



ROMANTIC FEATURES IN THE POETRY OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

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Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry was characterized with rare romantic sensibility. She was full of romantic zeal to be found in the great romantic poets. Her personal note, her treatment of human love, her lyrical intensity and her delicacy of feeling she also has romantic love of Nature, her sweet and melodious music, of verse and she has several qualities which link her with the great Romantics. But her romanticism is not only essential to her nature but also soaked in intellectuality. To the problem of her own age and her own sex, she supplies the romantic ideals and in the modern context presents a popular feminist poet. An intensely personal note marks Mrs. Browning's poetry. Her ladyr's heart is laid bare to us in the Sonnetts from the Portuguese. She considered love necessary for the happiness of life and confessed her romance about love. Love changed her life completely. In her poem life and love for instance, she makes a comparative study of her life with and without love and speaks :

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Blind already and calm as death,
Show flakes on her basom lying
Scarcely heaving with her breath.
Love came by and having known her
.In a dream of fabled lands,
Gently stooped, and laid upon her
Mystic chrism of holy hands.
Drew his smile across her faldded
Eyelids, as finely as the cold did,
Through the locking of her lips.¹

This love lyric traxis the emotional autography of the poetess. Such emotional autobiographic love lyric reminds us of Shelley or Keats. Union and separation, fruition and frustration are the two sides of love. Separation give pain and disappointment in the same proportion as union gives joy and thrill. When a women separated from her husband, it seems the worst heart breaking situation. The poem, Bianca among the Nightingales tells about an Indian women who loses her lover at the hands of an English girl. With the help of two images – one of flame and other of nightingales the poetess has presented a heat and height of passion :

I Seem to float, we seem to flat
Down Amo's stream in festive guise,



A boat Strikes flame 1 into our boat,
 And up that lady seems to rise
 As then she rose. The shock has flashed
 A vision on us! What a head!
 What leaping eyeball! Beauty dashed
 To splendour by a sudden dread.
 And still they sing, the nightingales.²

Even in her fifties the poetess could remarkably present the feelings of young lovers in such a striking manner. The feelings of a lover coated in sad and sorrow for his dead lady are described in an another poem My Kate :

My dear one! – when thou was alive with the rest, I held thee the sweetest and loved thee the best, and now thou art dead, shall I not take thy part as thy smiles used to do for thyself my sweet heart My Kate?³

Mrs. Browning's elegiac poems occasioned by the deaths of some near and dear ones, are no less romantic. Deep grief for her beloved brother, Edward, popularly known as "Bro" finds expression in De Profandis. One of the personal poems, verses to my Brother (1826), recalls the happy times she spent with Bro, their games and their literary pursuits. Her deep love is expressed in the following lines :

Beloved and best! What thousand feelings start, As over the papers
 course my fingers move My Brother! Dearest, kindest as thou art! How
 can these lips my heart's affection prove? I could not speak the words,
 if words could speak my love.⁴

Naturally, his death left her in a great shock. Cowper's Grave – the most popular poem of the volume of 1838, best shows the genuineness of grief and intense feelings. In the whole poem pervades a note of sadness.

The opening stanza touchingly describes the cowper's grave :

It is a place where poets crowned. May feel the hearts' decaying; It
 is a place where happy saints may weep amid their praying. Yet
 the grief and humbleness, as Low as silence, languish : Earth
 surely now may given her calm to whom she gave her anguish.⁵

Her romantic melancholy is also expressed in some of her lyrics and songs. Her feelings of sadness finds expression even more effectively in the poem My Hear and I she plays romantic notes in this literature of melancholy. For romantic melancholy, her memorial and elegiac verses are remarkable. Mrs. Barrette was susceptible to sorrow, but not secret enjoyment of it. She would never have written an ode to Melancholy, her soul never be hung as a cloudy trophy in



that shrine. She believed that all sorrow had a place in the pattern of God's purpose. She was better at conveying the sorrow than the pattern, but her conviction gives health to her descriptions of sorrow – they are poignant but, infected, they have not despair.”⁶

