking portraits

- Imperfect artist

- Failed lover

- Sadist or fanatic

- Villain

## ■ Constant preoccupation with good vs evil and man's mental deviations

## ■ Browning: a psychological atomist

# A friend to Browning

- F: “You have not a great love for nature, have you?”
- B: “Yes, I have, but I love men and women better”