

Personification of Quarrel in Love as Revealed in Robert Browning's Poems

Dr. B. Moses

M.A., M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Arasu Engineering College, Kumbakonam,
(Tamil Nadu) India

Abstract

Browning's ultimate position in the hierarchy in English poets", says Hugh Walker, "is more doubtful than that any of other English poet of the 19th century". This is because he is astonishingly great and astonishingly faulty. At one time, critics have pounced on his faults and his reputation has suffered, while in another age his many merits and his originality have been recognized, and his name and fame has risen high.

Key Words: Quarrel, love, Robert Browning

Browning's ultimate position in the hierarchy in English poets", says **Hugh Walker**, "is more doubtful than that any of other English poet of the 19th century". This is because he is astonishingly great and astonishingly faulty. At one time, critics have pounced on his faults and his reputation has suffered, while in another age his many merits and his originality have been recognized, and his name and fame has risen high.

Moreover, Browning was long, and one had no time for length; he was 'hearty' and 'healthy' and 'manly' – tedious attributes; he was an incorrigible optimist; he slapped you on the back with his, "All's love and all's law' , and his,

God's in his heaven,

Dinner's at seven

All's right with the world.

and words to that effect."

Browning's reputation suffered for a verity of reasons. It suffered, first, from a general react in to Victorianism. As **William Raymond** writes, "In particular, Browning has suffered, along with Tennyson, from the reaction, inimical to Victorianism and all its works, which has characterized the opening decades of the 20th century. It was called cheap and blind, by readers used to the novels of Hardy and the poetry of Housman and Davidson. Robert Brook and Sir Walter Raleigh denounced him on this count. Thirdly, the tempo of life has increased in the 20th century and, therefore, the preference to – day is for shorter poems. Much of Browning's poetry is long, sometimes excessively long, and this fact militated against his popularity. It came even in the way of the appreciation of his shorter poems, some of which are among the finest in English. But the last, and the most important reason, for the decline in his popularity, has been the criticism of the neo-

classicists, like Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, F.L. Lucas, and T.S. Eliot. They have criticized Browning for his lack of art, and his excessive emotionalism. They have criticized him for the harshness of his versification, for his grotesqueries of rhyme and metre, and for the many shortcomings of his language and diction. Thus **Irving Babbitt** finds utter lack of classical decorum, balance and repose in his poetry, and considers him as a representative of decadent romanticism. **F.L. Lucas** falls foul of what he calls, “his stamping and scribbled poems”, as instance of undisciplined romanticism. Their criticism is all negative. They are blind to his many merits, and in their own time they did much to obscure the real greatness of the poet.

In all these respects, Browning is a pre-runner of the modern poets like T.S. Eliot, W.E. Henley and John Davidson. But what makes him a modern in the true sense of the world, a poet much in advance of his age, is his interest in the incidents in the development of a soul. In his, “soul-dissection, “in his, “psycho-analysis, “in his probing into the heart and soul of men. Browning has his closest affinity with the modern age. His dramatic monologues are so many, “soul-reflectors”, in each of them a human soul reveals itself through self-introspection, through a process of minute self-analysis. The speaker’s thoughts range over the past and the future, and both are focused in the present. There is no chronological or sequential development, rather a backward and forward, zig-zag movement. This is another instance of his realism, in this way he faithfully renders the actual thought-processes of his characters. In

this respect, he anticipates the techniques of the modern impressionists. Thought not a poet of the school of, “stream of consciousness”, he foreshadows, ‘the inwardness’, of contemporary literature. In this respect, he has exercised considerable influence on modern writers, which has been freely acknowledged even by a great writer like Ezra Pound. Modern poets have benefitted considerably from psychological realism.

To conclude Browning’s reputation has fluctuated widely during the last hundred years, and despite his great merits, his place remains uncertain. But there can be no denying the fact that he is a great force in 20th century literature, and a number of poets are heavily indebted to him.

A Lover’s Quarrel is a dramatic monologue first published in Men and Women in 1855. The speaker is a lover whose beloved has left him after a quarrel caused by a rashly spoken word. The lover reveals the depth and intensity of his love, as he “contrasts the warmth of a love in winter with the chill that has arisen in spring because of a hasty word”.

James Reeves has summed up the poem admirably: “The weather is perfect, but the lover has quarreled. She has left him, and he had rather it were the weather in which they first met, for he cannot enjoy nature without her. Three months ago love made them secure against bad weather; idle diversions made them happy. They were like two people in a dream, sleeping as the earth sleeps under the spell of snow: how could they have any sense of insecurity? How were they to know that the devil of

disagreement would pierce to the centre of their happiness and make her his enemy? It was a mere word that offended her, coming only from the lips and not the heart. He begged her not to let a moment's spite make her cast him off of ever. The word's praise or blame is of no importance, but he cannot bear to be misunderstood in 'the one thing rare', his love. Spring is approaching; only if November were here – then in adversity the lovers would find the mutual dependence which they did not feel in summer. In winter weather she would forgive him and they would be reunited.”

Try, will our table turn?
Lay your hand there light, and zearn
Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,

Works Cited:

Browning, Robert. *Browning's Poems*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi.

Doeden. *Life of Browning*.

Chesterton, G.K. *Robert Browning*.

Brooke, K. *The Poetry of Browning*.

And the rest, they may live and learn

The monologue ends on a note of optimism, for the poet is sure that she would return to him at the usual hour, and forgive him for the rashly spoken word which had offended her. She would come to him even in the most inclement weather, even if a storm were raging outside. Then he would pull her in and says, he, “I shall have her for evermore”. The intensity of the lover's passion strikes a sympathetic chord in the heart of the readers. Browning finds some good even in things evil, and we almost agree with the lover that the bleak and barren winter is to be preferred to the gay spring. It is an emotional situation from common everyday life, but its treatment is original and illuminating. It may also be mentioned that the love-lyric is entirely free from the usual obscurities of Browning.