

**A LOVELESS WIFE'S EXTRA-MARITAL RELATIONSHIP: A STUDY OF
BROWNING'S *ANDREA DEL SARTO***

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ABSTRACT

Browning was born in Camberwell on the outskirts of London. He is famous for dramatic monologues. This study primarily focused on extra marital relationship in his poem *Andrea Del Sarto*, Andrea is one of the most miserable husbands. He has not even an iota of self-respect. He has become his wife Lucrezia's abject slave. Andrea's infatuation with Lucrezia is such that Madonna is painted by him in the semblance of Lucrezia. Andrea as a painter is that, though technically flawless, he has no spiritual fire. As a result, his paintings are dead. They are uninspiring and uninspired. Lucrezia is wantonness incarnate. Though her husband is standing by her side, she neglects him and is raving to join her lover in the garden. Andrea does not have the courage to divorce this monster of a wife. Instead, he asks her pathetically what her lover has got to attract her irresistibly towards himself. Moreover, Lucrezia's lover's gambling debts so that, at least out of gratitude, she will love him. But she merely smiles in a non-committal manner.

KEYWORDS: betray, painter, gambling, Rafael, whistle, etc....

INTRODUCTION

Browning was born in Camberwell on the outskirts of London. His father, though a clerk in the Bank of England, had the tastes of a scholar and an artist. His mother, daughter of a German shipowner, was interested in music. Browning might have inherited his fondness for music from his mother. His deep love for music is seen in poems like *Abt Vogler* and *A Toccata for Galuppi's*. Being coached by private tutors, his schooling was highly desultory.

Browning's early works were influenced by Shelley. His first major poem *Pauline* (1833) is a half-dramatic study of his spiritual life. It is reminiscent of Shelley's *Alastor*. After a trip to Russia and Italy, Browning published *Paracelsus* (1835). This is also a spiritual study. Browning's greatest artistic skills are i) subtle analyses of motives and counter-motives ii) pleading of causes iii) beauty of language and iv) noble thoughts. These are all found in the early works. At the same time, they betray his obscure, convoluted style and tendency to pursue the secondary suggestions of a theme. His first drama *Strafford* (1837) and *Sordello* are marred by extreme obscurity.

Browning has created a vast variety of characters, claiming parity with Shakespeare in this respect. Painters, poets, musicians, scholars, mystics, ecclesiastics and lovers are prominent among his bizarre creations. Caliban in Caliban upon Setebos is a half-human monster, grotesquely groping after an exploration of the universe.

Browning is famous for dramatic monologues. In these poems, a dramatic moment is chosen and the struggle between good and evil is described. What is of importance is that the narrator's strengths and weaknesses stand exposed. *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *A Grammarian's Funeral* and *My Last Duchess* are some of Browning's most famous dramatic monologues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chakravarthi states "He (Andrea) loves Lucrezia more than anything in the world. She is a widow actually. She works as model for his pictures before the marriage and after marriage too. He loves her so much that while he is working at Francis I..., he wants her smile to enlighten his place. He does every attempt not to lose Lucrezia."

Emma rightly says "he (Andrea) tries to put most of the blame for his life onto his wife. He thinks that she is the one that has been holding him back Lucrezia as rising together through the ranks of the art world and that if she with all of her perfections of physical beauty".

"The poem projects how materialism can divert the person from morality and spiritual path and is seen in the character of Andrea who got diverted in his life as well" (Getsetnotes).

METHOD

The present study investigated literary texts of Brownings' *Andrea Del Sarto*. The text was selected to represent different aspects and narratives of loveless wife.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Andrea is one of the most miserable husbands drawn by Browning. He has not even an iota of self-respect. He has become his wife Lucrezia's abject slave, conniving at her extra-marital goings-on. Andrea's infatuation with Lucrezia is such that Madonna is painted by him in the semblance of Lucrezia. Emma rightly says "he tries to put most of the blame for his life onto his wife. He thinks that she is the one that has been holding him back Lucrezia as rising together through the ranks of the art world and that if she with all of her perfections of physical beauty". But he is not ashamed of his lapse whose hopes to win over her love through this concession. But no! She is least inclined towards him.

