

مجلة بحوث  
كليّة الآداب

البحث ( ١٢ )

Les Identites Meurtrieres et le  
Message Paratextuel  
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By

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أكتوبر ٢٠١٤م

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## Cultural and Aesthetic Pluralism in Robert

القصيدة -بينما يقرأها آخرون بطريقة تواريخها فعلياً تحت غطاء "دراما الشعر المونولوجية" الذي يدعي الكمال والذي اشتهر من أجله براوننج في الأساس (Curry:1908), (Phelps: 1915), (Drew:1970) (Martens:2011)، وغيرهم نقاد كثيرون تناولوا البنية الأخلاقية في هذه القصيدة أو ما يمكن أن تحتويه من رسالة إنسانية (Jones: 187), (Chapman:1969, 187), (11891,14)، وقد حاول نقاد غيرهم حصرها في ازدواجية العلاقات الذكرية الأنثوية الضيقة وما فيها من تعبيرية خاصة (Nettleship; 1868, 16,17).

ما يحاول أن يفعله هذا المقال في اقترايه الحالي لهذه القصيدة يختلف عن ذلك كله كثيراً، فهو يحاول عبر تحليل البنية النصية وليس فقط الشكل أو الأسلوب أن يكشف نوع الفكر الثقافي والجمالي الذي ينطوي تحت اختيارات الكلمات والتعبير - على تنوعها واختلافها - ومن ثم تعريف رؤية هذه القصيدة للعالم وللحياة. ويذهب هذا المقال إلى أن استيعاب الأبعاد الكلاسيكية والرومانسية والفيكتورية والحداثية أيضاً في هذه القصيدة وخاصة فيما يتعلق بطرق اندماجها معاً - أي هذه الأبعاد - في نسيج العمل نفسه من شأنه أن يوسع آفاق رؤية أدبيات براوننج كافة، فمثل هذا التراشق الجمالي بين الظلال والمؤثرات المتنوعة التي غطت معظم حقب التاريخ الثقافي والجمالي المعروفة في هذه القصيدة من شأنها أن نتحد في عمل يتسم فعلياً بالعالمية لأكثر من وجهة تستحق التأمل والتفكير والتقدير.

للشاعر الإنجليزي " روبرت براوننج "

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الترجمة

تقدم قصيدة "النزهة الأخيرة" (فى ديوان: الرجال والنساء، عام ١٨٥٥ Men & Women" 1855) للشاعر الإنجليزي القديم "روبارت براوننج ١٨١٢-١٨٨٩ - Robert Browning" مزيجاً خاصاً من الأبعاد الحداثية والرومانسية والكلاسيكية الذي لم يُعط حقه فى الاقتراب النقدي المباشر، فضلاً عن الأبعاد الفيكترية المحضة، التي عُرفَ فى عصرها هذا الشاعر كأحد أهم كتاب المسرح، وأحد أهم الشعراء المبدعين لما عُرفَ حينها بـ "دراما الشعر المونولوجية". وبرغم أن القصيدة كما ذكر الشاعر والناقد الانجليزي الشهير "آرثر سايمون - Arthur Symons" ربما تكون "أروع وأصدق وأميز ما كُتب فى الحب بالإنجليزية قاطبة" (Symons"1906, 125) لما تطرحه من رؤية حثيثة ومواظبة لتداعيات الاشتياق والحب الداخلية، وما يقابلها من تداعيات خارجية مسؤولة عن الواقع المجتمعي المعيش برمته -برغم ذلك كله - لايزال بعض النقاد ممن تناول هذا العمل من أمثال جوليا فارب (Goldfarb: 1965, 255) يصرون على قراءة جنسية لها -أى لهذه

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4- Modernism is as much implied in the aesthetics of this poem as the previous aesthetics, if not more. Evidently, as we have seen, the kind of poetic "self" offered; both fractured and interrogative, or contradictory and reflexive, through complex multi-role arguments and a multi-faceted poetic voice, is a quintessential base for a particularly modernistic approach to human existence and definitions of life. This is also evident in the poem's interrogative undermining of any singular ideology of "righteousness", "virtuousness" or "political correctness", taken from history, classical art, (or even religion) which itself implies a modernistic concentration on the present, and a characteristic rejection of the past. This multiplicity of dimensions in the construction of the poetic self in this poem offers a defiance to conventional concepts of the self as a unified whole; as one indivisible and non-contradictory unit. By assuming so many narrative positions within the drama of the work (you, we, I, us), but, more significantly, by assuming other roles as well; such as the "audience" and the implied "narrate", the poem offers a truly modernistic aesthetic self which questions the past, wishes for ever more presentness in the present, and wants accreditation from no one but itself; a self that is fractured many times over and argues all the time for the suitability of this very degeneration to the facts of life; a self that is basically proud of its own paradoxicality and human condition.

This poem offers a unique blend of fundamentally different aesthetic and cultural eras without ever disfiguring / dissolving the distinctiveness of those eras, or allowing them to simply overwhelm the distinctiveness of its own culturally open personality.

Works Cited

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in the artistic use of language, offering sonically and visually great sense of regularity and familiarity. Despite all of this, the poem offers a lot more than just an adherence to some formal classical aspects.

2- Romanticism, for example, as represented by the transcendental higher ego-voice, is offered in this poem all through its self-reflexive dramatic arguments. Although this is only one dimension of the poetic self, it remains extremely significant. As we have seen, this ego evidently harbors a particularly romantic dream to singularly rise above all human constraints and shortcomings; to rise above life itself, reaching some form of imagined higher existence, far from the continuous wants and needs of humanity. But again, the poem is not entirely or even particularly romantic, as much as it is not entirely or particularly classic. It is simply too rich for any one single set of aesthetic or cultural ideals or values.

3- Victorianism, for example, is also very evident in this poem's immediate form and style. Largely, accredited to Browning's own aesthetics, among others', the development of "dramatic monologue" as a particularly empowering poetic form is generally known as Victorianism's signature poetics. This is the most obvious side of this poem and the most talked about in the history of its criticism. The reason for this is paradoxically both the obviousness of the dramatic features in the poem, and the unfamiliarity of its, then new, monologue-ous format, particularly when compared to the formal poetics of Romanticism and Classicism. Clearly, the poetic form employed in this poem is a monologue, where the speaking voice, at least superficially, is speaking to himself and no other! It is also a narrative, telling a story and, in doing so, following narrative sequences of tense, events and emotions. But, this is not all.



"we" in the repeated motif "we ride". This harsh fracturing of the poetic self into many dimensional self-ness, on multiple dimensions of linguistic effectiveness momentarily assuming almost all roles of readership including the writer or the author expresses a definite modern sense of alienation and loss as a direct result of increased sophistication.

### 3- Conclusion

By this definition, "The last Ride Together", offers a multitude of aesthetic and cultural identities starting from classicism and ending with modernism. This aesthetic and cultural pluralism is, as we have seen, crucial for grasping the true poetic impact of this particular masterpiece. The integration of these specific aesthetic and cultural ideals into the very fabric of this poem presents its poetics in a completely unique light against the background of most other so called "love-poetry" both present and past. This particular poem encompasses the following aesthetic and cultural ideals and identities:

- 1- Classicism; is evident in the formal structure of the poem from beginning to end. Balance, regularity and classical order in terms of form are woven steadily and very skillfully into the fabric of this poem's phraseology, stanza formation, prosody, rhyming and rhyming plan, in addition to the arrangement of ideas along the length of the poem. This is also evident in multiple numerical and syntactic equivalences across the poem. For example, there are ten stanzas, each containing eleven lines, each containing four iambic feet, all rhymed according to one plan without a single false rhyme or a single fabricated rhythm. This is, of course, to add to the regularity of motif, the clarity of rhythmic beats, as well as the familiarity of the chosen conceit "riding a horse". In short, the poem is a good example of classical "order", "decorum" and "eloquence" in almost every formal aspect there is. It cries balance and regularity, underlining "skill"

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On the surface, it offers a simple enough monologue form; unpretentious and seemingly two-dimensional, speaking to a reader who inhabits the directness of an authorial voice enjoying the nobility of its insistence on a love-relationship. But underneath the surface, the reader enjoys a multitude of poetic selves and identities; spanning from the reckless lover who wishes to change the fabric of space-time continuum for a few moments more with his lover, to the profound philosopher who realizes the fragility of human existence itself and the temporality of its cultural and aesthetic ideals and values. Underneath the surface, there are actually a multitude of beings and identities. In other words, it would make sense, only to a multi-sided self, compoundedly fractured between profound desires, wisdoms, rationales and weaknesses or identities; the human condition.

