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## 'The Last Ride Together' as a dramatic monologue

'The Last Ride Together' is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. The dramatic monologue as perfected by Browning is a poem in which a speaker other than the poet, speaks to an imaginary audience at a decisive moment in his life. The speech invariably reveals a state of mind or set of beliefs. Since there may be a contradiction between the speaker's apprehension and articulation of reality and objective reality, irony becomes a key factor in the dramatic monologues. The speaker here is a lover. He is in a critical moment of his life - he is rejected by his sweetheart. And, he discloses his mind to a silent audience. The lover asks for the only favour of a last ride with his lady and she grants it. In the ride together, he gathers up the rapture of a lifetime, and with no further heaven to be hoped for, he wishes that the ride may lengthen out into eternity.

The lover is rejected by his sweetheart. But he accepts his fate with dignity. He thanks and blesses her for all the joy her love has given him. Though she hesitates, the ride is finally granted, and he feels deified for one more day, and even imagine the very end of the world. She leans on his bosom and he experiences a joy as that of one who admires a resplendent cloud and gradually feels it upon him. As they ride along he reflects on his lot. His life has been twisted out of shape. But he realizes that it is no use struggling to set it right. Equally futile are speculations on how he might not have lost his love if he had said this or done that. Past is past and what matters is the present. If the worst had happened he might not have had even the present bliss of a last ride.



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Through the poem, Browning presents the self-consolation. It's based on the underlying theory of 'blame it all on fate'. Of course the poem talks about love and its attendant failures. The speaker thinks that failure is inevitable and as he himself has failed. He is attempting to reduce his pain by trying to curtail his desires. Some words are chosen to convey the feeling of polite resignation and acceptance of defeat. Moreover, the diction is superficial, and of super human psychology because a man who has been ditched can't have too many good things to say about the former flame unless of course he is ironical about it.

The next paragraph deals with the anticipation of a response by the speaker from the mistress. It is this dilemma and wait for the answer that contributes to the dramatic effect of the poem. The stanza progresses thus - from spine chilling excitement and anticipation to joy to relief and finally to ecstasy. The images of the mistress bending her brow, her "deep dark eyes", her breathing and consequent heaviness of the bosom and her blush conveys and all most erotic charm to the poem. In a superb metaphor - "With life or death in the balance". The speaker compares yes with life and no with death.

The diction provides a picture of the action in the man with which Browning was more concerned. It clearly brings out the anxiety and the emotional turmoil in the speaker's brain. Words like - 'bent that brow' refers to the brooding of the lady over the proposal. 'Fixed' and 'breathing' clearly brings out the anxiety of the speaker. The condition of 'yes' and 'no' has been beautifully painted as 'life' and 'death' respectively. The stanza could also be memorable for line - "Who knows but the world may end tonight?." This line affirms the stupid optimism of the speaker who becomes as much a butt of ridicule as the people he satirizes for their failure.



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'The Last Ride Together' deals with the beautiful feeling that follows after being with one's beloved the feeling of being on the top of the world after achieving one's goal. It also deals with the more physical part of love. The tone is of being overwhelmed in love in which everything is blessed. The next stanza provides us with a touch of Browning's philosophy. Dealing with the present and stop being bothered about the past. The tone of the poem presents a mix of consolatory and philosophical musings. With the "fluttering in the wind" metaphor, the speaker compares the soul with a long-crammed scroll. In itself it is a fresh metaphor unparalleled in literature.

Browning's poem contains little of artistic or dramatic techniques but more of philosophical elements. The theory of failure is introduced. In order to hide his agony he deliberately compares himself with those people who had failed in their lives but not with these who have achieved the zenith. It's a mere acceptance of defeat and on untrue optimism of better chance in future life.

In the poem 'The Last Ride Together' Browning presented the philosophical idea that the life of contemplation in love is far greater than material world. The words like 'fleshy', 'screen', 'heap of bones', etc. signify the sensuous markers of the poem. The gulf between imagination and creation is shortened. Browning deals with the comparison of the life of the statesman and soldier with the life and achievement of lover and puts the lover and his momentary triumph over the achievements of the statesman and the soldier. The speaker's tone is self congratulatory because nobody else congratulates him for having a last ride with her beloved. The tone is that of the justification of one's failure, the tone is of giving a lame excuse.

The poet's achievement is great. His brain throbs with music, and he puts into words what others can only experience. He considers beautiful things as the best things in the world, and makes



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thoughts ride in rhyme. All the same he does not get for himself what the world values most highly in life -the health, wealth and youth. Though he risks his health, wealth and youth, he does not come one bit nearer his goal than the lover and his lady. His vocation, the lover thinks, is indisputably superior to that of a poet.

The sculptor devotes his entire time to art and is her slave. After years of his toiling, at last he creates his Venus, his masterpiece. But it is still inferior to an ordinary village girl one may see crossing a stream. The lot of the composer is no better. He also grows grey in the service of his art. But after all his labour, when he gives his masterpiece to the world the only praise he gets is that through ambitious, it cannot be popular for long.

If he had succeeded in love, then he would have no 'bliss to die with' nothing to look forward to, after death. Then heaven would have no meaning for him. It is therefore, inevitable that he should fail here, in order to succeed in heaven. If heaven is a perpetuation and perfection of the earthy conditions - 'the instant made eternity' - then he and his lady will ever be as they are now, riding together in each others company.

In the monologue there is less probing of the self and development of character. The poem is in fact, a sustained reflection on the role of love, even when rejected, as a maker of happiness, and the meaning of failure. As a maker of happiness love is superior to all the arts - poetry, sculptor and music. And, failure is the token of triumph.

In a nutshell, we can conclude that the poem contains the core of Brownings philosophy. Browning is an optimist. He firmly believed that "Happiness is the crown of life." He is personal in nature. He holds that life is persistent struggle for an ideal or perfection. He believes that "Love is a crisis of man's life." It implies that man is imperfect or imperfection or failure is part of human nature



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something inevitable in life. Heaven is where 'life's flower is first discerned'. In other words, Browning believes that there is a life after that for man - a heavenly life. Heavenly life, therefore, is a perfect version of earthly life - 'the instant made eternity'. Heaven will have meaning only if man has 'a bliss to die with', an unrealized ambition. Brownings monologues are spiritual and sensuous together. It is a part drama, part philosophy, part poetry and part life all rolled into one.

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