

why? Because of a certain obscurity, an excessive demand on the reader.

In the *Drama of Exile* is felt the presence of astonishing genius. It contains many fine thoughts, but the whole seems a wild and wavering illusion. It is true in conception and magnificent in execution. In it, pure intellectual might and strict metaphysical truth are on a level with its consummate poetry. But in this as in the most of Mrs. Browning's longer poems there is a lack of sustaining power.

In the dialogue between Adam and Eve we become aware that the author is a woman—not from any weakness, not from any sameness or extravagance, but from the excess of the elements of pathos and beauty, which belong only to one whose womanliness is as intense as her genius is complete. A broad gleam of softest light, dewy, beautiful, original, like a stream of sunlight falling through a shower on a rugged hillside, is cast over the tragical realities of her theme, from the feminine knowledge and womanly sympathy of Mrs. Browning. The pathos throughout is very noble.

The conception of the *Drama of Exile* involved a task of overpowering difficulty: to put words into the mouth of the Saviour foretelling his own humiliation, with perfect preservation of Christian reverence, yet with an energy befitting the theme and poetic beauty embracing the whole; yet Mrs. Browning has performed it in a way not unworthy of Milton. Nowhere out of *Sacred Writ* is attained a pathos more sublime. In the "Solitary Vow," Mrs. Browning strikes a note beyond even Tennyson cannot reach. Again in this poem, the song of victory might be read after Shakspeare or Aeschylus and yet its excellence be pronounced supreme.

Still another class of writings remains to be considered: those which are broadly characterized as poems of personal emotion. In those poems are revealed the distinctive characteristics of female nature with more exquisite analysis and more powerful truth than hitherto. In this category belong many of the shorter poems such as *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, *Romaunt of the Page*, and many others. But the one deserving special notice is *The Rhyme of the Duchess May*. This, in the opinion of Bayne and other critics, is Mrs. Browning's masterpiece. All the objections to it may be summed up in one sentence. The comparison of an ancient wood standing "mute adown" to a "full heart having prayed." Such an expression as the "castle seethed in blood" when but five hundred archers were besieging it; the tediousness of the refrain about the little birds, the monotony of the words "toll slowly," these exhaust the faults that can be enumerated. But contemplating the piece in its entirety, it is found to be a production whose rare artistic