

Robert Browning (1812–1889)

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 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.
 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.

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.
'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? 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,
 The instant made eternity,—
 And heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

Summary and Analysis of The Last Ride Together by Robert Browning

“The Last Ride Together” by Robert Browning is a monologue of a rejected lover exploring the end of a love affair. The title suggests the last ride that the lover has spent with his love. However, the poet wants to convey through the narrator that rather than feeling sad about the end, he should be happy for the love that he underwent and which remains in his memory.

Summary

Stanza 1

“The Last Ride Together” by Robert Browning begins with a lover getting finally rejected by his lady-love after he waited for her for a long time. As the lover is sincere in his love, he does not have any ill-will for his lady-love. On the contrary, he tells his beloved that the uncertainty is no longer present as he knows that he would not get her love. The speaker says, his beloved’s love was the most meaningful thing in his life and after he has lost her love, his life has lost all its meaning and significance. Despite of the failure, neither the lover has any anger towards her beloved nor does he blame her for anything. He believes in the fate and that his failure was ordained by God. He has accepted that rejection and suffering was destined to him and therefore he has no one to put the blame on. In fact, he feels proud that he had the opportunity to love her and enjoy her company for a long time. He is grateful towards her for the beautiful and blissful moments they had together. For this he asks God to bless her. Though he has no hopes of ever getting her love back in his life, he requests her for two wishes. First, he should be allowed to cherish the memories of his love and the memories of the happiness during the courting period. Secondly, if she considers nothing indecent in this request, he wants to go on a last ride with her

Stanza 2

The lady is in a dilemma, not able to decide whether she should accept

request or reject it. For a moment she bows down her head as if she is deeply thinking about it. Her eyes reflected pride as well as pity. Her vain pride is in conflict with her pity for her lover. She hesitates for a moment and these brief moments seem like torture to the lover. It is a matter of life and death for him. If she accepts his request for having a last ride with him, it would mean life for him but if she refuses then it would mean death for him.

Finally, the lady accepts his request. The lover is extremely happy, it seemed like the circulation of blood in his body has been regenerated. When the lady stood confused, deciding whether or not to accept his request, the lover felt lifeless. Presently, his life and activity has been restored to normal by her favourable reply. The lover is at peace as he is going to enjoy bliss and his lover's company for another day. He hopes for the world to end that very night so that his moment of bliss becomes eternal. In that way, he would be with her always and there would be no need of despair at being rejected by his lad-love.

Stanza 3

The third stanza is about the description of the heavenly bliss which the lover experiences when his beloved lies on his bosom. He compares his experience with nature's joy and healing power. He feels like a man, who sees an evening cloud, swelling up like the sea-wave, illuminated and made beautiful by the light of the setting Sun, the Moon and the Stars. The man looks at the cloud, he is passionately drawn towards it and it seemed like the cloud was coming closer to him. In such a moment, he feels he has been transported to heaven and his body has lost its physicality. But he is afraid at the same time. He is afraid that his lover would leave him anytime and that this moment of bliss would end forever.

Stanza 4

The last ride begins. This blissful experience gives the lover soul a terrific experience. The poet compares the lover's soul to that of a crumpled paper which has been kept like that for a long time. When exposed to wind, this paper opens up, the wrinkles get smoothed and it starts fluttering in the wind like a bird. In the same way, the lover's soul has grown wrinkled due to the grief of his failure in love. But after encountering the last ride with his beloved, his soul experiences tremendous joy and feels rejuvenated.

The lover says that his hopes of getting her love are a matter of the

past. He feels that regret for the past is of no use. The lover thinks that it is now of no use to act in a different manner or express his love in different words for getting her love. This could lead her to hate him instead of loving him. At least now she does not hate him but is indifferent to his love. At least, now he has the pleasure of having the last ride with her.

Stanza 5

The lover as he is riding by his beloved's side thinks about the sorry state of humanity of the world. He consoles himself that he is not the single person to fail and suffer in life. Not all men succeed in their efforts. The landscape seems to him to have a different look. The fields and the cities through which they are passing seem to him more beautiful than before. He feels as if his own joy has illuminated the entire region on both sides.

The lover realizes that all human beings work hard to achieve their goals but only a few succeed. Like others, he too had failed but still he has his last wish fulfilled by riding with his beloved. The lover does not want to complain about his failures but enjoy the ride to the fullest in the company of his beloved.

