

**THEMATIC STUDY OF THE SELECTED POEMS OF ROBERT BROWNING: THE  
LAST RIDE TOGETHER, A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL, RABBI BEN EZRA,  
ANDREA DEL SARTO, PORPHYRIA'S LOVER, ABT VOGLER, FRA LIPPO LIPPI**

by

**Dr. Sheelu Singh Bhatia**

**Assistant Professor, Jazan University**

**Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

---

**I. Abstract**

*The Last Right Together* is one of the finest dramatic monologue of Browning. It was published in 1855 in *Men and Women*. Eighty years later it was again published and included in *Dramatic Romances*. Although it is a love poem but it expresses great philosophy of Browning. Perhaps its theme is to show a lover's expression of his joy born of the fulfillment of his last wish. The lover is rejected by his beloved but he does not murmur and grumble against his beloved. He requests her to grant his two wishes. First, that she should remember his love forever, and secondly, that she should come with him for a last ride together. When the beloved agrees, the lover considers he the happiest man on earth. He consoles himself by saying that it is not only he who is suffering because of the indifference and ingratitude of his beloved but there are other also who have met with the same fate in their lives with their own sweet hearts. Through this poem Browning represented very good though that nobody succeeds to win everything he wishes to win in life. To prove this point Browning gives the examples of statement labor, soldiers, poet and sculptors, who aim at an ideal and attempt to reach sublimity. They not succeed. He says about those persons.

**"Ten lines, a statesmen's life in each**

**The Flag stuck on a heap of bones**

**A soldier's doing! What atones?**

**They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones**

**The lover's ride is better, he is sure."**

## **II. Introduction:**

Through this poem Browning represents his optimistic view that even failure can bring some good or the other. Even in disappointment and frustration, there is hope. He says very well lines:

### **The petty Done, the undone vast**

and that is the theme of the poem.

*A Grammarian's Funeral* is one of the best poems of Browning. It was first published in the volume of poems called Men and Women, 1855. Later on, the poem was included in Dramatic Romances, 1868. Perhaps through this poem Browning wanted to show the spirit of the Renaissance Scholars, who had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and dedicated their life's to attain it. De Vane (A Browning Hand Book) writes:

**"The poem is a most successful attempt to catch the spirit of the scholars who hungred and thirsted after knowledge in the early Renaissance".**

## **III. Literature Aspect**

The theme of this poem is only to highlight the spirit of Grammarian who had the thirst for knowledge and because of this reason he neglected his health and died prematurely. He melted like a candle in the pursuit of knowledge. During Browning's age, the word Grammarian meant a scholar, generally Browning does not mention the name of Grammarian. But it is suggested that he was a German Scholar of the 15th century. Perhaps Grammarian is the symbol of the Renaissance scholar.

The Grammarian was dead and the member of the Funeral party talking about the character of Grammarian. Their talk shows that the Grammarian was idealized because he was a sincere lover of knowledge and died in its pursuit. His disciple are conducting his funeral and taking his coffin for burial on the top of a lofty mountain, regarding it as the appropriate place of grave for an elevated man that he was regarded to be in life. As they carry the body, one of the pall-bearing disciples tells his story and dilates on the praise of the departed scholar. As they bear him up the rocky heights, they step together to a tune with heads erect, proud of their noble burden. This is the theme of the poem.

*Rabbi Ben Ezra* was first published in the volume of Browning's poems entitled Dramatic Personae, 1864. The speaker in this dramatic monologue is an old Jew called Rabbi Ben Ezra. Rabbi in the Hebrew tongue means one learned, in theology and religious philosophy. Ben ('Ben' is a corruption of the Arabic word 'Ibn' meaning 'son'). Ezra was such a Jewish

scholar of the Middle Ages. He was born in Spain in 1092 and died in Rome in 1167. He left behind a number of manuscripts on religious philosophy and also a number of religious poems. But *Rabbi Ben Ezra* represents Browning's own philosophy.

