

Explorartion into Human Psyche in the selected poems of Robert Browning

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ABSTRACT

Browning`s intellectual curiosity and vivid interest in human psyche were allied with a singular aloofness from the main stream and current of the Victorian era. He delves deep into human psyche, watches the happenings in the psyche, complex or abnormal under the influence of despair or anxiety and upholds the same before us. Browning uses his poems to explore human psyche and this exploration and treatment of psyche finds as the better and true understanding of human life and character. But he is not interested in collectiveness but individuality, his exploration of human psyche is not general but particular. He delves into the deep chamber of human psyche, shows how they are distinguished from one another for their peculiar inclination of mind and their eccentric passions and emotions. His delving into human psyche and exploration follows the indirect provisions of details about the speaker`s personality through their own words , their criticism of their victims and also through speakers` abnormal state of mind regarding love , abhorrence ,male possessiveness and jealousy .

Keywords : Victorian era, Human psyche, anxiety ,male possessiveness, jealousy

Introduction

Browning`s dramatic monologues disclose an idiosyncratic, preoccupied mind and the imaginative art that connotes is to the mind and relates to the same art we make

while reading Shakespeare and in this way we reach a bridge imagination and reality. It is a character that speaks to us not the poet though it is the poet who gives spirit and voice to the character ' passions. Browning like Shakespeare is everywhere and nowhere in the voices he creates. Browning's characters have its peculiar and particular bending of passions and emotions, individual likes and dislikes but at the same time have their eternal significance and psychic reality. The article will discuss and analyse the four dramatic monologues viz, Fra Lippo Lippi, My Last Duchess, Porphyria's Lover and The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister and how psychology found in them.

Fra Lippo Lippi an artist is fallen into a psychological moment, as he is interested in painting the real characters as they are, but his masters in the monastery insist him to draw the characters in the moral and spiritual sense. There is a psychological conflict between two instances in which Fra is portrayed as a monk and an artist. There is a clear distinction between two instances in which Fra sayshimself.

I am poor brother Lippo by your leave!

You need not clap your torches to my face.

Zooks what to blame? you think you see a monk!(1-3)

The poem begins in a dramatic moment where Fra has been seized by the night guards as he makes his way back to the palace of Medici after spending time with the sportive ladies. He was caught in a dire dilemma of reconciling two opposite ideas in fresh and spirit, Fra is satisfied with his sensation that he wants to reveal through his paintings, he wants to escape the restriction of monastery life, that wants to restrict free choice, imposes to paint what he does not like, thus indulges instincts and realize his artistic impulse. Browning is a poet of character and situation, he selects a particular complex moment of a particular character and reveals the mind of the character.

My last Duchess is a study in a systematic texture of a warm human soul by a tyrant.
. The duke shows the envoy

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive ;I call

That piece a wonder,now(1-3)

The very fast lines present an ironical tone ,murdering the duchess , he painted her on the wall.It is the study and analysis of a complex psychology.

She had a heart ...how shall I say? too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed;(21-23)

This appreciation comes into a paradox due to his egotism and pride of his aristocratic line when he says

,I gave commands

Then all smiles stopped together.(45-46)

We are not only given the psyche of the duke but through his words readers come across humane and soft nature of his last duchess.

She rode with round the terrace—all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech

Or blush ,at least.She thanked men,--good ;but

Thanked

Somehow...I know not how...(31-32)

Browning puts together two characters distinctive from each other for deep psychological probing, one being a duchess bounteous soft while another jealous, egotist, greed and cruel. It is nothing but an exploration into complex mind ,murdering the duchess while preserving her memory in art by the same man having taste in connoisseur.

Porphyria`s Lover is a profound analysis of abnormal psychology as lover behaves like a psychopath and suffering from inferiority complex . He exemplifies to an extreme degree male possessiveness and jealousy in love and thus resembles the Duke of Ferrara .While duke having power and command simply ordered duchess` smiles to be stopped together ,Porphyria`s lover ,being poor and insecure in love has to exploit the opportune moment when her beloved has to come to offer her pure love by killing he with his own hands and using her beautiful hair as the weapon of murder .GK Chesterton observes in his book on Robert Browning that when we go a little below the surface in Browning. We find that there was something in him perverse and unusual despite all his working normality and simplicity .His mind was perfectly wholesome but

it was not made exactly like the ordinary mind. It was like a piece of strong wood with a knot in it. The element of perverse which was so inextricably knitted in Browning's mental makeup made him deeply interested in creation and observation of character of perversion and insane psyche as in, *Porphyria's Lover*. The act of murdering the beloved by the lover is horrible, but his reaction to the murder;

A thing to do and all her hair

In one long yellow string I wound

Three times her little throat around,

And strangled her. No pain felt she;

demonstrates his fainciful insanity. He takes the weight of dead Porphyria on his shoulder and probes upon the body, he feels sure that Porphyria is in supreme pleasure of union with him. He does not commit suicide to be with her soul, but he thinks that there is no difference between his live body and the beloved's lifeless one. And thus we confront together psychological behavior of the lover which takes a new turn as he brings in the spiritual sublime in killing her. In *Porphyria's Lover*, the source of the speaker's irrationality appears to be much more obvious. The evidence in the poem suggests that the speaker is insane, the insanity would imply that he is incapable of making rational decisions. The last lines of the poem bring ambiguity,

And we sit together now,

And all night long we have not stirred,

And yet God has not said a word!(58-60)

Because of the tone of the poem and the personality of speaker, the mental state of the speaker appear to be both irrational and unstable.