Stanza 6

The lover as he rides with his beloved continues to think about the world. He says that brain and hand cannot go together hand in hand. Conception and execution can never be paired together. Man is not able to make pace with his actions to match with his ambitions. He plans a lot but achieves a little. The lover feels that he has at least achieved a little success by being able to ride with his beloved. He compares himself with a statesman and a soldier. A statesman works hard all his life but all his efforts are merely published in a book or as an obituary in newspapers. Similarly a soldier dies fighting for his country and is buried in the Westminster Abbey, which is his only reward after death. Sometimes an epitaph is raised in his memory but that is all.

Stanza 7

The lover then compares his lot with that of a poet. He believes that a poet's reward is too small compared with his skills. He composed sweet lyrics, thoughts of emotions of others, views that men should achieve beautiful things in life. But the reward he gets in return is very little and he dies in poverty in the prime of his life. Ordinary men cannot compose

poems. Compared to the poet, the lover considers himself luckier as he has at least achieved the consolation of riding with his lover for the time.

Stanza 8

In this stanza, the lover considers himself superior than the sculptor and the musician. A sculptor devotes long years to art and creates a beautiful statue of Venus, the Greek goddess of youth and beauty. Through his art, he expresses his ideas of beauty and grace. But the reward for his hard work is all too less. People admire his work, praise it but the moment they see a real girl, they turn away from it. The real girl may have ordinary beauty but still when the people see her, they turn away from the statue. This shows that life is greater than art. Therefore, the speaker says that in this case he is more successful than a sculptor because he can ride with his beloved and the sculptor cannot have this happiness.

The lover then talks about a musician. He considers the musician as unsuccessful as the sculptor. A musician devotes his best years to composing sweet music. But the only praise he receives is by his friends and his music is used in operas which proved to be popular. But at the same time, tunes which once popular are soon forgotten. The lover considers himself happier and more successful than the musician. He has the pleasure of enjoying the last ride with her beloved. The musician can never enjoy this happiness.

Stanza 9

In the ninth stanza, the lover states his point that none succeeds in this world, despite the best efforts, the lover goes on to say that it is not easy to know what is good for man. Since the lover is Browning's mouthpiece, he expresses the view of the poet: success in this life means failure in the life to come.

If the lover is destined to enjoy the supreme bliss in this world by getting the desired love of his beloved, he would have nothing left to hope for in the near future. He feels that he has reached his destination in this world and has achieved the garland of victory by winning the love of his beloved. He may have failed in his love but it means success in the other world. Now, when he will die he will think of reuniting with his lover after death. If a man gets perfect happiness in this world, heaven would not be attracted towards him. The lover believes that he would have the highest bliss in heaven where he will meet his beloved.

Stanza 10

During the ride, the lover was lost in his own thoughts while his beloved did not speak a single word. But it did not make any difference to him as her company is a heavenly bliss for him. Man has always looked upwards and imagined that heaven lies somewhere in the sky. This heaven is symbolical of the best that man can imagine. Similarly, the lady is his heaven and he enjoys the same happiness which others hope to enjoy in heaven.

The lover thinks that it would be a heaven on earth for him if he continues to ride with his beloved forever. He wishes that the moment should become everlasting so that they could continue to ride together forever and ever. That would indeed be heavenly bliss for him.

Analysis

Form: "The Last Ride Together" by Robert Browning is a dramatic monologue. In a dramatic monologue, a single person not the poet; speaks out a speech that makes up the whole of the poem. The first-person speaker in the poem is the mouthpiece of the poet, Robert Browning but not the poet himself. This is evident from the phrases like I said, I know, my whole heart I claim, my mistress, my last thought, I miss, I alone, I hoped, I gave my youth and I sign'd.

Structure: The poem comprises of ten stanzas, each consisting of eleven lines each. The poem follows the rhyming pattern aabbcddeec.

Poetical Devices

The poet has used a number of poetical devices in his poem "The Last Ride Together", they are as follows:

Rhetorical Questions: A Rhetorical question is one which answers itself. Some of the rhetorical in the poem are as follows,

*What need to strive with a life awry?

Here, the lover says there is no point in grieving over a life which has been a failure.

* Might she loved me?

The lover wants to say that the hope of getting her love has become a matter of the past.

Metaphor

Example of metaphor in “The Last Ride Together” by Robert Browning

“...My soul/ Smooth’d itself out, a long-cramp’d scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.”

Personification

“When pity would be softening though” is an example of personification in the poem, “The Last Ride Together.”

Enjambment

Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause. Examples of enjambment in the poem are as follows:

*Take back the hope you gave,- I claim
Only a memory of the same,
*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.

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