Another limitation of Andrea as a painter is that, though technically flawless, he has no spiritual fire. As a result, his paintings are dead. They are uninspiring and uninspired. His rival Rafael's drawings are technically defective. The hand in one of his paintings is wrongly positioned. Andrea easily corrects it. But he admits that he is incapable of Rafael's spiritual glow. He is aware of his failings. He knows that his thinking drops downward whereas Rafael's soars heavenward. He blames himself for not attempting to reach what is beyond his grasp.

Andrea abjectly appealing to his wife Lucrezia to sit by his side and be with him not only physically but also mentally and spiritually like a loving married couple. Unfortunately, Lucrezia sits by Andrea's side and even allows him to clasp her hand but her mind is not with Andrea. It is with her lover who is whistling for her in the garden. "And look a half hour forth on Fiesole,/ Both of one mind, as married people use". (15-16, ADS)

After Andrea's persistent appeal, Lucrezia sits by his side. She is only physically close, mentally she is with her lover who is waiting for her in the garden. Andrea imagines painting a picture of himself as a groom and Lucrezia as his newly married bride. He will represent her as very proud of her artist husband and himself as a young man hopeful of achieving prominence as an artist. "The poem projects how materialism can divert the person from morality and spiritual path and is seen in the character of Andrea who got diverted in his life as well" (Getsetnotes).

A great artist remains unaffected by praise or blame. He sticks to his viewpoint, disregarding what others might say. Such disinterestedness is laudable. Andrea is also immune to others' comments. Some critics hold that Andrea's picture of the mountain Morello is accurate. Others deprecate his using colours inartistically. Andrea is neither elated nor depressed by these remarks. It shows not his disinterestedness but his deadness, his incapacity to feel anything. He is emotionally and spiritually atrophied.

Lucrezia is wantonness incarnate. Though her husband is standing by her side, she neglects him and is raving to join her lover in the garden. Andrea does not have the courage to divorce this monster of a wife. Instead, he asks her pathetically what her lover has got to attract her irresistibly towards himself. He remembers his parents who died poor and uncared for. He remembers how he embezzled King Francis's gold in order to build a house for his unloving wife. At night the bricks shine as though they are made of the gold that he had stolen from King Francis. His conscience has woken up at last. It pricks and prods him. He realizes that the mills of God grind surely though slowly.

Lucrezia, wife of Andrea, is called by her lover whistling to her from the garden. At the same time, Andrea pressurizes her to sit with him for a while, allowing him to hold her hand and gaze at her face. It is at this critical juncture that the poem opens. The rest of the poem shows Andrea telling her of the many sacrifices that he has made for her sake and his final acceptance of her extra-marital connexion with her gambler-lover.

Andrea's wife Lucrezia is unfaithful to him. Still, Andrea surrenders to her. He tells her that he will undergo any indignity for her sake. Lucrezia's lover is a gambler. He has to clear a lot of gaming debt. He has a wealthy friend. Lucrezia's lover has suggested to her that money can be gained by painting for him the kind of pictures he likes within the date fixed by him and receive from him whatever amount of money he gives and not demand a larger price for the painting. Andrea says that he will fulfil all these conditions and draw pictures just to clear Lucrezia's lover's gaming debts and thereby win her love. Andrea has become a mean slave of Lucrezia. "Treat his own subject after his own way, / Fix his own time, accept too his own price" (6-7, ADS).

