

A Brief Study Of The Language Of Robert Browning And Elizabeth Barrett Browning

12

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Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are conscious artists who express their feelings, thoughts and opinions in a free and natural language. They use language suited to their purpose in an original way.

As great scholars they have clear thoughts and use scholarly phrases, words and images. They are admired for the choice of subject, melody and words. Both love music and use musical words in their works. Their poems are remarkable for intensity of feelings, inspired passion, emotions and grand thoughts.

Their sonnets and lyrics confirm that they are original in their use of various poetic devices and techniques. Their works create hope in the hearts of readers as they present their positive thinking and great faith in God. They accept the eternal nature of soul and are not troubled with the troubles of earthly existence. To them, poetry is an art and as true artists they remain sincere to the genre verse and hence their works have stood the tests of time and place. Both are great poets as their poetical works have positive value and inspire readers to have a positive and optimistic view of life. Both regard language as a powerful instrument as without it there cannot be worthy poetry. It is a means to express ideas, thoughts and feelings. The style and language make this technique grand and sublime. As great intellectuals, they write upon grand themes and use grand language. Both are religious in their attitude and hence they take some phrases from the Bible and other scriptures. Their use of the Biblical references, expresses their religious bent and gives a religious dimension to their works. Both are conscious of the choice of words. Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses historical legendary and epic similes. Both are great scholars and use scholarly language. Like John Milton, she uses the splendid proper similes to convey

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her ideas. As great scholars, they have the whole treasure of learning at their command and use it with poetical inspiration.

As a lover of poetic beauty and truth, Robert Browning expresses his views on the role of the poet and on the nature of poetry in Sordello and other later works. His desire to explore the nature of poetic creation creates the feelings to use satire and irony in his poems. To him, art is means of highlighting the inherent importance of facts. He is accused of being unaware of disharmonies in existence and in The Two Poets Of Croisic, he asserts the nature of his poetry and answers those who find fault with his poetry. He says:

Who knows most, doubts most;
entertaining hope,

Means recognizing fear : the keener
sense.

Of all comprised within our actual
scope

Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim
and dense.

Who, grown familiar with the sky, will
grope

Henceforward among the groundlings?

That's offence

Just as indubitably; stars abound

O'erhead, but then — What flowers
make glad the ground! (TPC)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's mind is shaped and moulded by the influences of The Bible and the scriptures and so her poetry is full of moral and religious earnestness. Like R.W. Emerson, her works reveal the fervour of spiritualism and morality. Like John Milton, she makes a great use of Eden imagery and Prometheus myth in her poems. Her long poems such as A Drama of Exile, The Seraphim etc. reveal her beautiful treatment of Eden imagery. She presents Eve as the symbol of

hope, forgiveness, pity and grace. To her, Adam is the symbol of masculine powers such as strength, authority and physical powers.

She regards Jesus Christ as the symbol of love, truth and the incarnation of God. As a follower of the Bible she believes Satan as the symbol of evil, pride and defiance. In The Seraphim she presents a contrast of music and silence and she feels that human language becomes a perpetual song as music sings everywhere on earth as well as in heaven. God's voice murmurs in harmony with rivers, seas and the whole universe. Yet she also shows that the universe is also filled with noise of wailing winds, desolate cries, earthquake, thunder etc. She believes that the angels live in heaven and have no experience of sin or death and hence they sing the songs of praise but humans sing the passionate songs of sorrow, misery and suffering. Yet she believes:

In all thy vernal noises
 In the rollings of thine ocean,
 Leaping founts, and rivers running, —
 In thy wood's prophetic heaving...
 And with all thy music rolled
 In a breath abroad
 By the breathing God. (S 752-765)

To her, music or poetry is the language of God and angels and hence it is medium of communication between spirit and mortals. To her, all truth, beauty and music belong to God and hence she believes that the work of writing poetry is a worship to God. Like R.N. Tagore, she is a devotee of God and feels happy in singing songs praising God and His mercy. As a lover of truth and justice she believes in the principles of love, justice, mercy and truth. In the preface to the volume of 1860 she says :

What I have written has simply been written because I love truth and justice, quond meme, more than Plato and Plato's country, more than Dante and Dante's country, more even than Shakespeare and Shakespeare's country.
 (Qtd. by MFC 190)

Robert Browning is original in the use of language as he does not follow the principles of Romantic and new-classical writers. He does not regard poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings like Wordsworth. On the other hand his theory of poetry is somewhat different from that of romantics as he believes that art and poetry should present reality and life. As an individual, he regards poetry as an art to study individuals and their souls in an impartial manner. His language is functional as his main concern is to delineate and analyze the various moods of the characters. Often he neglects some of the connectives and other necessary rules of syntax to prove his point. He makes use of various devices to dramatize the narrative and conveys the meaning through various symbols taken from nature as well as other sources. His language is familiar and conversational and sometimes it seems to have the rhythm of spoken prose. The conversational tone imparts a sense of familiarity to the readers. In his later poems such as Red Cotton Night-cap Country (1873), Finite At The Fair, The Ring And The Book etc. he makes the use of conversational tone to create poetic beauty for meaningful values. His narrative art resembles with those of the modern novelists like Henry James and Conrad. As a precursor of modern novel he uses the method of dramatic projection combined with a multiplicity of interrelated perspective as his aim is to present the combiguous multiplicity of reality to get moral values. His poems are criticized for the obscurity of subject and the obscurity of language. As a scholar he uses a lot of classical allusions that make his poetry obscure as it is difficult to reach the depth of his knowledge.