Significantly, even the "I" in this stanza also stands for the audience to whom such narrative details seem important: "I and my mistress, side by side / Shall be together, breathe and ride". This first person pronoun: "I", contextually and semantically corresponds to the second person pronoun: "you", in the following stanza, and in the 7<sup>th</sup>, in addition to the first person plural: "We", in the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup>. They all act, more or less, on behalf of an audience, whose "self" literally absorbs nearly all pronoun-ial dimensions in this --only superficial -- monologue! If you saw some western cloud / --And so, you, looking and loving best etc... Have you yourself what is best for men ... we know how fashion end ...etc.". The "I", "you", "we" and most other pronouns in this poem are all indications of a definitely multiple modern self, narrated onto a more complicating part of its own aesthetic being as its own audience.

This is indicated, not only by question tags such as "right!", or "Hush!" in the second and third stanzas, but also by the sort of "you" in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> stanza, so is the sort of "I" used in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> all of which are defined and redefined by the

Significantly, the beginning of this stanza is quite obvious in its implication of an audience to which the fact that (My mistress bent that brow of hers....etc) seems important. But who, or what, such audience might actually be? The whole of the poem does not, at any of its sections or stanzas, indicate any form of radical "out-sided-ness" for its assignment of an audience, although it offers such an audience quite strongly as different enough. As seems very obvious from this stanza, the poem's audience is contextually implied as nothing more than this very omniscient speaker/narrator/receiver himself; who is clearly indicated by the exclamation marks after such question tags as "right!" in this stanza, and "Hush!" in the next. Such exclamatory questions as "who knows", or prepositions as "So", at the beginning of the last two lines in this stanza further testify to both the strong presence of an audience offering some type of identity "difference", and a simultaneous re-definition of the poetic self in the poem as fundamentally fractured and multi-sided. Who does the "So" in the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> line make sense to? The same applies to the question "Who Knows?" at the end of the stanza, and similar questions all over the poem such as "what atones!" in the 6<sup>th</sup> stanza.

Such exclamatory questions make sense only to that multi-sided poetic self which hopes to simultaneously inflate time; "forever ride", expand its being indefinitely "the instant made eternity"; and re-define the world and its own life for a love relationship; "Earth being so good, would heaven seem best". But, it also makes sense to that self that understands the futility of art "we know how fashions end", the instability of any single value-system or cultural ideal which must also include love; "What does it all mean?" and the innate insufficiency of any particular human endeavor; "What will but felt the fleshy screen", all at the same time. Put another way, such exclamations, questions and question tags; along with many usages of almost all known pronouns in the language including possessive ones are clear indications of a fundamentally fractured self, both multi-sided and multi-layered.

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This is indicated  
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the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>

At the very beginning of the poem, readers might observe the fundamental separation in the speaking voice between the "I speaking" and the "I" performing the action. Narration starts with describing of the sayings of the second "I" by the first in: "I said". This is repeated again at the middle of the stanza when the narrating "I" gives yet another description of the actions of the performing "I" in the phrase "I claim" in (take back the hope you gave,-- I claim". The reader might then ask: which of the two "I"s, offers the main narrative perspective? Namely; is the speaking voice actually living the action as it happens; or is he only narrating it after the fact? This is what Martens has observed earlier as "the self-division into author and speaker" and viewed simply as a challenge of "authorial authority" (Martens: 2011,255), but which we can now view, more sophisticatedly, as a projection of a modernistic paradoxical or plural self.

Both "I"s coexist quintessentially and simultaneously. This is the source of the confusion that was felt by Browning's contemporaries as stated earlier in this article. The speaking voice in the poem does not simply settle for a two dimensional presence as a narrator and / or a performer of the action, or even both as the protagonist and antagonist in the story, but always oversteps a flat, however rich, reality for a plural, rather paradoxical, narrative perspective which, in turn, offers a plural paradoxical poetic self. The second stanza completes that plural sense of oneness prevalent in this poem;

My mistress bent that brow of hers,  
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs  
When pity would be softening through,  
Fix'd me a breathing-while or two  
With life or death in the balance: right!  
The blood replenish'd me again;  
My last thought was at least not vain:  
I and my mistress, side by side  
Shall be together, breathe and ride,  
So, one day more am I deified.  
Who knows but the world may end to-night?

considered wholly in terms of a simple monologue. Stylistically speaking, it is a singular voice, but one, which offers many more dimensions in which it also narrates a story, implies an audience and projects a beloved "other", while negotiating the cultural and aesthetic norms of its very existence in language; its argument against the permanence of love (Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?/ Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.), its rejection of the claimed wisdom inherent in the arts (But in music we know how fashions end!").

It seems singular and unified on the surface, but underneath, this voice offers many more layers of negotiation with the reality of our cultural presence. A reality that is seamlessly offered through views on the temporality of artistic expression, on some synthetic aspects of literature, on politics or the necessity of war, etc... It is no wonder, at all, that Browning initial readers felt his works to be too complex to fathom, too "obscure" to comprehend (Shepherd:1890, 33), (Curry:1908,1-12). It was not simply because of the then unfamiliarity of the monologue format in writing poetry as his initial critics and elaborators thought. Other, closer, formats to this form, such as the soliloquy, had been widely practiced and read since before Browning. Many of Shakespeare's tragedies testify to this. Rather, it was because of the multiple dimensions involved in the seemingly singular voice claiming to be a monologue. Let us, for example, contemplate the very beginning of the poem again:

I SAID--Then, dearest, since 'tis so,  
Since now at length my fate I know,  
Since nothing all my love avails,  
Since all, my life seem'd meant for, fails,  
Since this was written and needs must be--  
My whole heart rises up to bless  
Your name in pride and thankfulness!  
Take back the hope you gave,--I claim  
Only a memory of the same,  
--And this beside, if you will not blame;  
Your leave for one more last ride with me

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differences. A modern self, is much more than that. It is a self that is continually searching for a justification for its own existence; a reasoning behind its own evident composition. It is a self that finds, cherishes, projects and defends its own inadequacies and deficiencies as though they were its most proud attributes. A modern self, that is, which has, unlike all other selves, perhaps in the history of literature, a complexity and paradoxicality that question stabilized definition of being, reason or position in life. A modern self offers itself always as multi-layered question rather than an answer, no matter how deep or comprehensive.

Look, for instance, at the poems of Auden (such as Lullaby, The Unknown Citizen) or the poems of Pound (such as the Cantos) or the poems of T.S. Eliot (such as: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, The Hollow Men). In all such decidedly modern poems, the poetic "self" is offered more as a continually asked question of worth and of true existence, than answers to matters of sexual fulfillment, or emotional trouble. The obscurity and mysteriousness of its offered features testify to the kind of questioning lurking in its insight into its own reality of existence. The composition of such a "self" differs intrinsically from its counterparts in such works of classical poetry as Spenser's Ice and Fire, Hymn in Honor of Beauty, Milton's and Shakespeare's various Sonnets, Dryden's Dreams, Happy The Man, Hidden Flame, or such works of Romanticism as Keats's "Ode On a Grecian Urn", Shelly's "Ode to the West Wind", or Byron's "I would I were a Carless Child", "And Thou Art Dead as Young and Fair", "By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept", or such works of Victorian poetry as Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot". The "self" offered in those types of poems is one which claims stability and homogeneity; is one which claims steadfast rootedness in life, even when it sometimes hates or rejects or mocks death like in many of Byron's, Shakespeare's or Tennyson's works.

Similarly, in "The Last Ride Together", the "self" projected through the invented voice of a speaker claiming to negotiate matters internally, is too multi-dimensional and paradoxical to be

it is a drama. That is, it contains the three most known features distinguishing a dramatic work of literature:

- 1- Personae which, in this case, happens to be a cross-over between many characters and a singular one. It is a multi-dimensional voice offering an imagined other (the beloved), and an imagined audience.
- 2- A crisis; (leaving the lover / redefining the love relationship), which, in this case, happens to have taken place immediately before the beginning of the work. This means that the whole poem starts at the "climax" of the dramatic action, the point of extreme complication, after which the events start to offer resolution or dénouement. Actually, the whole poem is just such a resolution or dénouement.
- 3- Sequences of events, tenses and emotions which seems quite obvious from the very beginning of the poem. The main events have already happened resulting in disappointment and frustration, followed by the speaker's request for a last ride with the beloved enticing hope and partial fulfillment. Then the riding together of the couple offers some decidedly satisfying sensations and wisdoms regarding life and its humanistic choices.

Second, it is a monologue, but not in the sense of a traditional self-confession or a soliloquy, or a flat one-to-one conversation. Rather, it is in the sense of a complex self-presence that includes much independence and multi-dimensionality within. The word "monologue" here, loses its traditional reference to a simplistic oneness in favor of a more complex type of self-negotiation or singularity containing a plurality of complex selves.

