

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ROBERT BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

JYOTI DAHIYA

Pre-Ph.D (English)

M.D.U, Rohtak



ABSTRACT

Browning was a great literary artist and that he was not indifferent to the beauty of style and technique, becomes clear from the fact that he always kept investing newer and still new poetic forms. For every new poem and for every new thought, he wanted to find a new poetic form. It is as a result of this that out of his two hundred and three hundred poems, about half have been written in verse-forms entirely different from one another. His stress was on making the verse forms serve the purpose of carrying the ideas forward. So, he wanted to pack every fresh idea in a form that it could suit it best. The dramatic monologue was the most favourite form with him because his primary concern was with the human interior. In every dramatic monologue, he wanted to erect the complete personality, a complete human being with his own thoughts and emotions. In *The Ring And The Book*, different characters tell the same story from different points of view and in so doing, they reveal their own nature and temperament. In *Pippa Passes*, Browning introduces an entirely new form. Here, we have a sequence of detached dramas and the presence of an isolated figure is the only unifying force.

Keywords: dramatic monologue, technique, style, verse- forms, blank verse, heroic couplet

© Copyright KY Publications

Article Info:

Article Received:25/08/2014

Revised on: 14/09/2014

Accepted on: 16/09/2014

Blank Verse and Other Verse Forms : Browning was a great metrical artist. He experimented with number of stanza – forms and rhyme – schemes. Browning has written *My Last Duchess* in heroic couplets but the sense runs so naturally from the one line to the other that the reader hardly remains conscious of the rhyme. The couplets take the reader along with the virtue of their speed. It is, therefore, that from the point of view of language, *My Last Duchess* is one of the most lovable poems of Browning. One feels like reading the following lines of the poem, over and over again :

She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made
glad,
Too early impressed; she liked whatever

She looked on, and her looks went
everywhere.

Browning's use of language is more functional than decorative; yet when he is at his best, he maintains a balance between his style and content. For example, in the following lines, the Duke conveys his meaning, and at the same time maintains the beauty of the language:

She thanked men – good; but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she
ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years old name
With any body's gift.

Equally effective are the lines in which the Duke gives as a glimpse of his personality. The tone of the language is high-sounding. The Duke makes use

of a powerful expression and yet the language retains its artistic beauty :

Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed
without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave
commands
Then all smile stopped together.

The expression, "all smiles stopped together", is an embodiment of the tragedy of a complete life. Browning alone is capable of concentrating so much in so few words. Such expression are a refutation of the charge that Browning cared only for sense and not for sound. Here, he has exhibited his capacity to care equally for both at the same time.

The Last Ride Together is also full of the beauties of language. In the long drawn rhythm of its verses, Browning captures the steady stride of the horses. We seem to hear the gallop of the horses. The music of the poem beats to the sound of the gallop:

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thoughts had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.

It is by virtue of its beauty of language that the poem contains so many memorable phrases like, "The glory-garland round my soul", and "the instant made entirely", (to mention only two of them). Similarly, in *A Grammarian's Funeral*, the movement of the verse at places gives us an echo of the movement of the mourners. "The lines of the poem seem actually to move to the steady climbing rhythm of their feet" says D.S Somerwell. The following lines can be cited as an example:

Here is the top peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:
This man-decided not to live but Know-
Bury this man there?

After seeing how Browning combines sense with sound, let us look at still another distinctive feature of his style, namely, his ability to create through the medium of languages, an atmosphere that makes the characters better understandable and remains in unity with the general state of their mind. For example, in *Andrea Del Sarto* the use of such words as 'grey' , 'greyness' , 'silver' , 'autumn' and

'twilight' serve to heighten the effect of the spiritual vacuum from which Andrea is suffering. In the same way, Browning avoids making use of verbs and other 'action words' in order to emphasis upon the weariness and boredom of Andrea. Thus, we find that Browning determines the vocabulary of his characters in accordance with their mood and temper. It is in this sense that we can say that Browning was a careful artist.

The language of *Fra Lippo Lippi* is again in keeping with the character of the speaker. The words are vigorous and concrete, perceptive and sensory – 'snap' , 'whipped' , 'bite' , 'keep' , 'twinkle' , 'prodded' , 'munching.'

