

Robert Browning as a Poet

Robert Browning, major English poet of the Victorian age, noted for his mastery of dramatic monologue and psychological portraiture. His most noted work was *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69), the story of a Roman murder trial in 12 books.

The son of a clerk in the Bank of England in London, Browning received only a slight formal education, although his father gave him a grounding in Greek and Latin. In 1828 he attended classes at the University of London but left after half a session. Apart from a journey to St. Petersburg in 1834 with George de Benkhausen, the Russian consul general, and two short visits to Italy in 1838 and 1844, he lived with his parents in London until 1846, first at Camberwell and after 1840 at Hatcham. During this period (1832–46) he wrote his early long poems and most of his plays.

Browning's first published work, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833, anonymous), although formally a dramatic monologue, embodied many of his own adolescent passions and anxieties. Although it received some favourable comment, it was attacked by John Stuart Mill, who condemned the poet's exposure and exploitation of his own emotions and his "intense and morbid self-consciousness." It was perhaps Mill's critique that determined Browning never to confess his own emotions again in his poetry but to write objectively. In 1835 he published *Paracelsus* and in 1840 *Sordello*, both poems dealing with men of great ability striving to reconcile the demands of their own personalities with those of the world. *Paracelsus* was well received, but *Sordello*, which made exacting demands on its reader's knowledge, was almost universally declared incomprehensible.