



Love as Seen in Selected Poems of Robert Browning

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Vt 2016

Examensarbete för kandidatexamen, 15 hp

Engelska

Abstract

This study explores the concept of love in some of Browning`s poems during the Victorian era in which he tried to discuss love from his own perspective. Thus the study explains the concept of love which has been a main theme in some of Browning`s poems.

My study will illustrate using the feminist theory. This theory was founded in 1792 when the struggle for women`s equality was much in demand. Thus, I will try to explain Browning`s poems by application of this theory.

Browning sees love as a basic need for the human soul; therefore, the study reveals how Browning saw love from his religious perspective through which he tried to tell his readers that love is a gift of God and that women are allowed to love and be loved despite the concept of the Victorian age that treated women as inferiors in comparison to men.

Keywords:

Victorian age, Browning, Love, Victorian Female

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1. Introduction

Robert Browning was a famous Victorian poet and is largely known for his dramatic monologues. He introduced his characters in dramatic situations because he wanted to draw his readers' attention to different kinds of relations; he conveys his own conceptions and beliefs of love in life and the continuation through death (Burgess 190).

This thesis will examine the subject of love in Browning's poetry, and relate this to how love was seen during the Victorian Age. It will also analyse the symbolism found in certain poems of Browning's that focus on purifying the soul instead of tainting it. Therefore, we can sense that Browning's philosophy of love can be considered as a holy matter and humans must be pure to be immortal. This also follows from Browning being a Christian, who believed that love is one of God's merits (Gupta 181). Consequently, my analysis will show the meaning of the poems and draw an image of the age that the text was written in, focusing on Browning's personal view of the woman as a person who has the right to love and be loved in the case where the relation is pure and honest, in an age that forbids women to love other than their father, brother, and husband. Thus, part of what this thesis will illustrate, is that Browning wants to defend women and their personalities.

The feminist approach is the movement of political, social and ideological beliefs which attempt to portray women as equals. This would shed light on certain points in Browning's poems which seemed to support his idea of equality thus supported by feminism. Steven Lynn professor of literature summed up this approach in some questioning. Trying to figure out the image of the woman that is conveyed in the chosen work of art, and analysing the relationship between the man and woman in that work (237). Accordingly, this study aims to trace the concept of love as treated in selected poems of Browning as well as the way he presented women in those poems.

The reason that Robert Browning is chosen is because he is a famous writer in Victorian time (Dell 61 and The moral basis of Robert Browning's "Cleon") and saw love as a sublime feeling that protects the individual from earthly desires. I will demonstrate this through analysing a number of his poems with emphasis on the theme of love.

The study falls into two parts; the first one is concerned with the Victorian philosophy of love according to the convictions, traditions and the norms of the age. I will discuss some traits of the Victorians that are relevant to the subject of this study such as the place of females in Victorian society.

Part two tackles Browning's way of treating the theme of love in selected poems that show the many faces of love, like pure love, sinful love, hopeless love, and so on, to show the consequences of each one of them. The selected poems are: "Love in a Life", "Life in a Love", "Evelyn Hope", "Love among the Ruins", "The Statue and the Bust" and "By the Fire-Side" that were chosen from his volume of poetry *Men and Women*, published in 1855.

Thus, this study addresses questions about how Victorians between the 18th and 19th centuries saw love and their concept of the female in the various social, cultural and classes of society. However, in light of Browning's ideals I will argue that this Victorian idealism was to some degree rejected by Browning's idea of love as a way of sublimating the human soul instead of ruining it, how pure love is rewarded and sinful love is not, which is also supported by many religions. Also how love is more important than materialistic life. Browning wants to convey the idea that one should not indulge in materialism and forget spirituality. To what degree should one give up on ambitions and achievements? His view is based on a religious foundation. Browning shares with us his experience of true love to make the world see his happiness with his beloved, his wife, to convey the idea that as long as your feelings are pure, happiness or immortality will be your reward. And I will discuss how he was affected by the idea of patriarchy that was prevailing in the Victorian age, and how he dealt with it. From a Victorian point of view, love was forbidden to woman except the love of her husband. However Browning portrayed that women have the right to enjoy love provided that it was pure and honest.

