

The Celebrity of love in Browning's *My Last Ride Together*

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"The greatest of love Poets", and his poetry, the "finest love-poetry in the world", as well as the, "truest of love-poetry". G. K. Chesterton.

Browning began writing love-poetry early in his career, and continued to write of love up to the very end. His last work *Asolando*, published on the very day of his death, contains a number of love poems which describe the passion of sexual love with surprising intensity. According to Brooke, They are fully charged with this isolated emotion; other thoughts than those of love do not intrude upon them.

According to Browning, Sexual love considered as a passion has two aspects –it is spiritual as well as physical. Browning does not frown upon the physical aspects of love. Indeed, when at his best, the physical and the spiritual meet in his love poetry, each in its pre-eminence. For him, the brightest truth, the purest truth in the universe, often lies "in the kiss of a girl". In one poem after another, he celebrates the earthly loves as well as the spiritual one. In *A Pearl and By the Fire side* express strong, earthly, and sensuous love, as well as love of the spirit, when one look, one word, from the woman opens the infinite world of love for the lover. For a moment with the beloved, the lover is prepared to surrender all- Heaven, Nature, Man, Art, and Life itself *Momentariness is the very essence of some of the best love poems of Browning*. In his treatment of love, Browning differs from the other Victorians who recoiled from the flesh and looked upon it as an obstacle in the way of the development of the human soul, It is a measure of his realism that he does not disregard the claims of the body; rather he

regards physical passion as essential for a happy married life, and as a means to spiritual development. His concern is with the harmonious development of human personality. This can be possible only through love which is both sensuous and physical.

Though, as pointed out above, the poet has dealt in a few poems with romantic, passionate love, more characteristic of him is the intellectual study of the emotion of love. He is more concerned with the psychology of love than with the passion of love or with that abandonment and exclusiveness which comes natural to youth and love. In one poem after another, his lovers dissect and analyse their passion. For example, the lover in *The Last Ride Together* thinks less of his beloved than of his own success and failure in love, and derives consolation from the fact that success is rare in life. *He intellectualises love: "the emotion of love is always entwined with grave questions of life and conduct."* He is more concerned with the consequences of love than with love itself. This detracts a little from Browning's greatness as a love-poet.

In his best love poems, he brings out the power of love to lift the lover to a higher and nobler level and give him new strength, as in *By the Fireside*, or sink him to the lower level of sensuous slavery, as in *Andrea Del Sarto*. Love is the one thing essential for the fulfilment of life: without

love even power and knowledge have no significance.

In short, Browning's love-poems deal with the countless phases and varieties of love in all classes of society. They show how Browning, passing through the world, was continually on the watch to catch. To store up, and reproduce a crowd of motives for poetry, which his memory held and his imagination shaped. For Browning love is the central principle of the universe, the highest attribute both of God and Man, and its triumph and immortality is never, even for a moment, clouded with doubt or uncertainty. To him Love is the conqueror, and Love is God; true lovers are bound to meet, if not in this world, certainly in worlds to come. A true lover need not despair, for love is its own reward, and, "God is mighty to create and mighty to grant". He creates love to grant the love In *Love Among the Ruins* he tells us that Empires decay, but love abides, for "**Love is best**".

The poem *Last Ride Together* is regarded as one of the finest love-poems of Browning. It is a rather long poem of ten stanzas, each of eleven lines. It was first published in 1855 in Vol. I of the collection of Browning's poems entitled *Men and Women*. Later, it was included in *Dramatic Romances* published in 1868. Such is the love situation out of which the monologue grows. It is spoken by the lover as he rides by the side of his beloved for the last time. As they commence their ride, the beloved for a moment bends over him and places her head descended over him, so great is the bliss he experiences at the moment.

As they ride along, the lover experiences a heavenly bliss. His soul which had lost its

happiness and on which grief had left its ugly marks and wrinkles, now smoothen itself out like a crumpled sheet of paper, which opens out and flutters in the wind. All his hopes of success in love, all hopes of a happy life with his beloved, were no dead and gone. His love was now a matter of the past. But the lover does not despair. He shares Browning's optimism and says that it is no use to regret or to feel sorry for a life which has been ruined. What is ended cannot be mended. It is no use speculating over his possible success, if he had acted and spoken differently. It is just possible that had he acted differently, instead of loving him, she might have hated him. Now she is only indifferent to him. Now at least she rides by his side. He derives consolation from this fact, instead of brooding sadly over the dead past.

My whole heart rises up to bliss

Your name in pride and
thankfulness!

Take back the hope you gave, - I
claim

Only a memory of the same,

And this beside, if you will not
blame,

Your leave for one more last ride
with me.

The lover then reflects over the lot of humanity in general, and derives further consolation from the fact that he is not the only one who has failed in life. Such is the lot of man that all try, but none succeeds. All labour, but all fail ultimately to achieve their ends. How little of success and achievement, and how much of failure does the whole world show! He is lucky in the sense that, at least,

he rides by the side of his beloved. Others do not get even that much of success. There is always a wide disparity between conception and execution, between ambition and achievement. Human will is seldom transformed into action; human limitations always hamper action and the achievement of one's desires. No one gets an adequate reward for his achievements. The only reward, even of the most successful statesman, is a short obituary notice and that of a heroic warrior only as epitaph over his grave in the Westminster Abbey. The poet, no doubt, achieves much. He expresses human thoughts and emotions in a sweet, melodious language, but he does not get any of the good things of life. He lives and dies in poverty. The great sculptor and musician, too, are failures. From even the most beautiful piece of sculpture, say a statue of the goddess, Venice, one turns to an ordinary, but a living, breathing, girl; and fashions in music are quick to change. Comparatively, he is more

successful, for he has at least, been rewarded with the company of his beloved. At least, he has the pleasure of riding with her by his side.

Finally, Browning illustrates in his lines,

And heaven just prove that I and she

Ride, ride together, forever ride?

It is difficult to say what is good and what is not good for man in this world have no hopes left for life in the other world. Failure in this world is essential for success and achievement in the life to come. He has failed in this life, but this is a blessing in disguise. It means that he would be successful in the life to come. He can now hope for happiness in the other world. Because he did not get his beloved here, he is sure to enjoy the bliss of her love in the life after death. Now for him, "both Heaven and she are beyond this ride." Failure in this world is best. Further, so hopes the lover, "the instant may become eternity" and they may ride together forever and ever. Who knows that the world may end that very moment? In that case, they will be together in the other world, and will be together forever.

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