The theme of the poem is to tell us the fact that one should not be afraid of the old age because old age has got its charms-

**"Grow old along with me!**

**The best is yet to be,**

**The last of life, for which the first was made".**

Browning says that we are born to become old and pass away from this world. We should welcome each problem in our life. Body is a gift of God, which could be used for noble purposes. We should not complain our Maker because what He has made us, is better than a number of things, rather we should be thankful to God that at least we are the human beings and superior to a brute. Browning further explores the fact through the Sixteenth Stanza of this poem that we should reckon of our deeds everything before going to the bed. This way the proper evaluation of life or self-realization is possible. We should have full contentment in our life. We should not feel alone at the old age because we have a lot of knowledge and wisdom to face our life. He completely rejects the philosophy of Omar Khayyam that we should 'eat, drink and be merry'. For Browning the present is important but cannot be over emphasized, in view of the past and future. He presents the image of the Potter's wheel for the God and his creation-

**"Ay, note that Potter's wheel,**

**That metaphor! And Fell".**

#### **IV. The utmost faith of Browning in God**

The utmost faith of Browning in God is very much clear from the first stanza of the poem. He says that we should have trust in God and must not bother our life and its problems. God benign and cares for everyone in this world-

**Who saith "A whole I planned,**

**Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid"**

*Andrea Del Sarto* was included in the volume entitled *Men and Women* published in 1855. It was written in Italy- the most creative and happy period in Browning's life. The poem is a dramatic monologue. According to Berdoe, the speaker Sarto was a great painter of the sixteenth century. He was a famous artist of the Florentine School of painters. He was a tailor's

son. Sarto means a tailor. He was born in Florence in 1486. He was nicknamed "The Tailor Andrew". Owing to his technical mastery, he was known as "Perfect" or "Faultless" painter. He had no great ambitions. He falls in love with Lucrezia del Fede, wife of a hatter. After the hatter's death, he married her in 1512. She was very beautiful and he painted many a picture of Modonna after her. His disciple Vasari speaks of her as being faithless, jealous and overbearing. By 1516 he sent a Pieta and a Madonna to the French court and the French king Francis I invited him to Paris and commissioned him to decorate his place of Fontainebleau. But Lucrezia felt tired of the French court and insisted on their return to Florence, where Andrew betrayed the king's confidence by building a house for Lucrezia with the money he had been given for the purchase of pictures. Lucrezia admired Andrea's art for its commercial value, but was indifferent to his love. Browning here exposes the distortion of human relationship in a materialistic world. As Lucrezia was a faithless wife, she finally left Andrea. In poverty and disgrace, he died of Plague.

*Porphyria's Lover* with first published in 1836 over the signature 'Z'. After words it was grouped with another poem (Johanes Agricola) under the combined title Madhouse Cells, but ultimately it achieved its independent status as *Porphyria's Lover*. It is a dramatic monologue of a pale lover, who is loved by Porphyria. She could not marry him because of the false family pride and social distinctions and barriers. One night when it was raining heavily and fierce wind was blowing she left the feasting at her castle and visited her lover. The lover's heart swelled with pride and joy when she made him believe of her sincerity in love. In order to immortalize that moment of happiness, he strangled her with the tresses of her long golden hair. He kissed her rosy cheeks and raised her head, but as it was lifeless, it fell on his shoulder. He and his beloved remained seated in the same position throughout the night. At this time he feels :

**"The moment she was mine, mine, fair, perfectly pure and good ..."**

Perhaps through this poem Browning made a satire against social conventions and barrier which stand in the way of sincere lovers.

The poem also represents the abnormal psychology of a lover. De Vane (A Browning Hand Book) remarks :

**"This poem has the distinction of being the first of Browning's studies in abnormal Psychology ...."**

*Abt Vogler* was first published in *Dramatic Personae* in 1864. De Vane (A Browning Hand Book) suggests the probable date of the poem with the reasoning, **"The spiritual fervor of**

**the poem, and its profound seriousness and beauty, leads one to think it was written after Mrs Browning's death".** This is a highly philosophical poem. It may be said that the poem shows Browning's aesthetic philosophy. There was a historical person in the poem known as Abbe Vogler or Abet Vogler. He was an organist and a composer. He developed his musical talents and at the age of ten he could play the organ and the violin well. He invented a musical organ called Orchestra. His opera plays did not succeed on the stage. He opened a few schools of music in different places and at different times. He was impressed by the beauty and completeness of the performance which evoked wonderful imagery. He wants it to be permanent. But what he created has vanished. He compares it to a place built of sweet sounds, such a structure as angels or demons might have reared for Soleman, a magic building where into lodge some loved princes, a place more beautiful than anything which human architect could plan or power of man construct. The music structure took shape in his mind and it might be as lasting as all good, beautiful and perfect things. But an extemporizer cannot give Permanence to his performance. In a state of ecstasy he finds the spiritual asserting itself over the material. The soul is raised to heaven and heaven brings it to earth. In the words of Milton, he had become-