2. The Victorian Age Attitude of the Concept of Love

Robert Browning lived in an age of change that rapidly took place affecting almost every aspect of life. Thomas Carlyle in *Signs of the Time* (1829) described the Mechanical Age, stating that:

It is the Age of Machinery in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which . . . practises the great art of adapting means to ends . . . Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the spiritual also. . . Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand (qtd. in Ford 19).

Briefly, the mechanical ideals of Steven Lynn can be related to the Victorian era , which illustrate that cruelty, greed, and selfishness were the characteristics of a successful businessman. Politically, Victorian England reached a high status all over the world in the aspects of progress and civilization. Yet, English society went through serious social problems as a result of this progress where labouring conditions were very bad and unhealthy (Evans 187). As a consequence of Victorian ideals love was viewed as a duty more than an instinct, and pre-marital purity was socially demanded by society. In general Lois Tyson critically analysis that: “[P]atriarchy imposes on the imagination of young girls, equates femininity with submission, encouraging women to view marriage as the only desirable reward for ‘right’ conduct” (88). Women overtime have been programmed to accept that they were not equal to men in society. Home was the temple where moral and spiritual values were worshipped and protected. “It was the wife who made the home, who cared for her children within it, who brought her husband back to it when work was done, who provided the hot dinners and created the atmosphere of comfort and protection” (qtd. in Danielová 8). Home and family life were the only strong protection for human emotions, concepts specifically associated with women.

Consequently, women were treated as ‘Others’, which meant different from men. Melissa Buron argues that: “Respectable women in Victorian England were either identified by marriage or by spinsterhood” (The feminine voice and feminine presence in the Nineteenth century poetry). Consequently, men and masculine traits were considered superior to women and feminine traits and the social, economical, and other powers were the right of men, while women were denied those powers.

Love was a rather forbidden issue for the Victorian women, and falling in love outside the institution of marriage, was considered as an unpardonable sin because it was believed that human passions and desires were something wrong that should be controlled by reason. Reason for Victorians was associated with men. Women were merely housewives, mothers, or sisters, who should obey their men. So, women were

objectified and considered as having no personal independent identity. Buron argues that even in the Victorian poems, “regardless of the poet's gender” (n.p), the male voice and male presence are more noticeable. In their attempt to lighten this general view towards love, Victorian writers presented love as sublime and an important need for humans as long as it was guided by moral standards. For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, the heroine's happy end was a consequence of her belief in moral values and commitment, and because “she puts conscience before love, refusing to become Rochester’s mistress” (Alexander 273). On the other hand, Alexander saw that sinful love and adultery were destructive weapons and love would change into lust and physical destructive sensuality.

Browning was one of the Victorian writers who drew the attention of the reader to the fact that women are not different from men, they are fully capable human beings and they deserve a chance to prove it. He wrote about the value of love and that every human being, whether male or female, has the right to love and be loved. Although many nineteenth-century poets attempted to use the voices of the female characters in their poems in effective ways, the result was usually that the male voice of the author or the presence of a man in the poems overshadows the female voice and their presence (Martens 10-17). Since women in patriarchy are always defined by their relationship to men, a distance is created between the reader and the female subjects through making the female voice and presence in these poems weaker than the presence of the male narrators and the male subjects in the poems. Thus, the reader cannot be in touch directly with the female, and cannot identify himself with her as with most other characters. Browning overcomes this issue by presenting the 'idea' rather than the 'person'. That is to say, he presents women in love rather than a woman speaking about love. By this, he shows the reader that the female is capable of preserving her purity, chastity, and femininity, despite the fact that she lets her emotions flow towards her lover. The most obvious real love example is the love affair between the two poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Their love overcame all the difficulties and the rigidity of Victorian conventions. In the Victorian age a daughter's marriage should have the blessing of her family, otherwise it would be a shame for the family, so when Barrett eloped with Browning, her father never approved of this marriage or never came to terms with his daughter until the end of his life.