After much beseeching by Andrea, Lucrezia relents and sits by his side and even allows him to clasp her hand. Andrea is thrilled by the soft feel of her hand. In contrast, his hand is rough and hairy. He would like her to recline her face on his hairy chest. She is not willing to do so. So Andrea contents himself imagining such an act. Her soft hand curled inside his hairy hand is a substitute for her leaning on his chest. "Your soft hand is a woman of itself,/ And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside". (21-22, ADS)

After much appeal by Andrea, is struck by the sinuous waves on her waist. He compares it to the way a snake curls its body fold on fold. He calls her a serpentine beauty. Chakravarthi correctly views that "it seems that as Samson has

fallen into the beauty trap of Delilah, Andrea has fallen into the trap of beauty of Lucrezia and failed Lucrezia his artistic spirit." The image calls to our mind the sinister role played by Satan in the shape of a serpent, corrupting Eve. Lucrezia plays a similar role, corrupting all the men she comes into contact with. "My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!" (26, ADS)

Andrea draws attention to Lucrezia's promiscuity. In this connexion he describes her as his everybody's moon. She is his wife. Instead of confining herself to him, she flirts with all the men she comes across. In this respect she is like the moon which shines on everybody. Andrea does not have the courage to openly call her a harlot. He indirectly refers to her whorishness by calling her everybody's moon. ".....my moon, my everybody's moon". (29, ADS)

But his dream has not come true. Lucrezia is not proud of him and he is not hopeful of rising to eminence as an artist. So his imaginary picture is not bright. Instead, it is pervaded by a dull greyness and is passionless like the town of Fiesole in the gloomy evening. "A common greyness silvers everything, / All in a twilight...My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down.... To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole". (36-40, ADS)

With his wife Lucrezia reluctantly seated by his side, Andrea looks out through the window at the shades of night falling. There is the dullness of autumn everywhere. The last clergyman, tired out, is slowly walking out of the cloister. The trees, pruned and leafless, are huddled inside the cloister. Even the church-bell is not ringing clangorously. It is merely clinking softly. There is no passion anywhere. It reflects Andrea's dullness and passionlessness. "And autumn grows, autumn in everything". (45, ADS)

Andrea is aware of his wife Lucrezia's whorishness. Yet, he cannot cut himself off her. He feels that God has inextricably tied him to Lucrezia, Even if he wants he cannot break his bondage. For, it is a bond imposed on him by God. Andrea lacks the will to break away from the unfaithful Lucrezia. But he puts the blame on God. He talks like a fatalist. "Love, we are in God's hand..... So free we seem, so fettered fast we are". (49-51, ADS)

Andrea is here comparing and contrasting himself with others. He paints effortlessly. "He is a man who has failed both in art and life as well" (Getsetnotes). He does not need any previous outlining or pre-planning. He can draw a picture straightaway. But other painters labour, strive, agonize, only to fail ultimately.

The very ease of which Andrea is very proud is also his weak point. He has become incapable of striving after unattainable effects. He achieves limited goals and leaves it at that. "No sketches first, no studies, that's long past-/I do what many dream of, all their lives. Dream? And fail in doing. Strive to do, and agonize to do" (68-70, ADS)

Andrea contrasts his technical excellence with the technical imperfection of painters like Rafael. Andrea is technically faultless. He aims at little things and easily attains them. Rafael tries to achieve superlative effects. He fails but there is something glorious in his failure. "He was also a failure in life as his wife committed infidelity and fallen for a cousin where he could not get in terms with his cheating wife as well" (Getsetnotes). It is blessed by God. God encourages lesser artists to strive to reach higher and higher. Hence, Rafael's 'less' is more valuable than Andrea's 'more'. "Well, less is more, Lucrezia! I am judged./There burns a truer light of God in them". (79-78, ADS)

CONCLUSION

Andrea's craze for Lucrezia remains unchanged. The poem begins with his readiness to overwork so that he can give more to Lucrezia in order to win her. At the end of the poem also we see his resolve to strain himself to earn more to clear Lucrezia's lover's gaming debts so that, at least out of gratitude, she will love him. But she merely smiles in a non-committal manner. The poem ends with Andrea asking her unashamedly to go to her lover who is impatiently whistling and waiting for her in the garden. Andrea remains Lucrezia's unabashed slave from beginning to end.

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