**"All ear, and took in strains that might create a soul under the ribs of death".**

He further says that the other arts are inferior to music since they are more human and more material. This leads the poet to reflect on the permanence of the good, on the nature of evil and an impermanent. In heaven we are to find 'the perfect round'. Hence an earth we have only 'the broken arc'. This leads him to speak of a home of pure ideals. The aspirations after the beautiful and true are preserved in God failure is like pause in music, like the discords. It is a revelation and, therefore, he can come back to the earth. "The musician feels for the common chord, descends the mount, gliding by semitones, glancing back at the heights he is leaving, till at last, finding his true resting place in C major of this life, soothed and sweetly lulled by the heavenly harmonies, he falls asleep".

*Fra Lippo Lippi* is one of the most popular monologues of Browning. It was first published in 'Men and Women'. The theme of this poem is to show the Man's acute consciousness of the flesh and blood. The main character of the poem, Fra Lippo Lippi is quite conscious of the bodily sex and attraction. Through this poem Browning's faith in love is illustrated and Renaissance urge of physicality also. The poem cores in the form of monologue in which the hero frankly tells that he was painting when he hearted the voice of ladies who were

laughing in the street. He himself could not resist the attraction of flesh and blood and very soon reached nearby them. The essence of this poem is that '*enjoyment of life should know no inhibitions*'. The painter Fra Lippo Lippi has no feeling of repent of what he has been doing even if he is caught in his act of enjoyment. The painter was given to the reality of life and under the impact of Renaissance individualism he would draw pictures of actuality which smelled of flesh. Browning preached Lippi that body is a perishable play and it should not be given importance. He suggested Lippi to paint the souls of man. Very beautifully he described in the poem-

**'Rub all out, try at it a second time'.**

The hero of the poem cannot believe that body can be ignored, that the possible without the proper delineation of the body. One point which is important in this poem is that Browning is not idealistic that he should believe that only soul is important. His sense of relativity lets him feel body and soul in their proper significance and this is the very opinion that Lippi expresses.

The impression that Browning leave upon the reader is twofold: he makes us feel the greatness of his mind and the intensity and breadth of his sympathies. It is a vast world of thought to which Browning introduces his reader. He claims from his absolute attention. In the world of Browning thought there is much that is strange, much that is new, much that is grotesque. There is no problem of life that he does not attempt to solve, no mystery of life that he is not ready to explain or reconcile. He insists that we take him seriously, for he himself is profoundly serious and earnest. He is not a singer, but a seer. In every line that he has written there is the vigorous movement of a strong and eager intellect. He demands our faith in him as a master-teacher; he will work no miracle for him who has no belief. Sometimes this sense of the power of mind in Browning is almost oppressive. We long for a little rest in the arduous novitiate he imposes on us. We feel that the vehicle he uses for the exposition of his thought is unequal to the vast strain he imposes on it.

## **V. References**

1. J.N. Mundra, "**Browning Selected Poems**" (Bareilly : Student Store Bareilly; 1996) P.39.
2. Idem P.P.
3. R.C. Kapoor and W.R. Goodman, "**Robert Browning, The Poet**", (Delhi : Doaba House; 1991) P. 252.

4. B.R. Sharma, "**Robert Browning Select Poems**", (Meerut : Shitya Bhandar; 2001) P. 266.
5. Ibid, P. 282.
6. Idem
7. J.N. Mundra, "**Browning Selected Poems**", (Bareilly : Student Store Bareilly; 1996) P. 151.
8. R.C. Kapoor and W.R. Goodman, "**Robert Browning, The Poet**" (Delhi : Doaba House; 1991) p. 205.
9. Dr. Raghukul Tilak, "**Studies In Poets Robert Browning**". (Delhi: Rama Brothers; 1997) P. 224.
10. R.C. Kapoor and W.R. Goodman, "**Robert Browning The Poet**" (Delhi : Doaba House; 1991) P. 261.
11. Edward Berdoe, "**The Browning Cyclopaedia**" (New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors; 2001) P.3.
12. R.C. Kapoor and W.R. Goodman, "**Robert Browning, The Poet**" (Delhi : Doaba House; 1991) P. 283.