### **2.5 Modernism; The Complex Self:**

This is what really distinguishes the poetics of modernity from other cultural eras of poetic innovation. The literary "self" projected in modernism is intrinsically multi-dimensional. This is not simply meant to refer to the havocs and tribulations of a regular literary "self" with basic emotional depths and

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dimension, so that the reader is in no doubt when the events are taking place. The repetitive adverb "since" at the beginning of every line afterwards, completes that sense of timing. Now, the reader is quite sure that the story is being told after the main event has taken place. The beloved has already rejected the lover/speaking-voice/protagonist, and he is writing this piece after the fact. He tells us about what happened, and invites us to share his feelings and decisions in the aftermath.

But, this lover/narrator/protagonist threesome is both speaking the actions of the drama and simultaneously living it, while imagining an audience to which the drama is offered: "an imaginary speaker addressing an imaginary audience" as **The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms** suggests (239). In other words, this is a singularity and a multiplicity at the same time; or rather a singularity engulfing a multiplicity within itself. It is a speaker or a narrator whose voice is both omniscient and particular. Yet, it is also a protagonist of a story in the middle of whose crisis he is. But, it is also the infatuated lover whose life seems centered around his emotions for his imagined beloved. Audience are also imagined and addressed according to such imagination. They are implied and accordingly supposed to possess certain argumentative qualities and cultural concepts and values. These qualities and values are offered freely within the poem's assumptions about the public it addresses. Qualities such as the natures of man's life-struggles (What hand and brain went ever pair'd), man's courage in seeking his own happiness (What heart alike conceived and dared?) and the absence of the absolute in this existence "What act proved all its thought had been?" and the limitedness of man's reach (What will but felt the fleshly screen). Audience is also supposed to hold certain values such as the importance of love (flesh must fade for heaven was here), of music (But in music we know how fashions end!), or of poetry (Have you yourself what's best for men?).

In short, the three most prominent features of a dramatic monologue are present in this particular poem; but present in a way that surpasses their classical or simplistic definitions. First,



## 2.4 Victorian Poetics; Particular Type of Dramatic Monologue:

The most significant aspect of any dramatic work of art is what makes it dramatic to start with. In other words; what is in it that recalls this specific, or near specific, description? Generally speaking, drama has always been associated with two major aspects; a "conflict" or a crisis of some description, and "personae" (a character or a set of characters) to which this conflict or crisis happens. In the oxford dictionary: "drama is usually expected to represent stories showing situations of conflict between characters, although the MONODRAMA is a special case in which only one performer speaks" (Baldick: 2001,71-2).

The crisis in this particular poem and personnel are both quite obvious from its very beginning.

I SAID--Then, dearest, since 'tis so,  
 Since now at length my fate I know,  
 Since nothing all my love avails,  
 Since all, my life seem'd meant for, fails,  
 Since this was written and needs must be--  
 My whole heart rises up to bless  
 Your name in pride and thankfulness!  
 Take back the hope you gave,--I claim  
 Only a memory of the same,  
 --And this beside, if you will not blame;  
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

The "I" at the very opening of the poem introduces the major characters in the drama; the speaking voice is both the main protagonist and the narrator of the events in the story. "I" here indicates both a narrating "self" discussing what has happened in the story and an acting "self" actually performing the events themselves. And since every drama needs a sequence of tenses according to which its events are usually arranged, the adverb "then" in the first line lays the foundation for this particular

drama of human social questioning and investigation. In such a context, it needs to be in control, classically speaking. "Order" seems to be the needed aesthetic value to support claims to comprehensiveness and transcendence over any possible materiality of existence. "Order" is provided through form; rhythm, rhyme and word control, through regularity of beat and singularity of pattern.

This is not any old egotistical self. This is a particularly transcendental one that aspires for what lies beyond the physical world and into an almost purely meta-physical. Its satisfaction is all spiritual and psychological rather than physical or materialistic, obtained through asking the beloved for company in a last stroll on horses for a brief period of time. Of course, the "now" has completely and utterly replaced the permanent and the lasting, in a decidedly anti-romantic gesture, as is observed before; but in what sense? Is it in the purely pragmatic sense of "anything is better than nothing at all"? Or rather, it is in the post-pragmatic, but also post-romantic, sense that one thing is itself almost always everything else as well!

The speaker's huge romantic self is simply too big to accept failure, and so it transcends itself and, arguably, transforms that failure into pure success. As such, the briefness of the moments spent with the beloved is transformed conceptually into the worthiness of all time. Moments spent with the beloved in this self's view are empowered with the density of all eternity (The instant made eternity), their beauty is given the worth of all poetry (Nearer one whit your own sublime / Than we who never have turn'd a rhyme), of all art (sculpture and music), and is endowed with the authenticity of all wisdom (Who knows what's fit for us?). But the genius of this particular poem is that it simply entertains both impressions and feeds both connotations; the total sublimation of "time" into moments of the "now", and the transcendence over that now into the worthiness of all eternity. In short, the poem offers the pragmatics of utilitarianism (enjoying the moment in all its details) and the assertion of ego in the transcendentalism over the confines of time and belief.

“classical order” here serves to empower this kind of singular, extreme sense of control favoring the realization that indeed such a self knows what it deals with precisely and comprehensively. Thus, “classical order” in form, resonates into the very fabric of the aesthetic impression left by the claimed supremacy of this very romantic self. Let us, for instance, read this stanza:

What does it all mean, poet? Well,  
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell  
What we felt only; you express'd  
You hold things beautiful the best,  
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.  
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,  
Have you yourself what's best for men?  
Are you--poor, sick, old ere your time--  
Nearer one whit your own sublime  
Than we who never have turn'd a rhyme?  
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

Whom does the word “poet” in the first line refer to? By the same token, who is answering that reference in the last line asking the “poet” to “sing,”? Whom is meant by the second person pronouns all across this stanza “you”, “your”, “yourself” repeatedly, and also by the first person pronouns “we”, “I”, “me”? The speaker in the poem is simply assuming all characters at all times in this dialogue-ous monologue by addressing himself, asking himself and answering his own rhetorical questions by assuming a higher self whose wisdom is supposedly above everyone else's. He is the poet referred to, and he is also the “we” who “never have turned a rhyme”. He is the rider, the gifted word-player who rhymes, or rather “sings” about it, but also he is the assumed antagonist who might not approve of the whole situation. The self projected here allows no room for anyone else; no space for another “self” no matter who might it be. This self assumes all roles available, explicit and implicit; plays all parts in its own invented drama including that of the audience. In short, it offers multiple dimensions of existence in a

## Cultural and Aesthetic Pluralism in Robert

By contrast, non-classicism, in most of its differing terminologies and ideologies, is about moments of the present thought to offer "actual" cherish-able temporalities and incompletenesses allowing man's existence to be continually defined and redefined; both objectively and subjectively. The integration of so binary a register in one poem seems, at first sight, not only strange, but perhaps even unnecessary, since in any one of these two cultural systems there are sufficient ontological impacts and richness for any particular poetic endeavor! Yet, this poem, not only manages to seamlessly integrate these cultural eras and value systems in ways which complement one another's cultural and aesthetic impacts, but made such integration utterly essential for readership.

Let us, for example take both the idea of "classical order", and the Romantic idea of "transcendental ego" discussed above. The latter refers, of course, to the singularity of poetic voice on a purely stylistic level, no matter how heterogeneous or complex or multi-dimensional that self actually is on other deeper levels of poetic intercourse. In other words, it implies both the believed supremacy of the speaking self over all other implied "selves" in the context of readership, and the claimed elevation (sublime or transcendental) of that speaking self over such earthly or "impure" forms of thought or feelings such as sex, or need for money, or food, viewed by Romantics as necessarily lower in absolute value or rank. One of the main aspects characterizing the monologue-form, stylistically speaking, of course, is that it implies no "other" in its visible format. There is, at least technically, no other addressee in the poem, but that very self, although with many different roles and dimensions of presence. This, in itself, implies a belief in self-sufficiency and completeness. It gives readers the impression that such a self, with such reasoning, belief and wisdom; with such love and concentration on the present, is in need for no "other" to argue with, to check its arguments with, or even, to read itself to. In itself, by itself, and with itself, such a self claims comprehensiveness, and in that, claims transcendentalism or sublime evocation of its own higher ego. The employment of

ordinary "order", is a worthy contrast, helping to focalize the specifics of the poem's argument and sensations.