The term Victorian, as is mentioned earlier in this study, suggests to society a sense of modesty, sometimes, 'false' chastity, and pretence, which were based on the high standards of respectability and the moral uprightness of the period. It is often remarked upon for its seriousness. Victorian writers believed that they were tutors for moral guidance and puritan morality. This Puritanism was largely a middle class characteristic emphasizing the virtues of hard work and worldly success. Thus, Victorian writers, including Browning, had to respect the dominant standards of their society and they had to reflect the characteristics of their age, nonetheless, their work as tutors made them use their poetry as guiding lessons to draw the attention of their readers to certain points that the poet wanted to high-light.

3. Robert Browning's Representation of Love

Browning, among a few other poets, was different from his contemporaries; he was interested in the thoughts, feelings, activities, and moral guidance of the individuals (Gupta 51). As a result, he disapproved of some of the age's social traits; in addition, most of his selected characters were knights or kings, or a figure from the medieval ages in a situation of a quest or actual or mental danger. Moreover, he believed that "God is the absolute truth and that the perfect happiness lies in our self-realization" (Gupta 175).

In *Philosophy of Life in the Works of Robert Browning*, Sheelu Singh Bhatia argues that Browning is known for his optimism, realism, and interest in the human soul, a subject that he tackled many times in his poetry, to represent human hidden thoughts.

Heartly he [Browning] gazed into the minds of his fellow men [sic] as they walked beside him. His interest lay not in the external wrappings of their manners and of their social conversation. His concern was with the meat of the inner personality, the unroasted joints of the human soul (Thomas and Thomas 177).

The above quotation shows that Browning was not interested in outer appearances or attitudes; he was more concerned with what led to this appearance and attitude. This interest gave Browning's poetry other dimensions for the Victorian readers to explore and made critics attack him and charge him with obscurity and strangeness. His

dramatic monologue has become one of the important characteristics in his poetry. Even his love poems have dramatic situations. He creates different atmospheres by putting his main character in a situation that brings out the personality and reveals the inner struggles of that character. In *The Philosophy of Robert Browning*, Peena Thanky commented on the idea of love in Browning's poems, saying that: "Love is the philosophic principle which binds all beings in harmony and unity" (174). In my opinion, Browning's love poems show his philosophy of love and the way that he presented his ideas and beliefs concerning the effect of love on the human soul.

Thanky argues also that Browning sees "every situation of life in a positive way" (173), despite the general pessimism, doubt, and materialism of his age, due to the industrial revolution. This optimism was not a mere desire for creating the fanciful Utopia (ideally perfect state), but a kind of message that Browning conveys through his poems to make humans strive for goodness and inner beauty called the soul.

As I mentioned before, Browning tackled a wide variety of themes in his poetry: love, religion, philosophy and nature, but his main preoccupation was the perfection that the human soul is eager to attain. Browning acknowledges the existence of God, as the supreme power, and believes that whatever a human being does, it should be done with love.

3.1 Selected Poems of Robert Browning:

3.1.1 "Love in a life" and "Life in a Love"

"Love in a life" and "Life in a Love" are twin lyrics on the theme of love. In "Love in a Life" the man is wise enough not to judge his woman by her past; he is concerned with the present, and he is persistent in his search for his beloved. The poem presents a lover who is searching in a house for his beloved, here, the search is an image for the lover's quest for his love. He is never tired, he is never hopeless, he never quits because that is what love is all about; to explore the realm of the beloved.

So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.

(Lines 5-7)

Opening door after door, he is searching as she eludes him, this point he made clear in his other poem “Life in a Love”. This search for the beloved corresponds to what the Victorians believed in, that a woman should not be open and easy, she must preserve her chastity for her future husband, but here, Browning made her love and be mysterious to win her lover's heart. In the first poem, “Love in a Life”, the same theme of searching occurs, where the man “Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?” (line 11), night has come and the lover insists on continuing his pursuit until he succeeds, no matter what the obstacles are, failure and disappointment will not prevent him from achieving his goal.