A.C. Swinburne is a great admirer of Robert Browning and in his book on George Chapman he defends Robert Browning's position against the charge of obscurity. In the essay On George Chapman, Swinburne remarks :

He (Browning) is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence with moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realize with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit

leaps and lightens to and from and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought, woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination.

He never thinks but at full speed. (Qtd. in WTYBP 14)

As a creative artist, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is original in her approach. She is a lover of truth and beauty and expresses it in her works. She takes poetry as an art and does not judge it for other's pleasures or benefits. As a great lover her aim is to present it in a beautiful language. Like Robert Browning, she is also charged for obscurity, and exaggerated verse, off-rhymes.

Like Tennyson, she uses compound words and noun-substantives but she does not imitate him as she used them before reading a page of Tennyson. Though she admires Tennyson, she does not like to be called a follower of Tennyson. She uses double rhymes, a little varying of accents as she says:

I have a theory about double rhymes for which I shall be attacked by the critics, but which I could justify perhaps on high authority, or at least analogy. In fact, these volumes of mine have more poems [...] not comic. Now, of double rhymes in use, which perfect rhymes, you are aware how few there are, and yet you are also aware of what an admirable effect in making a rhythm various and vigorous, double rhyming is in English poetry. Therefore, I have used a certain license; and after much thoughtful study of the Elizabethan writers, have ventured it with the public. And do you tell me [...] why you rhyme (as everybody does, without blame from anybody) 'given' to 'heaven' when you object to my rhyming 'remember'

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and chamber? (LEBB 1:183-1 84)

She experiments with new words and phrases and new techniques as she uses off-rhymes in Catarina To Camoens, A Vision of Plots and The Lost Bower. She writes dreamy, self-enclosed verse in narrative form and her long lyrics are stories based on her personal experience. She drags poetry into the kingdom of prose fiction. She always looks for new subjects and new experiments in her art as Dorothy Mermain remarks :

She was always looking for a new subject, a generic innovation, a new way to touch the world. Homeric epic, Aeschylean and Miltonic drama, amatory sonnet sequence, novel-in verse, dreamy fantasies of clouds and islands, political poetry of many kinds on several subjects ... sonnets, ballads, monologues of sexual obsession, ironical forays into the war between the sexes, occasional verses on her family, friends, birds and cocker spaniel — nothing satisfied her; she was always moving on. (EBB 2-3)

Sonnets From The Portugues is an excellent poetic work that is admired for its imagery, spontaneity, grandeur, sincerity in art, impassioned beauty and tenderness. It reveals her artistic skill to present her feelings in a beautiful way. Though it is regarded a love story, it is a poem of life, death, immortality, heaven upon earth and in heaven. The sonnets reveal her merit of using Petrarchan hyperbole, the analogy, images, the flexibility and control, the rhythms of thought and speech. She finds new kinds of images and a new voice, a witty, tender and sensuous tone in these sonnets. Emotions are expressed through beautiful similes as she says:

Let the world's sharpness, like a claspng knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of love, now soft and warm.
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. (SP 24)

These sonnets reveal the fervour and purity of her inmost soul in a beautiful language. As an artist she practices her craft in a conscious

and serious way and selects musical words to impart melody and rhythm to the poem. Her other sonnets are also admired for variety of images, expression of feelings. similes, metaphors. quickness, wit, archaism, personification etc. Sometimes she uses abrupt off-rhymes and she is blamed for obscurity yet the charm lies in its original and spontaneous treatment. As a symbolist, she finds symbolism in human life as well as in every natural object. Like R. W. Emerson and William Wordsworth, she believes that Mother Nature is the symbol of patience and other virtues as grass symbolizes patience. Both Robert Browning and Elizabeth use rose as the symbol of love. To her, the rose is also the symbol of love. To her, the rose is also the symbol of the poet herself. As a lover of nature she presents the images of various flowers in her poems as she believes that they are the symbols of love as she says:

Love's language may be talked with
these:

To work out choicest sentences,
No blossoms can be meeter;
And such, being used in Eastern bowers,
Young maids may wonder if the flowers.
Or meanings be the sweeter. (CPW 389)

As a spiritualist she finds the sense of spiritualism in every natural image. Her poems The Tempest and A Sea-Side Meditation etc. confirm this. As an artist she uses thunder and lightening as the symbols of heaven's anger. To her, earth is passive and symbolizes despair and weakness. On the other hand, heaven, thunder, lightening are the symbols of power, activity and energy. She regards nature as a mirror to one's own self but one does not like to confront oneself in mysterious nature. Nature is a mystery and so one feels awkward at its mysterious ways. She says :

All that doth force this nature back on us,
All that doth force the mind to view the mind,
Engend'reth what is named by men, sublime.

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Thus when, our wonted valley left, we gain
The mountain's horrent brow, and mark
from thence ...

Wherein we view ourselves, and back recoil
At our own awful likeness, ne' ertheless,
Cling to that likeness with a wonder wild,
And while we tremble, glory — proud
in fear. (CPW 576-577)

Aurora Leigh is regarded as a novel-poem or verse-novel or novel in verse written in the first person as it is the fictional autobiography that shows the poet's development. On the whole, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are original artists. Their language and style suited them in a way that their works are unique and sublime.

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