### **2.3 Romantic Ego: Singularity and Transcendentalism**

But, this is part of the whole point regarding the uniqueness of this particular poem in the poetry of Browning, and perhaps in the poetry of that whole era. Evidently, as we have seen, this poem attempts, quite successfully, to integrate various heterogeneous aesthetic and cultural value-systems or eras. Such systems or eras have normally been thought of as simply and unequivocally different, even sometimes opposed. This is not because of their formalistic particularities, which are many by the way, or even because of their distinctive aesthetic impacts on readers, which are very obvious also. But, much more significantly, this is because of these eras' almost aggressively contrasting cultural mentalities.

Classicism is about nostalgia, both aesthetic and cultural. More accurately, it is about the "supposed" refurbishment of certain past(s) thought to offer "imagined" completeness and timelessness transgressing man's existence itself. "The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms" (1998) draws precisely this kind of conclusion:

Aristotle's Poetics and Horace's Ars Poetica, were two major influences in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century ...His views of tragedy and epic were regarded almost as gospel...Horace's remarks on decorum, the appropriateness of language and style, the appropriateness of action to character, and his observations on the need to excellence in craftsmanship were also taken up... classicism is an attempt to express infinite ideas and feelings in a finite form... (Cuddon:1998, 139-40)

and most non-classical poems, is too multi-layered and complex, even when it projects the same feelings of love, longing, jealousy and ambition for satisfaction.

Significantly, the poem's own cultural concepts are also very different. More modern realizations of the place of man in the known universe influenced by advances in science and technology, as well as disintegrations of medieval religious control over intellectual issues, have all contributed to enrich the kind of self-understanding and self-liberation evident all through this poem. For example, the free references to "heaven" and "earth" (Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?), the equally free references to the futility and triviality of life (What need to strive with a life awry? / Had I said that, had I done this), and to man's utter ignorance of an "ultimate" wisdom (Who knows what's fit for us?) serve as clear indications of a more modern understanding of the "self" based on liberty and pride in humanity.

The poem teams with implications and references that clearly connote to a completely non-classical value-system, both cultural and aesthetic, even when some of its formal aesthetic values entertain classical registers such as balance or order. In fact, those very values of classical balance and order are themselves the poem's way to underline its eclectic stance towards aesthetics. By choosing some classical values among other non-classical ones, the poem is simply choosing what it sees best for its particular aesthetic imprint regardless. Regularity, balance and order, in the general format of this poem, serve to heighten concentration on the "now" as opposed to the "then", or the future. By making that "now" aesthetically in the foreground, while offering the all-familiar rhythms, rhymes and phraseology patterns at the background, the poem simply sharpens the contrast and therefore the focus on that very "now" enhancing its visibility and appreciate-ability in the eyes of readers. The familiarity of form against the unfamiliarity of content; order and balance of form, versus disorder and complexity of content: "now" as the sum of all time versus an ordinary present full of

1. A case statement and a request.
2. Anticipation and reception of the answer.
3. Moments of euphoria regarding the answer.
4. Life's endeavors are worthless: Beginnings of argument.
5. Vain labors of Man and the delights of the present.
6. No labor is perfect, no life is complete.
7. Even art is incomplete and wisdom-searching.
8. Art is taste-dependent and therefore lacking in itself.
9. No wisdom complete, no perfection available.
10. So the "now" is much better and durable than the ever-after.

This climatic arrangement of ideas and sensations from beginning to end in an almost perfect ladder of feelings and arguments leading at the top to the final judgment which justifies the speaker's glorification of his present moment of love as opposed to any possible future(s), only complements the almost flawless classical order of formal aspects in this poem. Even the ideas and sensations in this poem are ordered ascendingly, from beginning to end, so as to enrich the formal decorum felt by readers under a prominent sense of classical order.

However, this is not to say that "The Last Ride Together" is somehow a classical poem; far from it. As is perhaps very obvious, this poem's cultural mentality differs in almost every possible regard to classical ways of dealing with the subject of love including its very definition and, with it, definitions of the implied roles of gender, religion, prevalent aesthetic and cultural ideals. The poem's concept of "self", as suggested before, is very different. The speaker is no longer the two-dimensional longing male who is infatuated with the physical beauty of an anonymous beloved {as in the sonnets of Philip Sidney "Astrophil and Stella"(1580s)}, or the enchanted individual captured by the beauty of the other {as in the Petrarchian sonnets of Thomas Wyatt's "Songs and Sonnets" (1557)}, or the aspirer to perfect love {as in Spenser's "Amoretti and Epithalamion" (1595) or "Shakespeare's Sonnets" (1609)}. Rather, the poetic self in this,

"THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER" depicts the emotions of a ride, which a finally dismissed lover has been allowed to take with his beloved. He has vainly passed his youth in loving her. But as this boon is granted, she lies for a moment on his breast. "She might have loved him more; she might also have liked him less." As they ride away side by side, a sense of resignation comes over him. His life is not alone in its failure. Every one strives. Few or none succeed. The best success proves itself to be shallow. And if it were otherwise—if the goal could be reached on earth—what care would one take for heaven? Then the peace which is in him absorbs the consciousness of reality. He fancies himself riding with the loved one till the end of time; and he asks himself if his destined heaven may not prove to be this. (Orr: 1927, 96)

The poem starts after the main event had already taken place. The speaker already knows that the person whom he calls "dearest," is not actually in love with him, that he might have understood her wrong, and that he can no longer hope for a lasting relationship with her. So, the whole poem is really about the justification of choosing the "now" rather than the past or the future as a means of dealing with frustration in love. From the very first stanza, the reader is faced with questions of justification regarding why the whole poem was written in the first place since the main event in the poem has already happened prior to its writing. The first stanza is simply an admission of that fact, woven by a polite request for a last ride with the speaker. But it is also an introduction to the true cultural argument of the poem; the capturing of a singularity of happiness in the time continuum is worthier than all other endeavors in life.



1 a, a, b, b, c, d, d, e, e, e, c	2 f, f, g, g, h, i, i, j, j, j, h	3 k, k, l, l, m, n, n, o, o, o, m	4 p, p, q, q, r, s, s, t, t, t, r	5 U, u, v, v, w X, x, y, y, y, z
6 a2, a2, b2, b2, c2, d2, d2, e2, e2, e2, c2.	7 f2, f2, g2, g2, h2, i2, i2, j2, j2, j2, h2.	8 k2, k2, l2, l2, m2, n2, n2, o2, o2, o2, m2.	9 p2, p2, q2, q2, r2, s2, s2, t2, t2, t2, r2	10 u2, u2, v2, v2, w2 X2, x2, y2, y2, y2, z

**Rhyme Scheme: AA BB C DD EEE C =**  
**Regularity (Classical Order)**

What we can see here is a persistent underlining of one of the most prominent aesthetic values of classicism; order and regularity, which almost always results in the sensation of decorum, wholesomeness and control, even when it is only on the most superficial of poetic levels. There is an almost perfectly-balanced rhyming pattern, mirrored by an almost perfectly-balanced rhythmic pattern which is, in turn, echoed by the almost perfectly-balanced formal lay-out of the poem, where there are equal number of lines in each stanza and a square number of stanzas in the whole poem. On the page, in one sense at least, the poem seems most decidedly entertaining a formally classical mode of writing.

<b>Pattern of Rhyme (AA BB C DD EEE C)</b>	+
<b>Pattern of Rhythm (iambic tetrameter)</b>	+
<b>Pattern of Wording (10 stanzas in 11 lines each)</b>	+
<b>Pattern of imagery (conceit of "riding")</b>	=

### Classical Order

Yet, this regularity or formal order, is itself also echoed by a similar, but deeper, sense of arrangement, or balance, with regards to what could be seen as the plan of argument or the order of ideas presented in the poem. Generally speaking, the poem is about disappointment in love where the beloved has decided not only that her relationship with the speaker should no longer continue, but also that it was never really a worthy one to start with. Sutherland Orr (1927) summarizes the poem's general story:

The instant made eternity,--  
And heaven just prove that I  
and she  
Ride, ride together, forever  
ride? (Browning: 1855, 184)

On the most superficial of those layers; the general stylistic structure, the poem appears to entertain decidedly classical poetic values. The very first thing that we might observe about the superficial form of this poem is its overwhelming balance in terms of both wording, or general lay-out, and prosody or melody.

### 2.2 Classical Order: Regularity and Balance.

The poem consists of exactly ten stanzas, each of which contains exactly eleven lines, whose rhythm is consistently iambic tetrameter, ending with quite prominent rhyming pound without a single false or coarse rhyme.

