

28/4/20
Lecture No. (16)
Dr. Hemphill

English (Hons)

DI / Paper II : Palgrave's Golden Treasury

Topic : Robert Browning's "My last Duchess"

Robert Browning :-

Robert Browning, born in 1812, was son of a bank clerk father and a mother having an artistic bent of mind. His father is also known for his intellectuality and moral uprightness. It is, therefore, not surprising that Browning, too, inherited some of these positive characteristics. It is said that he ^{was} best-riding grammar of music when most children are learning the multiplication table."

His education was both formal and informal in the fact that if, on the one hand, he kept receiving his education at home after a brief stint at a private school, on the other, he also attended lectures at University College. Browning's talent was not limited to a single direction as he, with equal ease, could ride, fence, box and dance.

Though he can be referred to as a precocious poet as he had composed a small volume of verse before he was twelve, that poetic creation of his was lost to the world after he threw it in fire; ~~ex~~ in frustration of not being able to find a publisher for it. He also tried his luck in the medical profession as well as in the acting profession (stage) before realizing his cherished desire to become a poet of renown that he ultimately managed to accomplish.

Browning was influenced by many poets in turn - Byron, Shelley, Keats are

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major names among them. About his fascination with Byron he says "I would at anytime have gone to Finchley to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves... while heaven knows that I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey were condensed into the little china bottle yonder"

Browning made brief sojourns to Italy and Russia where he befriended many other poets like John Foster, assisting him to complete his "Life of Stafford"; and Macready, the actor, for whose son he composed the poem "Pied Piper".

Returning to England, Browning married

Elizabeth Barrett who herself was a poetess of some repute and it was first a literary friendship which later developed into acquaintance and matrimony, even without the permission of her reluctant father. Their marriage, though, proved to be a bliss and they were blessed with a son in 1849. Much of Browning's writings did appear in the decade ahead which, thus, proved to be the most productive period for him. But we also see Mrs. Browning complaining about the lack of appreciation for Browning's work in the native public as she writes "nobody there except a small knot of pre-Raphaelite men, pretend to do him justice... while in America he is a power — he is read — he lives in the hearts of the people". She ^{was so} became ill in 1860 and died a year later.

Elizabeth Barrett's death was a shock

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~~Shook~~ to him no doubt, but he did not let it deter him from ~~much~~ his filial duties as he returned to London with his son and devoted himself to the boy's education. ~~His~~^{He} was also able, though late, in gaining popularity with the local public and by 1870's his works started being sold in hundreds in a year. Time had somewhat ~~soft~~ softened his bitterness at the loss of his wife and he died in Italy, where his son had settled as an artist, as a comparatively peaceful man; the same day as his swan song "Asolando" got published.

The literary productive period of Browning's life comprised of 44 years. Among his best known works are "Pauline", "Paracelsus", "Sordello", "Dramatic Lyrics", "Dramatic Romances", "Men and Women", "Dramatic Personae", "Ring and the Book", "Famfine at the Fair", "Red Night Cap Country" and the last one "Asolando". Besides the works as enumerated earlier, he is also credited with dramas such as "Strafford", "Pippa Passes", "King Victor and King Charles", "The Return of the Druses", "A Blot in the Scutcheon", "Colombe's Birthday", "A Soul's Tragedy", "Livia" and "In a Balcony" — all the eight ^{published} in a collection known as "Bells and Pomegranates".

Browning's interests, though wide and varied, concentrated upon what may be termed as psychological illumination of human soul and mind. ~~The~~ One respect that he differed from his great contemporaries like Tennyson is his being least

concerned with the social and economic ideas gaining currency at the time. He, by choice, kept himself aloof from the problems of his age. We may quote Hugh Walker in this regard who asserts: "Browning did not love much to work on topics connected with his own generation. To him time was almost ^{of} indifference, for the human soul, in which his interest was centred, has remained much the same since the days of Adam. If he had a preference, it was for the Italian renaissance rather than for any other age or country." His object, according to his own admission, is the study of incidents which go to compose the development of a soul.

Dramatic monologue, for this reason, became the tool of his choice which he was able to take to a new height. Louis Cazamien hits the bull's eye when he says: "Browning's typical form, that towards which all other forms may be said to converge, is the monologue; there properly resides the newness of his art. His main idea is to throw light upon the realm of consciousness, and to do this he frees himself from all the shackles which impede psychological analysis, whether they are connected with action and narration, or the laws of material probability, and... The psychologist finds full liberty only in the direct and individual expression of each being."

(To be concluded)