

Robert Browning And Elizabeth Barrett Browning As Lovers Of Nature

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Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are lovers of nature as both of them feel her influence . Both have painted various moods of nature in their works. Like romantic poets, both of them feel influence of nature in their personal life. Both are sensitive to the colours, sounds and various changing aspects of nature. Their works confirm their position as great pictorial artists. Though both share the love of nature, their attitude towards nature is somewhat different. As a lover of man, Robert Browning pays great heed to man and his activities in nature while Elizabeth Barrett Browning feels that there is God in various objects of nature. Like R. W. Emerson and William Wordsworth, she is a spiritualist and has eyes to observe nature's mystic ways in the world. As a moralist, she believes that nature inspires people to be patient, happy, optimistic, pure and to follow the path of goodness. No doubt, nature forms the background of the poems of Robert Browning, he treats nature in a different way.

Robert Browning's treatment of nature is different from that of romantic poets as neither does he spiritualize Nature like William Wordsworth nor does he express his views through natural objects like P.B. Shelley. Actually he is a poet of human nature and of man. It is a fact that man's life is related to nature and so he treats nature in relation to man. Nature does not become a medium to him through which he may express his emotions. On the other hand, he deals with the natural scenes to analyze the various moods of man. No doubt he has remarkable love for

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natural landscapes, for the breadth and freshness found. His love for flowers and animals and other natural objects also confirm his attitude towards nature. In Introduction to Browning's Poems W.T. Young remarks:

In descriptions of nature he reveals in brilliant clear colours such as glow in 'fierce and flashing splendour' in the sun and atmosphere of Italy; his distaste for the 'gaudy melon-flower' was the result of a moment of transient recoil. He disregards in the main the suggestions of depth and mystery given by subtle intertwinings of light and shade, but displays a characteristic liking for sudden and startling contrasts. (XIX-XX)

He is not a nature poet like William Wordsworth as he thinks of human destiny and walks in the natural surroundings. No doubt he respects dignity, simplicity and moral purpose of nature, yet he accepts it with full analysis as he is intellectually a realist who has a sense of inquiry and observation. He does not fail to realize the beauty of nature like John Keats and his description of natural beauty is based on his experience and not mere imagination. His poetry is replete with various natural scenes that he takes from real natural scenes and landscapes and they impart a sense of real or actual incident to his readers. Stopford A. Brooke remarks:

...though the love of Nature was always less in him than his love of human nature, yet for the first half of his work it was so interwoven with his human poetry that Nature suggested to him humanity and humanity Nature. And these two, as subjects for thought and feeling, were each uplifted and impassioned, illustrated and developed, by this intercommunion. That was a true and high position. Humanity was first, Nature second in Browning's poetry, but both were linked together in a noble marriage; and at the time he wrote his best poetry. PRB 82-83)

Like William Wordsworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a great lover of nature. She sees a mysterious power in natural objects and feels elevated in their company. All the objects of nature have great fascination for her as she regards them the means to realize the glory of God. To her, God is present in every natural object as she believes in the spiritual aspect of nature and perceives a mysterious power in it. God is the creator of this world and like Robert Frost, she is able to see the beauty of the earth.

Like the romantic poets. Elizabeth Barrett Browning feels great divine power in the various objects of nature and believes that nature heals wounded people. In some of her poems she presents the ferocious aspect of nature and yet her love for nature cannot be denied. In her poems she presents the beautiful natural pictures of the sea, moon, sun, flowers, animals, birds, earth etc. As a lover of nature she is not blind to see the mystical aspect of nature. As a true mystic, she realizes the divine power of natural objects and her poems confirm this fact. Her poems such as The Deserted Garden, Earth, The House of Clouds, Hector in The Garden, An Island, A Sea-side Meditation, Night and The Merry Man, Earth and Her Praisers, The Sew-Mew etc. can be cited to confirm this fact. As an invalid she could not enjoy nature like William Wordsworth and Robert Browning, yet she is not deaf to hear the sounds of nature. In the poem Sounds she says:

Harken, harken!
The rapid river carrieth
Many noises underneath
The hoary ocean:
Teaching his solemnity
Sounds of inland life and glee

Learnt beside the waving tree
When the winds in summer prank
Toss the shades from band to bank.....
(CPW 353)

As a child, she took great care of her garden and used to walk lonely to get peace in the company of nature. Since childhood, she led an inward life and used to wake early and sit by the window to enjoy the beauty of the dawn. As an invalid, she could not wander in natural surroundings and hence she passed her time in reading the books of various authors. Like Robert Browning, she did not have a healthy childhood and failed to enjoy outdoor life. Her health did not allow her to enjoy these pleasures. After the death of her mother her family had to leave the loving house in Hope End and her father was forced to sell the house. At the age of twenty six Elizabeth, her two sisters and six brothers went to Sidmouth where they found various flowers and shrubs.