10 Stanza in 11 lines	+	4 iambic feet	+	True rhyme	=
Perfect formal regularity	+	perfect rhythm	+	Perfect rhyme	=
Physical Harmony	+	Balance	+	Regularity	=

#### Classical Order

What is really significant in addition to all such formal regularity and insistence on musical and rhythmic tangibility is the **rhyme scheme**. All stanzas in this poem follow an identical pattern of rhyme. They all reiterate the same rhyme plan with perfectly corresponding numbers of units mirroring each other quite precisely in each stanza. The first two lines follow the same rhyme (aa), then the following two lines offer another (bb), while a singular line offers a third (c), which is, in turn, followed by a couple more offering a fourth rhyme (dd), then three lines using a fifth (eee), ending with a final line that corresponds to the third (c):

Past hopes already lay behind.  
What need to strive with a life  
awry?  
Had I said that, had I done this,  
So might I gain, so might I  
miss.  
Might she have loved me? just  
as well  
She might have hated, who can  
tell!  
Where had I been now if the  
worst befell?  
And here we are riding, she and  
I.

Fail I alone, in words and  
deeds?  
Why, all men strive and who  
succeeds?  
We rode; it seem'd my spirit  
flew,  
Saw other regions, cities new,  
As the world rush'd by on  
either side.  
I thought,--All labour, yet no  
less  
Bear up beneath their  
unsuccess.  
Look at the end of work,  
contrast  
The petty done, the undone  
vast,  
This present of theirs with the  
hopeful past!  
I hoped she would love me;  
here we ride.

Dr. Nagy Rashwan  
Had fate  
Proposed bliss here should  
sublimate  
My being--had I sign'd the  
bond--  
Still one must lead some life  
beyond,  
Have a bliss to die with, dim-  
descried.  
This foot once planted on the  
goal,  
This glory-garland round my  
soul,  
Could I descry such? Try and  
test!  
I sink back shuddering from  
the quest.  
Earth being so good, would  
heaven seem best?  
Now, heaven and she are  
beyond this ride.

And yet--she has not spoke so  
long!  
What if heaven be that, fair  
and strong  
At life's best, with our eyes  
upturn'd  
Whither life's flower is first  
discern'd,  
We, fix'd so, ever should so  
abide?  
What if we still ride on, we  
two  
With life for ever old yet new,  
Changed not in kind but in  
degree,

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again;  
My last thought was at least not  
vain:  
I and my mistress, side by side  
Shall be together, breathe and  
ride,  
So, one day more am I deified.  
Who knows but the world may  
end to-night?

Hush! if you saw some western  
cloud  
All billowy-bosom'd, over-  
bow'd  
By many benedictions--sun's  
And moon's and evening-star's  
at once--  
And so, you, looking and  
loving best,  
Conscious grew, your passion  
drew  
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-  
shine too,  
Down on you, near and yet  
more near,  
Till flesh must fade for heaven  
was here!--  
Thus leant she and linger'd--joy  
and fear!  
Thus lay she a moment on my  
breast.

Then we began to ride. My soul  
Smooth'd itself out, a long-  
cramp'd scroll  
Freshening and fluttering in the  
wind.

'Tis something, nay 'tis much:  
but then,  
Have you yourself what's best  
for men?  
Are you--poor, sick, old ere  
your time--  
Nearer one whit your own  
sublime  
Than we who never have turn'd  
a rhyme?  
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I  
ride.

And you, great sculptor--so,  
you gave  
A score of years to Art, her  
slave,  
And that's your Venus, whence  
we turn  
To yonder girl that fords the  
burn!  
You acquiesce, and shall I  
repine?  
What, man of music, you  
grown gray  
With notes and nothing else to  
say,  
Is this your sole praise from a  
friend?--  
'Greatly his opera's strains  
intend,  
But in music we know how  
fashions end!  
I gave my youth: but we ride,  
in fine.

Who knows what's fit for us?

“THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER”

I SAID--Then, dearest, since  
'tis so,  
Since now at length my fate I  
know,  
Since nothing all my love  
avails,  
Since all, my life seem'd meant  
for, fails,  
Since this was written and  
needs must be--  
My whole heart rises up to  
bless  
Your name in pride and  
thankfulness!  
Take back the hope you gave,--  
I claim  
Only a memory of the same,  
--And this beside, if you will  
not blame;  
Your leave for one more last  
ride with me.

My mistress bent that brow of  
hers,  
Those deep dark eyes where  
pride demurs  
When pity would be softening  
through,  
Fix'd me a breathing-while or  
two  
With life or death in the  
balance: right!  
The blood replenish'd me

What hand and brain went ever  
pair'd?  
What heart alike conceived  
and dared?  
What act proved all its thought  
had been?  
What will but felt the fleshly  
screen?  
We ride and I see her bosom  
heave.  
There's many a crown for who  
can reach.  
Ten lines, a statesman's life in  
each!  
The flag stuck on a heap of  
bones,  
A soldier's doing! what  
atones?  
They scratch his name on the  
Abbey-stones.  
My riding is better, by their  
leave.

What does it all mean, poet?  
Well,  
Your brains beat into rhythm,  
you tell  
What we felt only; you  
express'd  
You hold things beautiful the  
best,  
And pace them in rhyme so,  
side by side.

so intensively harmonized that it mimics a poetic melody of the cultural sublime. Its structure, as we shall see, offers its own, very balanced, form of rationality. It is perhaps time to deal with the poem itself.

### 2. Analysis: Form and Formula

#### 2.1 Widening the Scope:

"The Last Ride Together" is part of a plethora of love poems that were written and published by Browning over a period of about eleven years. It was first published in 1855 in a volume entitled "Men and Women" which appeared in two parts, followed in 1863, and 1868, by two other volumes of mainly love poetry; "Lyrics" and "Dramatic Lyrics" consequently. The poems in these volumes were later dispersed in volumes 3, 4 and 5 of a collective poetry volume entitled "Poetical Works" which appeared in 1986 containing more than 50 of Browning's best devised works; "the very flower of Mr. Browning's genius" in Edward Bordo's words (Bordo:1891, 273).

But, "The Last Ride Together" is unique amongst Browning's love poetry inasmuch as it offers aesthetic ideals and techniques skimming key eras of poetic innovation. We have discussed earlier in this article how this poem challenges the ruling Romantic ideal of "Permanence", while, at the same time, imposing the presence of its transcendental "ego", which very much also characterizes Romanticism. "The Last Ride Together" contains and very much utilizes aesthetic techniques and ideals usually associated with Classicism, while at the same time destabilizing fundamental poetic cannons such as sequentiality of tense or singularity of voice to achieve rather modernistic effects.

In other words; this is a multi-layered work of art whose poetic formula encompasses at least four distinct eras of aesthetic ideals. Let us, first, read the whole poem:

love him ("Since nothing all my love avails"), and that because of this, because she refuses him entrance to her heart, and consequently all life's secrets, there is probably no hope for him to write the best of poetry ("Since, all my life seemed meant, for fails") (Orenstein: 1961, 4)

However, not only the "absurdities" of sexual meaning in such readings as Goldfarb's or Mechiori's that may imaginatively be over-reaching or irrelevant with regards to Browning's love poetics. Others, perhaps even more over-reaching, have been provoked when dealing with this kind of poetry. For example, George Santayana in his "The Poetry of Barbarism" (1900) complains about the "irrationality" of Browning's love poetry, calling it "barbaric" while viewing his emotions as random as the eruption of a volcano:

... in Browning the barbarism is no less real disguised by a literary and a scientific language, since the passions of a civilized life with which he deals are treated as so many "barbaric yelps," complex indeed in their conditions, puffings of an intricate engine, but aimless in their vehemence and mere ebullitions of lustiness in adventurous and profoundly ungoverned souls. (178)

We are in the presence of a barbaric genius, of a truncated imagination, of a thought and an art inchoate and ill-digested, of a volcanic eruption that tosses itself quite blindly and ineffectually into the sky. (Santayana: 1900, 189)

The barbarism claimed in Browning's love poetry might, as well, be claimed of any expression of thought or emotion that offers an experience of any particularity whatsoever. This is, very much the nature of any ground-breaking emotion or thought. But literature offers its own form of rationality, even with regards to explosive emotions such as those of love. This is called form. Browning's love poetry, particularly "The Last Ride Together", offers a particular balance of truly fresh passions and progressive ideas enveloped by a tone of language and a style of figuration

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metaphor relates significantly to the act of sex... In all probability, Browning was not conscious of the word's metaphoric extension. (Goldfarb:1965, 255)

Similarly, Barbara Melchiori in "Browning: Poetry of Reticence" (1968) speaks of the "sexual rhythm" of horse-back riding in "The Last Ride Together" arguing that "students in classroom seminars readily perceive the suggestiveness of the poem" (Melchiori: 1968, 168). It is this form of over-stretched interpretations that sometimes accuses readership at large of irrational or irrelevant results. It is significant that Goldfarb justifies his approach as simply trying to be "distinct", while blatantly admitting that the poet himself never really intended what he termed as the "metaphoric extension" of the word, as though such vulgar connotations of that word was ever recorded at Browning's poetic era in the first place?