Some of her intimately personal poems reflects her romantic temper. Her love for her father is beautifully expressed in her lovely lyric, To my father on his Birthday. She once made confession to Mrs. Mitford to the effect that she was ready to exchange anything, even her child, for the happiness for her father. Her poetic tribute to her dear father can be seen in the following lines :

For ‘neath thy gentleness of praise, My father! Rose my early lays! And
when the Lyre was scarce awake, I loved it strings for they love’s sake;
Wooded the kind Muses – but the whole thought only how to win thy
smile My proudest fame – my dearest pride – more dear than all the
world beside.⁷

Mrs. Browning's shorter poems are characterized by two essentially romantic qualities – lyricism and subjectively which make them intensely romantic. Her love lyrics and love sonnets are intimately personal as well as highly emotional and poignant. Some of them embody not only the rapture and ecstasy of love but also the romantic agony and despondency caused by frustration in love.

Elizabeth treats Nature with romantic touch. Nearly all her nature descriptions are infused with the poets rapturous and emotional fervour. She gets inspiration from the rich natural beauties to sing of them with great zeal and zest. In the lost Bower, a poem with a personal interest, she has expressed her passion for nature beautifully. In it she signs of her wandering in the wood near Hope End and of her entering a glade which she so enjoyed for its “fresh and dewy glitter” that she resolved to drink this natural beauty everyday to her hearts content. How beautifully and vividly she describes the scenery of Hope End :

“Green the land is where my daily Steps in jocernd childhood
played, Dimpled close with hill and valley, Dappled very close
with shade; Summer – snow of apple blossoms running up
From glade to glade.....”⁸

Elizabeth believed that while interpreting Nature, the poet must not forget man. This relation between man and nature has been pointed out in Aurora Leigh in the following lines :

“There is not a flower of spring that dies ere June, but vaunts itself
allied by issue and symbol, by significance Let poets give it
voice. With Human meaning”⁹

Her delicacy of feeling, lyrical genius and poetic fervour, all these romantic traits of her find full expression even in the later poems traits of her find full expression even in the later poems such as Aurora Leigh and Poems before Congress. The only difference is that while in



earlier poems she struck a purely romantic ideals to the problems of her own age and of her own sex.

The classical bent of her mind is also reflected her attitude to poetry. Thus, her poetry is a sort of amalgamation of classicism and romanticism. In her earlier poems, she mostly follows the neo-classical tradition of Pope, whereas in her later poems, she shows her kinship with such romantic poets as Carriage and Wordsworth. In her poetry romanticism predominates classicism. Almost all of her poetry is characterized by romantic sensibility. Here is a poetry of feeling and vision. It is highly lyrical, sweet, spontaneous and passionate. In her poems the effects of mysterious atmosphere and tragic passion are handled with talent. Her love sonnets and lyrics are truly romantic and highly passionate. The romantic melancholy animates her elegiac pieces. To such moments belong her shorter poems where she relies more upon her feelings rather than her intellect.

Her critics and reviewers also adored her for her best known poems in which the romantic effusion was at its highest. Her friend H.F. Chorley remarked, "Mrs. Browning is produced in any age: - she is, beyond comparison, the first poetess of her own."¹⁰ *The Electric Review*, which commended some of her poems extravagantly, admired her 'splendid poetry', her profound thought, and her 'pervading spirit so pure and so womanly'. No other woman writer, the review held, had such a combination of 'solemn purpose with large intellect and the same intensity of imagination'.¹¹ *The Guardian* said that "in melody of verse, in tenderness, in the pathos, in abundant language, command of rhyme, and affluence of imagery, she is quite in the first rank of living writers. In all her works, she evinces marks of a truly poetical mind."¹² *The English Review* pointed out that she took "high rank among the bards of England" and that there was perhaps none who surpassed her in her 'especial beauties - in the combination of romantic wildness with deep, true tenderness and most singular power.'¹³

But the fact remains that her romanticism is soaked in intellectuality. Her poetry presents a beautiful combination of thought and feelings, mind and heart. *Blackwood's Magazine*, therefore, justly wrote that her "powers appear to us to extend over a wider and profounder.

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