The journey gave them a great relief and adventure and for the first time they saw the sea that was never seen before. The sea became the source of great inspiration and beauty to her. Though she feels disappointed due to the sale of Hope End, the sea imparts her with great mental, physical and spiritual power. Her love for her pet dog Flush is also quite clear in her poems. In the poem To Flush My Dog she calls Flush her loving friend—the gift of her dear friend Miss Mitford:

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
Render praise and favour:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
Therefore and forever.

And because he loves me so
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men
Leaning from my human. (CPW 348)

To her, the doves are her chief acquaints and she feels that they demand her help in building their nests she calls doves the fit ministers to describe love as God has a purpose behind the creation of every creature and hence the doves are the symbol of God's love. In the poem My Doves she exhorts them to teach her the way 'to move along the city-ways' with heart assured by holy love.

As a child, she is deprived of certain pleasures, studious health and merry leisure and yet by the grace of God she devotes herself to poetry and now poetry becomes religion to her. She led the life of an exiled child of twenty years in London and it is only after her marriage that she enjoys the treasures of forest, mountains, hills and other natural scenes in Italy.

Her love for Italy and its pictorial natural scenes finds place in her poetry. As a pictorial artist, she draws various beautiful pictures of Italy in her poems. Like John Keats, she is quite sensitive to the colour, sounds and beauty of nature and has power to hear the great echoes of mountains and other natural objects. She likes Italian forests of chestnut and the olive groves and finds great solace in the beauty of nature.

Like William Wordsworth, the meanest flower is very precious to her. Her love for various flowers is quite clear as she composes many poems on camellias, roses, violets, tulips, pansies etc. She selects various images from natural garden. To her, the various flowers are the symbols of different human

emotions and passions. She believes that the rose is the symbol of love and the beauty of the earth. During her relationship with Robert Browning, she got flowers sent by him in the folds of a letter. In the poem Song of the Rose she says:

For the rose, ho, the rose: is the grace of the earth,
Is the light of the plants that are growing upon it:
For the rose, ho, the rose! Is the eye of the flowers,
Is the blush of the meadows that feel themselves fair,
Is the lightning of beauty that strikes through the bowers
On pale lovers who sit in the glow unaware.....(CPW
397)

Both Robert Browning and Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning use rose as a great symbol of love. To Robert Browning the rose is the symbol of eternal life, love, creation, faith and the renewal of youth as he presents this idea in the poem Saul. As a lover of flowers, he makes use of various flowers to symbolize various ideas in the poem The Flower's Name. In the lyric Evelyn Hope, he says that the flower in the glass begins to fade as the heroine is dead. The atmosphere is gloomy and the flower also shows sympathy with Evelyn Hope.

As an invalid, Elizabeth Barrett Browning led a secluded life and her illness confined her to a private room. She suffers great pain and disappointment even after the death of her dearest brother Edward who is her sole companion and yet she accepts everything. Still she has faith in God and His creation.

As a follower of The Bible she believes that one gets knowledge after suffering. At the time Nature also comes to help her and she has keen interest in God's world and regards nature as a teacher. God teaches people through natural objects. In the poem Patience Taught by Nature she says:

'O dreary life!' we cry 'O dreary life!'

And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and
herds.

Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle!.....

O thou God of old,

Grant me some smaller grace than comes to
these!

But so much patience as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through the heat and cold.
(CPW 362)

As a devotee of God she believes that

What happens, happens according to a natural
law, the development of which only becomes fuller and more
observable. (MFC 62)

Actually it is her belief in God that imparts her great
patience and peace to bear all the sufferings and adverse
circumstances in life. Nature teaches people how to live with
patience, humility, dignity and simplicity. As a lover of nature, he
is fond of spikes and spears and wedges. In his poems such as
By The Fireside, The Grammarian's Funeral, etc. he presents a
vivid and fascinating account of various trees and landscapes.
By The Fireside is a personal poem in which he imagines the
scenes of his love and marriage.

Though the lover has decided to devote himself fully to
his studies as he has grown old, he remembers his youth and
Italy. Actually the poem is dedicated to Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett
Browning and through the perfect character of Leonor, the wife
of the old person, Robert Browning idolizes his own wife whom
he regards perfect. She is his ears and eyes. Like the romantic

poets, he also uses spring season as the symbol of youth while old age is symbolized by the autumn season in the poem. His liking for mountain and hills is quite clear with this beautiful imagery. In the poem By the Fireside he says:

Is Tella, see, in the evening glow,
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets Heaven in snow. (BP45)

Robert Browning presents nature as a supreme agent who helps the lovers to recognize and identify their love. While they are silent, nature motivates them to speak and supports them to be united. Robert Browning is conscious of spring, autumn, dawn, glorious light, colours, splendour and various sounds of nature. In Pippa Passes he records the sounds of nature. The lyric The Year's At The Spring presents the optimistic philosophy that nature is full of spontaneous joy and beauty and one feels that no evil can touch the world. God rules in Heaven and the world is happy.

Thus Robert Browning and Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning are great lovers of Nature. Both regard nature beautiful and truthful and a source of inspiration to man. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's approach to nature puts her in the category of the great transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson and the great Romantic William Wordsworth. Robert Browning also establishes himself as a great poet of nature as well as of man.

References

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