As Kennedy and Hair explain, Goldfarb "allegorizes his commentary too much and thus pushes his reading of the poem into absurdities of detail in seeking correspondences with sexual intercourse" (Kennedy: 2007, 456). But, the question remains, would the sexual meaning of "The Last Ride Together", assuming the reality of Goldfarb's argument, possibly offer any extra-cultural window of understanding of the true aesthetic impact of this love poem, or any love poetry in this regard? Or, as any psycho-analytic thinking would naturally surmise, sexual dimensions are simply intrinsic to any expression of love, poetic or otherwise. There need not be any recourse to some fanciful interpretive mechanisms of figurative language to offer such conclusion? How about those critics who actually see this particular poem as almost completely devoid of any direct sexual connotation whatsoever? For example, Irving Orenstein's "A Fresh Interpretation of "The Last Ride Together" (1961), has, long before Goldfarb, argued that "the lady in the poem" is simply "the muse" rather than "the flesh and blood creature we are used to considering" and that:

On a metaphoric level, the poem begins with the poet's acknowledgment that the "muse" does not



He was too great an artist not to feel that his violations of form helped him... These savageries spoke to the hearts of men tired of smoothness and platitude, and who were relieved by just such a breaking up of the ice. Men loved Browning not only for what he was, but also for what he was not. (Chapman: 1969, 215)

It is in this particular sense that Browning's "The Last Ride Together" has, more or less, never really been touched. The specifics of its aesthetic argument, the ways of its ontological entanglements with one of the eldest subjects of poetry: frustration of love, as well as the means with which it covers plenty of poetic and cultural identities, including poetic Modernism, have not been seen in their worthy rights as such. Instead, Browning's moral, philosophical and religious approaches to life and art at large seem to have been more interesting to his critics and readers alike since the end of the nineteenth century. It is as if, just because the poem is about love, means that most of its details are somehow known, or given, or experienced before, or something to this effect, and therefore it is acceptable to ignore them? Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth, as this article will continue to show. At each corner, and with each stanza, phase, rhyme, rhythm, question or hesitation, there are abundance of significance and richness of implications, but above all, there are complexities and potentials for revelations.

### 1-3 Stretched Interpretations and Views:

Other approaches to Browning's love poetry at large, and to "The Last Ride Together" in particular, tend to offer somewhat far-fetched interpretations of the poem both recent and less so. For example, Russell M. Goldfarb suggests:

To ask devotees for a fresh reading of this Victorian masterpiece, however one must speak in distinct tones. My paper suggests a new understanding of "The Last Ride Together" based upon the now vulgar coitional meaning of the word "ride". With a necessary qualification, the title as a

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It may seem an obvious thing to say about almost any poet, but Browning differed from other poets in being able to express, not only the love of his own heart, but the love of the hearts of all sorts of people. He dramatized every kind of love from the spiritual to the sensual. One might say of him that there never was another poet in whom there was so much of the obsession of love and so little of the obsession of sex. Love was for him the crisis and test of a man's life. (Lynd: 1919, 8)

There are, of course, critical approaches that thought to discuss Browning's work as a mere reflection of his philosophy in life both ethical and religious. Here is Henry Jones arguing that:

In attempting, therefore, to discover Robert Browning's philosophy of life, I do not pretend that my treatment of him is adequate. Browning is, first of all, a poet; it is only as a poet that he can be finally judged; and the greatness of a poet is to be measured by the extent to which his writings are a revelation of what is beautiful. (Jones: 1891, 14, 15)

A simple attempt either to re-envelop his work within a larger understanding of human sensations of love, or put the whole of his art aside in service of another medium of understanding altogether; be it ethical, religious or humanistic. The specifics of each poem is rarely discussed or even viewed in themselves as particularly significant either ontologically or culturally. John Jay Chapman's, "Emerson and Other Essays" (1969) justifies this attitude by actually viewing Browning's artistic spirit as simply above literature itself! He argues:

Browning never really stoops to literature; he makes perfunctory obeisance to it. The truth is that Browning is expressed by his defects. He would not be Robert Browning without them. In the technical part of his art, as well as in his spirit, Browning represents a reaction of a violent sort.

pain of their unfulfilled longings, (Bohm:2006, 165)

Similarly, but much less recent, Stopford A. Brooke's "The Poetry of Robert Browning" (1903) argues:

But I do not think Browning was ever quite young save at happy intervals; and this falls in with the fact that his imagination was more intellectual than passionate; that while he felt love, he also analyzed, even dissected it, as he wrote about it; that it scarcely ever carried him away so far as to make him forget everything but itself. Perhaps once or twice, as in *The Last Ride Together*, he may have drawn near to this absorption, but even then the man is thinking more of his own thoughts than of the woman by his side, who must have been somewhat wearied by so silent a companion. (Brooke: 1903, 245-6)

A year after, Edward Dowden's "Robert Browning", exemplifies his view of Browning's poetic approach to love:

In *The Last Ride together*, the lover is defeated but he is not cast down, ... In these examples, though love has been frustrated in its aim, the cause of failure did not lie in any infirmity of the lover's heart or will. But what if the will itself be supine, what if it dallies and delays, consults the convenience of occasions, observes the indications of a shallow prudence, slackens its pace towards the goal, and meanwhile the passion languishes and grows pale from day to day, until the day of love has waned, and the passion dies in a twilight hour through mere inanition? Such a failure as this seems to Browning to mean the perishing of a soul, or of more souls than one. (Dowden: 1904, 160)

In a chapter entitled "Browning: The Poet of Love", Robert Lynd's "Old and New Masters" (1919) a few years after Dowden, very much similarly argues:

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the "now" as only particularly NOW? Yet, the presence of a higher "ego" in the poem, the "master-thread of subjectiveness" in Nittleship's words (1868, 3), what Browning himself calls "lyrics", testifies to the Romantic influence in his poetics, even when such "ego" is balanced by the detachment of an invented, seemingly separate, personality doing the speaking in the poem. But, more importantly, As Jeorme McGann observes; a Romantic poet "wants his language to enact the kind of sympathetic exchanges which he takes to be the enginery of the governing law of the physical and human world". As such, his "lyricism" is "a poetic language of images aspires to the condition of music". His poetry is torn between two forces; "first a gap in expression is open when an effort is made to render an idea in positive language. Secondly, and more importantly, the failure is itself part of the process that the poem addresses" (McCalman (ed.) et al.: 2001, 277). Similarly, the lyricism of "The Last Ride Together" is torn between a "positive language" of suggestion through figuration and depiction, and a "negative language" of failure to enact precisely the speaker's sense of loss and frustration not only with his love, but perhaps much more significantly, with his language.

### 1.2 Generalizations of a Love Poetry:

The second problematic critical attitude towards Browning's "The Last Ride Together" tends to basically lump it under a more general heading of "Browning's "love poetry" emphasizing some poetic traits at large while ignoring the particularity of this poem's progressive registers altogether. Both recent and much less so, this critical attitude would sometimes be satisfied with only discussing this poem in the context of another, or in the context of analyzing Browning's personal feelings of love at large. There are literally tens of articles and books offering, more or less, the same idea. Here is Arnd Bohm's "Increasing Suspicion about Browning's Grammarian" (2006) arguing:

Browning treats love as many things and from many points of view. Most of his lovers, however, are frustrated and unhappy, their vision of an ideal love a tantalizing dream which only intensifies the

of the world, as opposed to the seemingly neutral or separate reality of the world. For them, reality is, more or less, made by man's own perception of it and not the other way around. Time, matter and life are all concepts made, or rather defined, by man. Man, in their views, fabricates reality, not the other way around. Man's claimed deficiencies and shortcomings, according to many of these modernistic avant-garde movements, are, therefore, worthier, as an aesthetic source, to be followed and focused upon. Here is French poet F.T. Marinetti's "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" (1908):

We are on the extreme promontory of ages! Why look back since we must break back down the mysterious doors of impossibility? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the Absolute for we have already created the omnipresent eternal speed. (Chipp:1968, 286)

Similarly, French Dada and symbolist poet Tristan Tzara, in his "Lecture on Dada" (1924) argues:

The Beautiful and the True in art do not exist; what interests me is the intensity of a personality transposed directly, clearly into the work; the man and his vitality; the angle from which he regards the elements, and in what manner he knows how to gather sensations, emotions, into a lacework of words and sentiments. (Chipp: 1968, 387)

This is precisely what "The Last Ride Together" represents; a modern concentration on Man's deficiencies as his most precious attributes. This stanza's implementation of the personal dreams, wishes or fantasies of the speaking voice in the poem as the "truth" of things, questions not only the norms of any "objective" understanding of existence, but the more profound acceptance of the repercussions of such understanding. People simply accept perceived reality as such, including their sense of its time continuum.