In “Life in a Love”, the lover asks his beloved not to leave him no matter what, they should remain faithful, and devoted to each other. Nevertheless, the lover is aware of his faults and capabilities. Fate may oppose his pursuits, which is why, in spite of all the hard efforts, he fails again and again. Yet, he is an optimistic man, he believes in pursuing his goal against all difficulties of life or society. He is sure that if he does not obtain his goal in this life, he will succeed in the next life. If one hope fails, “Then a new one, straight to the self-same mark” (line 19), thus he must go on:

To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up and begin again,—
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.

(Lines 13-15)

Both poems have the same theme: the quest for love, and they illustrate Browning's attitude to love and life. They also use the male voice only, where we cannot hear the women in them but we can sense the existence of the ‘beloved’ that the poet is longing for. But the important point is that, he presented a love story between a male and female. Browning, like other Victorian poets, is talking from the male's point of view to say that it is man's duty to seek and preserve his love, thus, he is still speaking the society's voice for his message to be heard, but allowing the female to love and be loved.

3.1.2 “Evelyn Hope”

Another example of Browning's optimism and belief in love is the poem “Evelyn Hope”, in which he conveyed the idea that only sincere love, if not fulfilled during this

life will be fulfilled in the next life. The poem tells the story of a middle-aged man who loves a young girl. She dies before she could notice his love. By her death-bed, he wonders whether the age difference can stand in the way of his love, answering himself that love is God's reward, thus her death will not stop him from loving her, if not in this world, then, in the next world. He watches her things and remembers her, the book shelf, and the red flower in the glass which begins to fade like the dead girl.

The second stanza gives more information; we know that Evelyn is very young and that she might not know about him and his feelings. He laments her saying that she was too young to die and was "not her time to love" (line 11) and her age was full of hopes and few concerns.

The third stanza reveals the reason of the man's sadness that is his love for Evelyn. He wonders if the difference in age, because he was "thrice as old", should prevent them from loving each other. The fourth stanza is the conclusion of the poem, where Browning presents his own conception about love in the lover's tongue, saying that love cannot be restricted to any bound, physical or material, and sincere and true love can live through time and even can surpass the limitations of this world to survive in the next world, for, love is essentially created to be a reward, it is God's gift and must be respected and cherished:

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
(Lines 25-28)

There was hope everywhere despite the death in the poem. It is not a coincidence that the girl's last name was Hope. Browning presents the female to carry his message of hope. The lover is convinced that his love will be fulfilled in the next world, because, the injustices of this life will be compensated in the next life. The poem conveys Browning's belief about the immortality of love and how it elevates the soul, as well as his conception of the afterlife, Mark Roberts comments that:

Browning ... feels that we must believe in an afterlife, because we must believe that a loving God will eventually right all wrongs and wipe all tears. The next world exists to redress the injustices of this ... as an expression of God's love (7).

In the sixth stanza the lover promises his dead beloved to be worthy of her love and that he will be patient till they meet in the next life. The last stanza shows that the man puts a poem written on a piece of 'leaf' in his beloved's hands believing that she will "wake, and remember and understand" (lines 53-56). This, he believed, would happen in the other world, to find his poem, to know about his love for her and love him in return.

In this poem, the woman is not only absent, but dead. The love relationship is only presented from the male point of view, we cannot, and will not, hear the female voice. Tyson argues that: "[P]atriarchy treats women, whatever their role, like objects ... to be used without consideration of their own perspectives, feelings or opinions... do not count unless they conform to those of patriarchy" (91). Browning, consciously and deliberately, presents women in the highlights, because he represents the minority (who believes in women's rights) against the majority (who believe in women being different). This is one of his techniques to talk to the Victorian mind, since he cannot disapprove their mentality completely; he tries to show woman as a person how has the right to love purely and rightfully. For this reason, his main point here was not the female, but the idea of love itself and how true love is rewarded even after death.

3.1.3 "Love among the Ruins"

Another poem that tackles the theme of love over time and death is "Love among the Ruins". In this poem Browning presents two lovers meeting among the ruins, comparing the value of love with the value of the great historical incidents that took place in the same ancient area, concluding that love is more valuable than all the great events that took and will take place on earth. It is a dramatic poem where the main character is a shepherd who is a happy lover waiting for his beloved in the ruins of a great ancient city which used to be "great and gay". He is sitting "on the solitary pastures where our sheep, half asleep, tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop, as they crop, was the site once of a city great and gay, (So they say)" (line 3-4), in this historical area, thinking about the past glories of the place and comparing them with the value of love. In this very place stands the ruins of a great city which used to be "Of our country's very capital" (line 9), in ancient times.