Natural and Conventional Tone of the Dramatic Monologues : That Browning was a deliberate and conscious artist, becomes clear from the fact that he takes pains to impart a conversational character to the language and tone of his speakers. He made use of compound words, exclamations and questions. He repeated certain words and made use of alliteration – all in an effort to make his characters as lively as possible. As an example, we can take the following lines from Evelyn Hope where the lover speaks to the girl lying dead, and whom he had loved from the core of his heart. The language is remarkable for its simplicity and naturalness:

I loved you, Evelyn, all the white.
My heart seemed full as it could hold:
There was place and to spare for the frank
young smile
And the red young mouth, and the hair's
young gold.

The lines that follow are still more natural and conversational and embody the affection of the lover, and his abiding faith:

So, hush, I will give you this leaf to keep.
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand
There, that is our secret: go to sleep:

You will wake, and remember, and understand.

Pictorial Elements, Imagery and Symbolism: Browning had an accurate eye for pictorial detail. Word-pictures abound in his poetry. In a *Gondala* has beautiful word-pictures. In *Andrea Del Sarto*, the silver-grey twilight gives added meaning to the painter's art.

Browning makes use of rich imagery and similes. Startling and daring, his images are often drawn from the grotesque aspects of nature. Often the images have symbolic significance. The potter in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* signifies God, the potter's wheel is the time passing over the world, and the pitcher is the human soul. In *Abt Vogler*, a hall of music has been built by the musician- an architectural image. The phrase, "serpentine beauty" in *Andrea Del Sarto*, makes clear in one stroke the deadly effect of Lucrezia's charms.

Distinct and deep-cut similes can be used by Browning in poems like *By the Fireside*, where he describes the November colours on the creeper's leaf:

Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from sun to boss.

Browning has a special fondness for using moon and star imagery. A star stands for purity, nobility, and peace. In *Abt Vogler*, the musician's great miracle is that "out of three sounds, the frames not a fourth sound but a start." In *One World More*, uniqueness of love is expressed by a reference to the unknown side of the moon.

Use of the Grotesque : Browning style often has an element of the grotesqueness to convey the odd and the fantastic aspects of nature. Good use of the grotesque occurs in *The Englishman in Italy* where he says:

And mouths gape there, eyes open, all
manner of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at.

In *Sludge*, he uses an image of a shapeless sea animal to present a noble idea that small and great things are equally infused with the spirit of God.

Rugged Diction and Versification : Following as he did, the tortuous mental processes of individuals. Browning's diction often has the rugged cadences of spoken language. Sometimes the use of a broken, varying, irregular verse is essential to convey a particular emotion or impression. It is natural as the Duke of Ferrara strives for the right word to describe his wife's disposition :

She had
A heart – how shall I say? – Too soon made
glad.
In this often rough and unmusical style,
Browning is unconventional and original.

Conclusion : Browning has his own whims and fancies. He was a widely read man and exploited his knowledge to a large degree while composing his poems. His Latin expressions and reference and allusions to little known sources stand in the way of a reader's understanding of his poems. At times, he leaves his sentences half-finished and his meaning half-expressed. He overloads his style too heavily with parentheses. The grotesque, the odd and the fantastic in nature had a peculiar fascination for him. In *Sludge*, he makes use of the grotesque image in a shapeless sea-beast to make us feel the presence of God in all kinds of things, small as well as big. He believed that the grotesque was essential to convey the oddity of a philosophical idea or of a character and the subtleties of thought and emotion. At times, Browning makes use of concrete images to give an idea of something abstract, as in the case of the image of the Potter, the wheel and clay in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

These are some obstacle that pose a problem before a reader of Browning. Still, it must be said that Browning was a man with peculiar or eccentric poetic tastes. His poetry belongs to a class of its own. He is the supreme master of a field – that of psychoanalysis. His literary art has its own perfections and imperfections. His poetry will continue to be read, not in spite of, but with all its flaws.

WORKS CITED :

1. Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*. London : Routledge, 1993. Print.
2. Eagleton, Terry. *How To Read a Poem*. Oxford : Blackwell, 2007. Print.
3. Kennedy, Richard S., and Donald S.Hair. *The Dramatic Imagination Of Robert Browning : A Literary Life*. Columbia : U of Missouri P, 2007. Print.
4. Hair, Donald S. *Robert Browning's Language*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1999. Print.
5. Hawlin, Stefan. *The Complete Critical Guide to Robert Browning*. London : Routledge, 2002. Print.
6. Ryals, Clyde de L. *The Life of Robert Browning : A Critical Biography*. Oxford : Blackwell, 1993. Print.