Through convincing sensations of inadequacy, this stanza challenges our very stance in life: why indeed should we accept "this ride" with the beloved as the last one; why should we see

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farmer's combines and after the introduction of the telegraph, intercontinental cable, photography, anesthetics and universal compulsory education – a late Victorian could look back with astonishment on these developments during his or her life time. (Abrams (ed. Et al): 2000, 1043)

But, much more significantly, the stanza's privileging of the "now" as an "absolute value" speaks directly to the particularly Modern mentality's break with tradition and valuing of the human condition with all its claimed deficiencies and shortcomings. British critic and philosopher Barry Smart, explains:

Modernism is a cultural temper pervading all the arts; as opaque, unfamiliar, deliberately disturbing, experimental in form, and disruptive of memesis. It constitutes a response to late nineteenth century social changes in sense perception and self consciousness which arose from **space-time disorientation** associated with fundamental transformations in communication and transport, and a crisis in self-consciousness following an erosion of religious beliefs and values respectively. **The emphasis of modernism is upon movement and flux, on the absolute present, if not the future as present.** (Smart: 1990, 19) (My bolds)

"The Penguin's Dictionary of Literary Terms" (1998) puts it in no clearer terms:

As far as literature is concerned modernism reveals a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe (in some cases remarkable experiments in form and style.

(Cuddon (ed.):1998, 515-516)

Other, particularly modern, literary and artistic movements at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like "Futurism", "Dadaism" and "Surrealism" have all put to practice this idea of "absolute present". They emphasized man's internal views and sensations

“The Night’s Tomb”(1817 ), Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and many more.

“Permanence” has constituted, perhaps, the most sought-after aesthetic value in Romantic poetry. Even their love of permanence was, more or less, defined by an implicit desire for permanence, represented by the perpetuality of nature’s beauty, and a similar rejection of what is mortal represented by their incarnated sadness over Man’s short life. The Romantic transcendentalism offered readers ways to look for what goes beyond any time-limited beauty, searching for sensations that are continuous and eternal. This is what British critic Jerome McGann calls the Romantic “vital force” in his interpretation of Wordsworth’s poetic view of nature:

When Wordsworth details his “forms of nature” – birds and flowers, rivers and mountains, the weather – they constitute part of an expressive and organic system. Even individual human lives are part of this vast system. These “forms” are the local habitations and the names – literally, the apparitions of a vital force that subsists everywhere and nowhere. (McCalman (ed.) et al.: 2001, 274)

This stanza of Browning’s “The Last Ride Together”, as well as the whole poem, breaks with this Romantic tradition, not only to enrich the psychological impact of its attachment to its concept of love for purely dramatic purposes, but more importantly, to privilege the particularly realistic / Victorian value of understanding the necessity of the present as opposed to the past or the future. As “The Norton Anthology of English Literature” observes:

The rapid growth of London is one of the many indications of the most important development of the age; the shift from a way of life based on the ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing...By the end of the century after the resources of the steam power had been more fully exploited for fast rail ways and iron ships, for looms, printing presses, and

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What if heaven be that, fair and strong  
At life's best, with our eyes upturn'd  
Whither life's flower is first discern'd,  
We, fix'd so, ever should so abide?  
What if we still ride on, we two  
With life forever old yet new,  
Changed not in kind but in degree,  
The instant made eternity,--  
And heaven just prove that I and she  
Ride, ride together, forever ride?

Culturally speaking, the very first thing that we might immediately observe about this stanza is its concentration on the metaphoric destruction of any "fixable" idea of the "now", and by association, also any fixable idea of the "then", both past and future. The most brilliant account of human existence, in this stanza's view, is simply the enrichment of the "now" to include all time; to explode into a single moment of sensation through the figurative cessation of the natural flow of time; becoming it, rather than living it. No matter how valuable this particular moment is to the reader or even the implied author, the idea of a present that is actually more significant than any hopeful future or any memorable past, breaks with one of the most specific aesthetic and cultural tenants of Romanticism: that is "permanence" as a means of both rejecting the temporality of human life and reaching transcendently for the "permanent", the "continuous" or, in short, the "sublime".

We need only to have a glance on some of the most famous works of Romanticism to observe how prevalent this aesthetic value is: "Ozymandias of Egypt" (1818), "Love's Philosophy" (1819), "Ode to the West Wind" (1819) Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode on Indolence", "Ode on Melancholy", "Ode to a Nightingale", and "Ode to Psyche" (1819) John Keats, "To spring" "To Summer", "To Autumn" "To Winter" (1792) William Blake, "My Heart Leaps Up", "I wonder Lonely as a Cloud" (1807) William Wordsworth, "A Day Dream" (1802), "Answer to a Child's Question" (1802),



in Browning's aesthetics, to add to its more basic dramatic nature, often dialectically combine to produce a much deeper stance towards humanity and its implied conditions than initially believed. "The Last Ride Together", both in terms of content and general structure, offers an example of a Browning's poetics which not only attests to some of the major values of Victorianism, Romanticism and Classicism, while contesting others, but paradoxically also prophesizes the yet-to-come Modern ones.

Martens' argument attempts as much to re-establish the distinctions of Browning's poetics from his Romantic predecessors', as to confirm its definition within the confines of the poetic tenants he has helped to form. For Martens:

The confrontation with the Romantic values on the level of content is mirrored by the clash on the formal level between the Romantic authorial voice and Browning characteristic dramatic method.  
(Martens:2011,255)

As we shall see in more detail shortly, Browning's "The Last Ride Together" offers exactly this kind of authorial voice; what Nettleship calls "master-thread of subjectiveness" (1868, 3) both in Romanticism and in Modernism alike. **It is what this article seeks to establish as a form of modern multi-dimensional poetic-self that performs more than simple confessional monologues going into wider areas of aesthetic and cultural pluralism while establishing itself as the centre of its own heterogeneous poetic world.** The kind of supremacy of poetic "ego" displayed in the love sensations of the poem testifies to the romantic side of this self, while competing, more realistic, sides are displayed in its deep desires for practical solutions to dilemmas of love, and inclusions of definite "otherness" in its discourse. The poem's challenge to Romanticism is rather obvious in its rejection of one of the most significant cultural and aesthetic values of Romanticism; that is "permanence". Let us, for the sake of this argument, analyze only a small part of the poem. Here is the last stanza:

And yet--she has not spoke so long!

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Richard S. Kennedy's & Donald S. Hair's "The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life" (2007) also takes dramatic effects as the main poetic definition of Browning's poetics:

Browning's "Men & Women" is the most important collection of short poems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century since Keats... The two volumes contain fifty one poems of immense variety and vigor, mono-dramatic poems that reflect life past and present ... Browning displayed his complete command of the mono-dramatic form (Kennedy et al.:2007, 264)

Perhaps, with this fact in mind, it is time to ask the question: has Browning ever surpassed this form in any of his works? "Surpassed"; it is written, not abandoned or changed? And if so, in what poetic manner; and how significant this manner is, both culturally and aesthetically? Is Browning's "monologues", dramatic as they may be, are as two-dimensional or flat, as most of these critics' suggestions' imply, or do they carry within them more aesthetic and cultural dimensions than initially thought? How would such dimensions affect our very definition(s) of those monologues?

As we shall see later on in this article, while "dramatic monologue" seems to cover some stylistic aspects of Browning's aesthetic signature, his poetics imply and exhibit much more. For example, the kind of poetic "self" offered in "The Last Ride Together" cries multi-dimensionality and heterogeneousness on more than one compositional level. It articulates not just itself as such, but also a dynamic concept of a beloved, a vibrant definition of an involved audience and a higher, transcendental or Romantic, "ego", whose omniscient narrative knowledge of life's down-to-earth needs and shortages reflects this complex structure of "selves", which should very much be looked at as essentially modern. Another dimension of Browning's poetics is its obvious dependence on classical stylistic values of balance and order apparent in this poem's rhythm, rhyme, imagery and phraseology. These modern, romantic and classical dimensions

Looking at all his works in the four volumes in which they are at present published, we find that he has not written a single poem or piece which **does not confess to be more or less dramatic in its nature...** Now, though this dramatic quality is so observable, it must be admitted that, vivid as his portraits are, and great as is his power to delineate all human passion, there is no poet the fabric of whose works is so invariably sustained by a master-thread of subjectiveness. (Nettleship: 1868, 3)

It is not by mere chance that many of Browning's initial defenders / elaborators have agreed on the creative significance of his poetics' very unfamiliarity and obscurity, which were felt by his immediate contemporaries, as well as on its obvious abilities to surpass established poetic confines. Yet, nearly all are quite satisfied with explaining the, then, new form of poetic expression: "dramatic monologue", as the all-confining umbrella of Browning's work without ever questioning the limitations of this assumption. The richness of Browning's contributions to this, then new, form, seemingly allowed hope only for elaborating its technical complexities rather than also throwing light on the kind of poetic prophecies and entanglements it might have been offering as well. They, themselves, were complaining about the limitations of contemporary understandings of Browning's work! In hindsight, it seems almost astonishing that they also had to stop so short of questioning the scope of their own definitions. Namely, "dramatic monologue" as a typical stylistic or formal definition is simply too narrow to accommodate the whole of Browning's poetics, particularly in "The Last Ride Together". This is true, as we shall see, in terms of both contextual variations (such as the complexity of poetic self; of narration perspectives, of concept of time etc...) and cultural and aesthetic value systems (Classicism, Romanticism, Victorianism and Modernism.