In the second stanza, the shepherd describes the landscape where in the past stood a whole city with towers, surrounded by a marble wall of many gates. Browning makes a comparison between this old magnificent city, and its present state of ruins, where grass covered every spot in the hilly tracts. The third stanza emphasizes the thoughts of time and death which are aroused by the sight of the ruins of the old city. As the shepherd thinks about the old glories of the city, he begins to think also about ancient people who used to inhabit this place; their hopes, joys, sadness and fears. Those people are dead now and time ruined their great palaces and towers. The girl is waiting for her beloved in the very same tower where the ancient king used to watch races from:

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
 Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
 Till I come.

(Lines 55-60)

So, in other words, the girl is mostly described in terms of her relation with her lover and by her lover's words only. Melissa E. Buron argued this point by saying that: "This reinforces the idea that Victorian women did not have their own identities outside of their relationships with these male figures" (5). Isobel Armstrong agreed with this opinion by stating that the poem shows the supremacy of a man's power over a woman's weaknesses, and that it points at the "fascination with women which is everywhere in Victorian poetry and to their historic function as subordinates" (Armstrong 287). Nevertheless, Shosuke Kinugawa disagrees with Armstrong's opinion, stating that Browning is, in fact, making the feminine presence more powerful over the males:

Interpretations that tip the gender balance to the masculine tend to disregard the fact that it is the two female figures, the "girl" and the "Earth" (lines 55 and 80), who have the final say in the male/female relationship in this poem. On one level, this poem depicts the inevitable dissolution of patriarchal civilization into feminine nature, that is, "Earth's returns" (line 80). Matching this design is the return of the man to the woman, represented by the male protagonist's meeting with the "girl" (p.235).

This means that Browning does enforce the female in his poems. May be he does not do it by making her appear or talk in the poems, but he, indirectly, enforces her identity, by comparing her to Mother Earth:

O heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

(Lines 79-84)

Browning gave his female character the power to choose her destiny in love. While the Victorian age forbade women from showing any intimacy or emotion to men, Browning grants her that right, even though not explicitly.

The shepherd goes on describing the greatness of this old city and its citizens, who had conquered many nations. Yet all these triumphs and glories are in vain, because what is left of their wealth and glory is just this little broken turret where his beloved is waiting for him. This leads him to conclude that love is the mightiest power on earth that is permanent and spreads peace and joy among all human beings.

For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

(Lines 81-84)

The central thought that Browning wants to convey, is that earthly ambitions and achievements are fated to end. Love is sublime and through true love human souls gain immortality, "For his outlook on love is the outlook of a man who puts it before any other thing in life, as a force for sanctifying and strengthening the soul" (Westland 48). To Browning, love purifies human beings from base emotions, like hatred and selfishness.

Love helps the human beings to unite with their soul mates, and that was the case in his own love experience with Barrett because "He realized fully ... that love gives power to the lover to see the soul of his beloved as no one else can ... and this is the gift for which Barrett was most grateful to the poet" (Devane 84). Love, for Browning, is

immortal and human souls can be immortalized through true and sincere love only, because when the seeds of love grow in an improper atmosphere the result will be unpleasant.

3.1.4 “The Statue and the Bust”

In “The Statue and the Bust” Browning presents an example of unlawful love, presented in a narrative poem, a love that grows wrongfully between a married lady and a Duke. This narrative poem is built on an old Florentine legend and the main characters are the Grand Duke Ferdinand and the bride of Riccardi. When she was preparing for her wedding day, with her maids, the bride saw the Duke passing on his horse by her window. Their eyes met and instantly they fell in love.

In the wedding party, the Duke was congratulating the bride and groom, the two lovers exchanged the words of love secretly, only Riccardi (husband), heard what the lovers had said to each other and thus he condemned his bride to be locked up in her chamber for the rest of her life.