The speaker in *My Last Duchess* reveals his flaws of extreme jealousy and control when he complains his wife being too easily pleased by everything and expressing much gratitude to everyone. Through his vanity and power, the duke reveals the extremity of his emotions and Instead of praising the duchess and looking down on the dead woman, as the duke himself does, he feels pity for the next woman to come.

The mental state of the duke as appeared to that of *Porphyria's lover* is irrational yet very stable. The duke is coolminded and he knows exactly what he is doing when he murdered his wife and his conversation with the envoy. The duke is rational and sane, but he is evil and he is more evil than *Porphyria's lover*.

The Soliloquy of The Spanish Cloister is saturated with the complications of psychology. The speaker, anonymous outside his vows as a monk, despises Brother Lawrence from some unspecified envy, though he rationalizes his envy under the guise of piety. The many sins he accuses Brother Lawrence of committing provide the speaker with justification for his hatred, but the truth is that the speaker is unknowingly guilty of each of them himself, whereas Brother Lawrence is only guilty of them in the speaker's imagination. The speaker accuses Lawrence of pride in his conversation, whereas the speaker is himself proud enough to want another man dead and damned for some transgression. He also angers himself over Brother Lawrence's lust for the two nearby women,

Saint, forshooth! while brown Dolores

Squats outside the Convent bank

With Sanchicha, telling stories,

Steeping tresses in the tank

Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs... (25-29)

but the truth is that it is only the speaker who notices the girls. What's more, he admits to himself that Brother Lawrence does not "show" his lust, suggesting it is only the speaker's lust that fuels the attack. He accuses Brother Lawrence of failing to show proper piety through ridiculous gestures like crossing his fork and knife in the shape of a cross or drinking in three gulps to imitate the Trinity.

When he finishes refection ,

Knife and fork never lays

Crosswise, to my recollection ,

As do I, in Jesu`s praise. (33-36)

Even when he thinks of the presumably lewd French novel as a way to ensnare Brother Lawrence, he ironically reveals his own knowledge of the book.

Or, my scrofulous French novel,

On grey paper with blunt type!

Simply glance at it ,you grovel

Hand and foot in Belial`s gripe;(57-60)

If knowing the book makes one impious and he hates Brother Lawrence for being impious, there is an irony that the speaker is too blinded by hate to recognize. It is abundantly clear to the reader that the speaker knows only the outward shapes of Christianity, whereas the true meanings of the religion – charity, love, and forgiveness – are absent from his character. The complexity of psyche and paradox is also found in the last stanza of the monologue;

Or,there`s Satan!-one might venture

Pledge one`s soul to him ,yet leave

Such a flaw in the indenture

As he`d miss till, past retrieve,

Blasted lay that rose-acacia

We`re so proud of !(65-70)

So absent are they that the speaker is willing not only to damn Brother Lawrence to an eternity in hell, but also to damn himself. The turn that the poem takes in the seventh stanza, when the speaker begins to consider hell as an option, moves the poem into a starker comment on hypocrisy. Implicitly, it reveals the thin line between religious piety and hellish damnation. Because both operate in extreme realms, it is easy to make the jump. The speaker is so convinced of his own piety that he considers damnation an appropriate punishment for he who fails in it. As with most of Browning's characters, what comes across most of all is the human complications of psychology, whereas institutions like religion are thin disguises of these more ordinary emotions.

Certainly, Browning does not mean to suggest that all priests are as deeply hypocritical as this speaker, or that we are all so wicked, but he does suggest through this masterful sketch how any individual can be at justifying his own subjective truth, and how the complications of our psychology often work against us by allowing us such license to rationalize our otherwise-ungrounded feelings and actions.

In conclusion ,the above four dramatic monologues by Browning manifest his knowledge and mastery in human psyche as well as human psychology and in this way he is a

pioneer in his era in the treatment of human mind in its various moods and moments. In Fra Lippo Lippi conflict in the mind ,in the Duke of Ferrara complexity in the mind ,utter abnormality in the Porphyria`s lover and irony and paradox in the speaker in the Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister reveal a deep interpretation of life ,profound understanding of characters and faithful reflection of human nature.

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