However, more recent accounts of Browning's poetics are not very different from Martens's in this very regard. For example,

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conceived in a definite, dramatic situation. Usually we find also a well-defined listener, though his character is understood entirely from the impression he produces upon the speaker. (Curry:1908,1-12)

Not long after Curry, Phelps's "Robert Browning: How to Know Him" (1915) also comments on the dramatic nature of Browning's "theory of poetry". More significantly, it comments on the amount of critical rejection with which his poetry was met by readers who were initially unfamiliar with its "uncouthness":

Browning's poetry, as he elsewhere expresses it, was always dramatic in principle, always an attempt to interpret human life. With that large number of highly respectable and useful persons who do not care whether they understand him or not, I have here no concern: but to those who really wish to learn his secret, I insist that his main intention must ever be kept in mind. Much of his so-called obscurity, harshness, and uncouthness falls immediately into its proper place, is indeed necessary...Browning's love for the dramatic was so intense that he carried it into every kind of poetry that he wrote. (Phelps: 1915, 28-38)

The same view has been expressed time and again by many other critics, past and present, though sometimes with slight variations. For example; John T. Nettleship's "Essays on Robert Browning's Poetry" (1868) speaks of "The Last Ride Together" in the context of another two poems "Cristina" and "Evelyn Hope", both from his volume "Dramatic Lyrics" (1842), as all simply representatives of what he calls "failure" in love, while other poems like "Love among the Ruins" (1955) representing a "successful love". For Nettleship, "The Last Ride Together" is "simple enough" to be discussed merely in terms of the natural passions between men and women (Nettleship: 1868, 16, 25) while Browning's poetics as a whole is seen as categorically dramatic in nature:

in their turn, by two speaker/poet larger monologues, offers a typical Browning's long poem that speaks to the poetics of his age. As Martens herself argues, it reflects Browning's "growing realization that a poet and his work are subject to the pressures of competing literary tastes at a time when literature is becoming increasingly commercialized" viewing the richness of his monologues as meant simply to "emphasize the relativity of individual perspectives" (Martens: 2011, 167).

It is, of course, true that Browning's major poetic achievement concerns his contributions to this particularly Victorian poetics. Martens' argument, as most others', testify to this fact. Since 1908, when Curry first published his landmark work "Browning and the Dramatic Monologue: Nature and Interpretation of an Overlooked Form of Literature", aesthetic and intellectual curiosities over Browning's poetics have generally been confined to his major contributions to the invention and enrichment of this particular poetic form. In that book, perhaps, for the first time, Curry has critically framed both the poetic features of this form, and the difficulties faced by its initial readers:

What was the chief cause of the almost universal failure to understand Browning? Many reasons are assigned. His themes were such as had never before been found in poetry, his allusions and illustrations so unfamiliar as to presuppose wide knowledge on the part of the reader; he had a very concise and abrupt way of stating things. Yet, after all, were these the chief causes? Was he not obscure because he had chosen a new or unusual dramatic form? **Nearly every one of his poems is written in the form of a monologue**, which, according to Professor Johnson, "may be termed a novelty of invention in Browning." Hence, to the average man of a generation ago, Browning's poems were written in almost a new language... The monologue, as Browning has exemplified it, is one end of a conversation. A definite speaker is

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language (narrative love poem) and immediate form (dramatic monologue) without due attention to the more general cultural and philosophical ideals under-laying this very language/form/content triangle. The true cultural impact of this particular poem, this article claims, cannot be divorced from those kinds of dimensions particularly with their wide scope of influence through, not one, but four generations of poetic impact; namely Classicism, Romanticism, Victorianism and Modernism. Based on this, three major critical attitudes can be distinguished.

The first, and the most famous of them all, is this approach which sees "The Last Ride Together", in its totality, as a simple continuation of Browning's "dramatic" influence, offering part of his contribution to the narrative monologues of which his age is most famous, and in which his poetics has originally established itself. Most recent of these approaches is Britta Martens' "Browning Victorian Poetics and the Romantic Legacy" (2011) in which she argues:

The self-division into author and speaker on the model of the dramatic monologue allows Browning to articulate his challenge to authorial authority – both his own authority and that of poets in the Romantic tradition (Martens:2011,255)

Significantly, Martens' suggestion of a "self-division into author and speaker" as part of Browning's characteristic monologue technique, typically underwrites, perhaps un-intentionally, some of what this article concludes as a form of "fractured" modernistic poetic self, in "The Last Ride Together", who is both aesthetically and culturally multi-faceted and plural. Nevertheless, the term "dramatic monologue"; seems to be the all-covering definition of Browning poetics, for Martens, and perhaps also for most of Browning's readers, and for good reasons too.

For example, Marten's analysis of Browning's long poem "The Ring and the Book" (1864), in which he utilizes, not one or two, but ten different monologues by nine different characters framed,

Romantic, Victorian and, more significantly, Modern dimensions in this particular poem – as well as the ways in which they are woven together in a unique aesthetic and cultural fabric - may help widen the horizon of understanding of Browning's poetics at large. This mosaic of aesthetic effects and shades, spanning over most known eras of cultural history, seems to offer a truly universalize-able work of art for contemplation and further appreciation.

## 1. The Problem: Critical Scope

### 1.1 Dramatic Poetry or Dramatic Monologue:

In his "Writing Degree Zero" (1953), French philosopher and critic Roland Barthes comments on the responsibilities of "literature" beyond its immediate form or content:

It (literature) too must signify something other than its content and its

individual form, something which defines its limits and imposes it as literature.... Classical art could have no sense of being a language, for it was language, in other words it was transparent, it flowed and left no deposit, it brought ideally together a universal Spirit and decorative sign without substance or responsibility: it was a language closed by social and not natural bounds ... (Barthes:1953, 1-3) (my brackets)

In more than one sense, the distinction Barthes makes between "closed" and "open" literary languages, describes the problem this article is willing to face in relation to Browning's masterpiece. Most readings of this particular poem, both present and past, has, more or less, tended to approach it on generalizing, if polarizing bases, in service of a specific label or definition (Victorian or pre-modern), offering a particular meaning for its

**Cultural and Aesthetic Pluralism in  
Robert Browning's "The Last Ride Together".**

by

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Abstract:-

Generally known for his rich dramatic monologues, as one of the Victorian age's most prominent poets and playwrights, Robert Browning's (1812-1889) "The Last Ride Together" from his volume "Men & Women" (1855) offers a particular mixture of Modern, Victorian, Romantic and Classical dimensions that has rarely been approached in their rights as such. The poem itself represents perhaps, as British poet and critic Arthur Symons once said; "the noblest and most truly unique" of "all love poems" (Symons' 1906, 125) for its particular insight into the specific, moment by moment, tribulations of both; the interior sensations of longing and love, and the anterior practical responsibilities towards social reality at large. Critics, such as Goldfarb (1965,255), insist on an interpretation of this poem as basically sexual! Others, have swept it under the all-covering umbrella of "dramatic monologue" of which Browning is most famous (Curry:1908), (Phelps: 1915), (Drew:1970) (Martens:2011). Many more critics have commented on this poem's moral structure or message (Chapman:1969, 187), (Jones: 11891,14) or attempted to categorize it under some rather narrow generic dichotomies of male and female expressionism (Nettleship; 1868, 16,17). This article will approach "The Last Ride Together" slightly differently. Depending more on analysis of textual structure, rather than simply form, or style, it attempts to reveal the kind of aesthetic and cultural philosophy underlying variable choices of vocabulary and phraseology, while defining the sort of world-view it advocates. Understanding the Classical,