Only one of the thousand heard.
That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last.
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink
Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door that she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalque repassed

(Lines 51-57)

The lady's imprisonment did not prevent the two lovers from seeing each other. The Duke rode past her window every day and she waited for him. Each day they thought that very soon they would find a way to fulfil their love. The bride thought of escaping her husband to be with her lover as we understand from the below quoted lines:

'I fly to the Duke, who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

(Lines 70-72)

So, she thought that the solution was easy, what she had to do, was only to disguise in “the coat of a page” and to tie her hair “in a horse-boy’s trim” (line 75) in order to be able to escape her imprisonment. But neither she nor the Duke took action to achieve their goal. This part of the poem is 'full with dramatic irony' says Roberts:

She does spend the night twice with ‘that devil’ [as the bride thinks her husband is] and accordingly his window does become the ‘loop of hell’ from which her soul looks on Paradise. For neither the lady nor the Duke has the resolution to act. (32).

Years go by while they were waiting for the right time, thus, the two lovers ordered sculptures to be made showing them looking at each other; she is sitting behind her window, and he is passing on his horse turning his head towards her. They tried to immortalize their love through art, but:

The statue and the bust mock rather than glorify the impulse which brings them into being. Fixed in their apartness, they are as futile and as static as the couple they commemorate. Art has been made a substitute for, not a confirmation of life (Johnson 190).

In this poem, Browning appears as the moralist. “The Statue and the Bust” is the exact opposite of Browning’s thinking of Love, but his depictions work was to illustrate a point. The lovers in the poem were committing a wrong doing by their love, which is why they were condemned to living apart like their statues and never to unite, not like Browning who eloped with Barrett and got married not paying attention to the consequences as long as they were doing the right thing. The other reason that made Browning sentence them to eternal separation is that, as stated before, he believed that love is sublime and the gift of God.

I hear you reproach. “But delay was best,
For their end was a crime”—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

(Lines 226-228)

Their love was wrong and if the lady was not imprisoned by her husband or afraid to take action, she may have escaped with her lover, consequently, committed adultery. And this wrong doing is the opposite of what Browning believed in.

In this poem also, the bride was never heard. Even her name was not mentioned, she was described as the “bride the Riccardi brings home today”. Thus, she is known according to her relation with her husband. In my opinion, Browning intended to present the woman as the 'bride of Riccardi' because as a result of her unlawful or false feelings, she deserves to stay anonymous and rigid as her bust. Browning wants to convey the idea that this is what happens when love is not pure.

3.1.5 “By the Fire-Side”

In contrast to the unfulfilled and forbidden love in “Statue and the Bust”, Browning experienced a mature love that survives throughout a life-time, with his wife, Elizabeth. “By the Fire-Side” is an autobiographical poem in which “the poet expresses the intensity of his love and admiration for his wife through various stages—from the earliest stage of his courtship and marriage to the fulfilment of love in youth and maturity in old age” (Sastri 190) . It is a personal poem in which Browning describes his own feelings for Barrett and the intimate relation between them, and shows his “profound gratitude and wonder at his own fortune” (William 110).

The poem begins with Browning’s own words stating that in spite of time and passing years, their love is as new as ever due to the changing seasons in the following lines.

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
For the drop of the woodland fruit’s begun,
These early November hours!

(Lines 51-55)

The poet’s use of imagery is deep, not just because of the beautiful details that he skillfully described, but because of its psychological dimension. The beautiful scenes of nature remind him of his youth, and as the happy memories rush in front of him, he feels that he senses the vitality of young age.

Browning does not regret his old age because he believed that each phase in a human’s life has its sweetness, just like the seasons of the year where autumn has its

special beauty. The imagery in the poem describes the beauty of autumn to emphasize the beauty of middle and old age, and thus “Browning’s imagery ... derives its force from its psychological truth, not from its formal beauty” (Hugh 71). Birds are one of the elements of nature; the poet uses the image of a singing bird which sings all day long. Browning meditated on the special beauty of the bird, which is intensified when it is seen with the beloved. Browning identifies himself or his phases of life with the seasons of nature; consequently, he identifies himself with the female nature as in the previous poem “Love among the Ruins”.

