

Hope Amidst Hopelessness: A Comparative Analysis of *The Last Ride Together* and *Ode to Autumn*

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Abstract

This research paper deals with the issue of hope and hopelessness. It is a comparative analysis of the two prominent writers of Romantic and Victorian period. The Victorian age is considered as a reaction to the Romantic era. The Romantic elements in a poem contain emotion and imagination but the Victorian poetry is known for realism. The endeavor of this comparative analysis is to find common elements in two distinct writers of different eras. Two poems, The Last Ride Together and Ode to Autumn have been compared. It has been observed that both of them try to experience a type of success in failure, pleasure in adversity.

John Keats is one of the greatest poets of Romantic era. He was born in London on 31 October in 1795. He died an early death at the age of 25. In spite of his early death he has given rich literature which is enough to make him a literary luminary in the world of English literature. He is best known for his odes in which *Ode to Nightingale*, *Ode to Autumn*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode on Melancholy* are counted among his prominent works. Rohrbach considers him “the dreamer who evaded topical issues and whose well-wrought productions aspired to a realm of timeless beauty”(229). He is not only a poet of senses but he is also a poet who propounds a philosophy for the world to lead their life in the realm of art and beauty by making it permanent in the work of art.

Robert Browning was born on 7 May 1812. He died in 1889. He belongs to the Victoria age which is known as an age of compromise. He is best known for his dramatic monologues. He tried his hand at writing dramas but he did not get much success in the field of drama. *My Last Duchess*, *Andrea Del Sarto*, *The Last Ride Together*, *The Ring and the Book*, *Sordello* are his notable works. Henry E. Shepherd gives his observation about the literary stature of Robert Browning in his article:

It is beyond the scope of an ordinary article to dwell in detail upon the varied and versatile productions of ROBERT BROWNING. Any one of his more elaborate achievements-such as "The Ring and The Book "-might exhaust the possibilities of the rarest criticism. (31)

John Keats and Shakespeare have been compared by many critics on account of one quality that is negative capability. Negative capability means to be in mysteries and doubts without reaching after fact and reason (Comfort 60). Keats's odes are best example of negative capability. However it depends on the mood of a poet to communicate his idea in his or her way. John Keats have shown this trait of negative capability which makes his poetry philosophical as well as sensual. In *Ode to Autumn*, written by John Keats he seems to be in doubt when he says:

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music to-- (322)

The mood of the poem in first line is different where he longs for songs of spring. However in the next line he says that Autumn season is also good. He does not feel hopeless in the autumn season. He tries to find the songs of spring even then he says that autumn has its own music. This poem by John Keats shows typical qualities of Romanticism that is, emotional exuberance, haunting melody, pictorial charm. The author wants to experience optimism amidst the negativity of the autumn season. This is in a way an answer to those critics who call John Keats a poet of escape. He wants to be in the autumn season and enjoy its beauties. He personifies the autumn season and creates a word picture which portrays this season in the light of hope, beauty, and carelessness. These lines are written using a negative question with a positive impact.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; (322)

So the poet is not sad; he does not wait for summer. He does not think that this time will be over and summer will come. He enjoys the present he listens to the music of autumn. Robert Browning belongs to the Victorian period where there is a conflict between faith and reason. Streak of pessimism is a rampant in the poetry of Victorian age. Robert Browning always looks at the positive aspect of the life. He believes in God

and feels that god will set everything right. In his masterpiece *The Last Ride Together* the protagonist gives various examples to press home his idea that flight is better than many.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds? (lines 45-46)

He opines that he is not the only one who has to suffer failure in his endeavours. There are many like him, who remain unsuccessful. This way he wants to give the lesson of hope. He feels fortunate that in spite of he feels fortunate that in spite of facing rejection from his beloved, he is given an opportunity to have a last ride with his beloved. He wants to live this moment as much as possible. He also creates word pictures like John Keats but they do not have pictorial beauty of John Keats yet they have artistic representation of stark realism and logic which is the trait of Browning's poetry.

There are two prevalent misconception of the nature of Browning's optimism, one simple, the other sophisticated no time need be wasted on the crude misjudgment which ascribes to Browning himself opinions which he has put into mouth of his characters for dramatic purposes. (Philip 29)

Browning is also known for his obscurity but here Keats has made this poem a bit obscure by using the negative capability. This is a common element in both the poems. One element is similar in both the poems that is optimism. Like Keats, Browning also uses the imagery of nature to press home his idea.

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—(Lines 22-25)

These lines of poem show him in an optimistic mood still in the darkness of failure. Robert Browning does not want to feel hopeless. He is happy that his lot is better than others to attain nothing after lot of struggle. Browning gives his philosophy of observing success in a fiasco. He compares his life with a sculptor, a statesman, a soldier etc. who devote their life for one cause and at the end they achieve very less. Lover in *The Last Ride Together* he feels that he has achieved much more than that. He is optimistic to the extent that he sees the possibility of the end of the world at the time of his ride which will make this ride

eternal. Many authors talk about eternal damnation but Robert Browning talks about eternal pleasure even in the case of death. However he is not doubtful like John Keats who is also feeling optimistic in autumn.

It is noticeable that both the poets belong to different eras in terms of literature but they are showing a similarity in this context. Whether it is Victorian Era or Romantic era the human emotions have similar responses in various situations. Although it varies from individual to individual but still they show similarity at certain levels. Keats is hopeful in autumn and does not wait for the spring season. He is optimistic in his own way as his mistress has rejected his love but she is still allowing him to have a last ride with him. Both the authors seem to finding hope amidst hopelessness in their own way. Literature reflects the mindset of the people of that time. These writers have given the concept of faith in adverse circumstances. It means that one should not lose hope as every cloud has a silver lining.

Work Cited

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