

## Introduction to the poem "The Last Ride Together":

"The Last Ride Together" is a poem by Robert Browning, first published in 1855. It tells the story of a man who has been hopelessly in love with a woman for years, but has never been able to win her affections. Finally, he is given the opportunity to spend one last evening with her, and he takes her on a horse ride through the countryside. The poem explores themes of love, longing, and the bittersweet nature of endings.

## Introduction to the poet Robert Browning:

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was an English poet and playwright, best known for his dramatic monologues that explored the human psyche and the complexities of human relationships. Born in Camberwell, London, Browning was the son of a wealthy clerk in the Bank of England. He was educated privately, studying Greek, Latin, and literature, and began writing poetry at a young age.

Browning's early work was influenced by Romantic poets such as Shelley and Keats, but he later developed his own unique style, characterized by his use of dramatic monologue, complex syntax, and often obscure references. He first achieved critical success with the publication of "Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession" in 1833, and went on to write many other notable works, including "Sordello," "Men and Women," and "The Ring and the Book."

Browning's personal life was also marked by drama, as he eloped with fellow poet Elizabeth Barrett in 1846 and spent much of his life living abroad in Italy. Despite his success as a writer, he was often criticized for his unconventional style and subject matter. However, his work has since been recognized as a major influence on modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and continues to be studied and celebrated today.

## The setting of the poem

"The Last Ride Together" by Robert Browning is primarily outdoors in the countryside. The speaker and the woman he loves take a horse ride together through various landscapes, including hills, valleys, and forests. The time period of the poem is not explicitly stated, but it is likely set in the 19th century, which is when Browning was writing. The setting of the poem serves to create a romantic and idyllic atmosphere, as the natural beauty of the countryside is intertwined with the emotional landscape of the speaker's final moments with his beloved.

## Literary devices

**Repetition:** The phrase “ride together” is repeated multiple times throughout the poem, emphasizing the idea of companionship and unity between the speaker and his mistress.

**Imagery:** Browning uses vivid imagery throughout the poem, such as the description of a “western cloud / All billowy-bosom’d, over-bow’d / By many benedictions—sun’s / And moon’s and evening-star’s at once—” to create a sense of wonder and awe.

**Personification:** The speaker personifies his own soul when he says that it “Smooth’d itself out, a long-cramp’d scroll / Freshening and fluttering in the wind.”

**Rhetorical question:** The speaker poses rhetorical questions, such as “What does it all mean, poet?” and “What if heaven be that, fair and strong,” to explore deeper philosophical ideas.

**Irony:** The speaker ironically compares his own riding to the accomplishments of a statesman or soldier, suggesting that his personal experiences are just as significant as those of historical figures.

**Allusion:** The mention of the “Abbey-stones” alludes to the practice of engraving names on tombstones in Westminster Abbey, suggesting the idea of mortality and the legacy one leaves behind.

**Enjambment:** The use of enjambment, or the continuation of a sentence from one line to the next, creates a sense of fluidity and movement throughout the poem.

## Historical context

Robert Browning’s poem “The Last Ride Together” was published in 1855 as part of his collection of poems titled “Men and Women.” The poem was written during the Victorian era, a period in British history marked by Queen Victoria’s reign from 1837 to 1901.

The Victorian era was characterized by significant social, economic, and political changes, including the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and the expansion of the British Empire. It was also a time of strict social norms and morality, where the upper class was expected to adhere to rigid codes of conduct, and women were relegated to traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Browning’s poem reflects some of these societal norms and expectations, particularly in its portrayal of the male speaker’s desire for his mistress, who is already engaged to another man. The poem explores themes of love, desire, and mortality, which were prevalent in Victorian literature and art.

Additionally, Browning was writing during a time of significant literary movement, known as the Victorian literary period. This period saw the rise of novelists like Charles Dickens, the Bronte sisters, and Thomas Hardy, who wrote about social issues and class struggles in their works. Browning was part of a group of poets known as the “Brownings,” which included his wife

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who were known for their dramatic monologues and exploration of human psychology.

One historical reference in the poem is the mention of the Abbey-stones, which refers to Westminster Abbey in London, a famous site of British monarchs' burials and memorials. The line "They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones" suggests the fleeting nature of fame and how even the most renowned figures in history will eventually be forgotten.

### Theme of the poem

One of the themes of Robert Browning's poem "The Last Ride Together" is the idea of accepting one's fate and finding contentment in the present moment. The speaker has accepted that his love interest will not reciprocate his feelings, but instead of dwelling on what could have been, he decides to spend one last moment with her and enjoy the present. This acceptance and contentment in the moment can be seen in lines such as "What need to strive with a life awry?" and "Sing, riding 's a joy! For me, I ride." Another related theme is the idea that life is fleeting and that we should embrace the present because we never know what the future may hold. This is reflected in the line "Who knows but the world may end to-night?" and the final stanza where the speaker muses on the possibility of spending eternity riding with his love interest.