Daniel Karlin observes that:

Love singles out Browning’s men and women, as it singled him out in his own love for Barrett; the relation between lovers in his work passionately excludes other kinds of relation, seeing them as intrusion or a threat. Love is all encompassing and absolute in its claims: Browning’s speakers recognize the claim even if they do not believe it can be fulfilled (47).

The happy moments will always be in the lovers’ minds. Being in such a beautiful and quiet place, makes the two lovers recognize the intensity of their love and in such intimate moments the lovers’ souls mingle and become as one.

When, if I think but deep enough,
 You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme
And you, too, find without rebuff
 Response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

(Lines 116-120)

Browning and Barrett could feel the other’s deepest emotions just by listening to their hearts. Only fortunate people can find their true love and achieve such a perfect union that will intensify true love. By portraying Barrett and expressing his happiness for meeting, loving and marrying her, Browning ends his poem by assuring that their true love will extend to live in the afterlife because “the gain of earth must be heaven’s gain too.” Besides, the significance of “By the Fire-Side” presents Browning’s own philosophy of love, that is, ideal love is the one which unites the souls of the two lovers to attain complete spiritual union and cast aside all earthly vices to become one soul in

two bodies. Ideal love for Browning is the unity of souls before bodies. Whenever this happens, the result is the most exquisite and productive form of communication possible between human beings (Johnson 105). Yet, there is nothing impossible in Browning's search for ideal love, because he assists it with actual experience. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, the German philosopher, stated that "to love is to be disposed to take pleasure in the perfection, well-being or happiness of the object of one's love" (Boros 86) and this idea is similar to Browning's philosophy where he found his happiness through his wife.

It is worth mentioning, that in this poem too, we hear the voice of Browning, the male. The feelings and happiness of Barrett, the female, is presented to us through the male. We never hear her express her love or joy or whatever feeling she has, but we must not forget that this poem is autobiographical, thus, it is meant to reveal the author's feeling from his point of view. Thus, in this poem, the idea that women have the right to love and choose is what is important, not if the woman speaks or not.

3.2 Browning's Beliefs as Seen Through his Poetry

Love as seen in Browning's poetry mingles his personal ideas and those of the Victorian age. As stated before, the latter called for chastity and purity but in a fanatic way, whereas Browning loosens those chains that the Victorians put around love. He called for love only as long as it preserves its purity and honesty. Though his poetry deals with love as a fact in life, Browning does not take into consideration the physical aspect of love as separate, like I notice in line 16 in his poem "Love in a Life":

But 'tis twilight, you see, -with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!.

(Lines 15-16)

Ideal love must be the blending between physical and spiritual needs, because it is the supreme goal in human life and when love is fulfilled, both man and woman will gain lifelong happiness and satisfaction. Yet, Browning's love poetry "never sinks into sensuality; in spite of its frequent extreme crudeness, it is always ... mingled as it may be with friendship, with religion, or with various forms of natural tenderness, it always remains passion" (George 27).

That is why I believe that he divided his love poems into two parts, the first represented by “Life in a Love”, “Love in a Life”, “Evelyn Hope”, and “Love among the Ruins”, where love is rewarded for its purity and chastity. He evaluates love according to its relation with God and His teachings in that “if they [the lovers] succeed in establishing an adequate relationship to God, their own being is thereby adequately ordered, without any further effort” (Boros 87) which can be related Browning’s ideals. On the other side of the equation, comes “The Statue and The Bust”, Browning had sentenced the lovers to eternal separation because their love had the seeds of betrayal to other innocent people and will lead to fornication. What links between the two parts is his poem “By the Fire-Side”, where he presented the idea drawn from his own experience of how love “[A]wakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute” (Chesterton 49).

What Chesterton argues is clear , he just say’s that pure love is immortal and the two lovers can see a reflection of their love in everything in life.

This poem gives a living example of what love should be according to Browning. I understand that when he writes about love, he shows its effect on a human heart and soul, for both men and women, bringing them to a kind of elevation that only true lovers comprehend. Thus, his personal experience is the evidence that proves what he states in his other poems.

4. Conclusion

A close analysis of the poetry of Robert Browning reveals that he called for sublimating the human soul through love and depicted love as God's greater gift to human beings. For him, love is the sole power in this world that can redeem humans from earthly evils and lift them to a higher degree. This state enables them to gain peace from within which surpasses worldly desires in order to be worthy of everlasting happiness in this life and in the next life to come.

Browning's poetry presents different sorts of love relationships according to the different kinds of characters. His concern with the human mind gives him the ability to display a wide variety of characters in his poetry. Browning's technique; the dramatic monologue gives him the power to present different kinds of human characters nakedly before the readers' eyes.

Browning believed that love is God's bliss to human beings, males and females, and that He created love to reward the loving and honest people regardless of their gender. One of the concepts that are conveyed in his poetry is the immortality of love. True love has no limits, it can live through the ages, and that successful and happy love will be fulfilled in the next world as is shown in "Evelyn Hope". True love gives the lover an insight to penetrate the beloved's soul and makes him/her read and feel his/her beloved's thoughts and emotions.

Browning deals with love as a fact of life, therefore, he depicts different sorts of love relationships that exist in life; weak and fragile love, unlawful love, and powerful love that brings prosperity and peace to human life. "The Statue and the Bust" displays a kind of unlawful and fragile love, and future adultery if the lovers were meant to unite, but the importance of the poem lays in declaring Browning's principle in life; that pure love will be rewarded, and unlawful love will be damned with eternal separation.

Another important conception that is shown in his poetry is the one which sees that love is more important than any earthly gains. In "Love among the Ruins", he states that worldly ambitions and achievements are fated to end in ruins, what lasts forever is love, because, real love purifies humans from worldly and evil emotions and frees them

from the prison of ambitions that restrict the human soul. Only through true love, human beings gain immortality.

Though Browning is known as being critical of his age, by believing that a woman had the right to love, he cannot help but reflect the Victorian spirit in his poetry. He thinks that a lady must preserve her maiden modesty and it is man's task to pursue her in order to gain her love, which is a universal truth according to Browning's contemporaries. Moreover, he thinks that a lover feels happy when his beloved eludes him. "A Life in a Love" and "A Love in a Life" presents a hopeful lover who never gets tired from pursuing his beloved.

Next to this picture of immature love of youth, Browning presents the wisdom of old age and the warmth of mature love in "By the Fire Side" which is the manifestation of his love to his wife. The poem illustrates Browning's conception concerning ideal love. He believes that ideal love is the blending of spiritual and physical aspects of human nature. He sees that a successful love relationship must be a combination of the two aspects. Though spiritual union is necessary to gain everlasting happiness and satisfaction, it must be completed by the physical one in order to gain perfection and win ideal love.

Browning understood the significant role that love plays in the life of human beings, men and women, he was against the Victorians who believed that love is forbidden to a woman (except the love for the husband) because it will stain her chastity and makes her in control of her choices, which was an issue refused by the Victorians. The poems discussed in this study, show how Browning let the woman enjoy the happiness of love as long as it is pure and honest. It is true that we never hear the women's voice; nevertheless, they play an important part in the idea of the poem. They have the right to love. He presented all his poems with female characters, which were hidden but powerful, to illustrate his point in seeing women as a completion for men. He used Nature many times in his poems, because Mother Nature is the ultimate end for any man, where he finally rests his soul. Here we see the image of the woman and the relation between man and woman, both presented to strengthen the idea that Browning was against making woman as "Other", or in other words, as a human being with no power or control of her life.

Thus, Browning's open-minded thinking was one of the first steps that led to the liberation of women and their control of their will. By letting them show their love emotions, not only to their husbands, but to their truthful lovers as an example The Statue and Bust poem, where the woman marries Riccardi, though is in love with the Duke, Browning loosened the chains that encircled women's choices in the Victorian Age. Not to mention that Browning's treatment of the concept of love puts him among the greatest love-poets throughout the past two centuries.

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