



**كلية : الآداب**

**القسم او الفرع : اللغة الإنجليزية**

**المرحلة: الرابعة**

**الفصل الدراسي: الاول**

**أستاذ المادة : م.م. استبرق رافع غركان**

**اسم المادة باللغة العربية : شعر**

**اسم المادة باللغة الإنجليزية : Poetry**

## Introduction to the Victorian Poetry

Victorian poetry refers to the verses composed during the reign of Queen Victoria in English (1837-1901). This period was marked by tremendous cultural upheaval.

There were a drastic change and development in the form of literature, art and music. Although Victorian Poetry was quite different from that of [the preceding era](#), yet there were some similarities that existed between the two periods.

1. Questioning the Established Rule of Church
2. Interest in myths and mysteries.
3. Scepticism and Doubtfulness.

Characteristics

Realism

The Victorian Poetry was quite realistic in nature and quite less idealised as compared to the Romantic Poets who were idealists and believed in *Art for the Art Sake*. Nature, that was everything for the Romantics lost that idealised position in the Victorian era and became just a source of leisure and inspiration for the poets.

Focus on Masses

Romantic Poetry mainly focused on rural and rustic life. It is no way related to city life. On the other hand, Victorian poets used language as well as themes common to city life and thus wrote about the masses and for the masses.

Pessimism

As already discussed, Victorians were quite realistic and thus were more concerned about the reality rather than the ideal world. Due to the industrial revolution and advancement in science and technology, there was a drastic increase in the city population that gave rise to slums, poverty, unemployment, corruption diseases, deaths etc.

Thus, Victorian Poetry which focused on the pains and sufferings of commoners had a note.

## Science and Technology

The advancement in science and inventions was welcomed by the Victorian poets. It made them believe that a man can find all solutions to his problems and sufferings. They made their readers believe that they should use science for their betterment.

## Questioning to God

It was an important feature of Victorian poetry. The development of empirical science, rationalism and radicalism led the people to give up religious thoughts and be more sceptic. Moreover, corruption in the Church, defining the morality of Priests, etc also led institutions.

## Sense of Responsibility

The Romantics believed in “return in nature”. A number of the Romantics did not like the city life and instead of giving voice to the victims of industrialisation, they left the city life. On the other hand, Victoria poets took the responsibility of social reform and gave voice to the commoners by living with them.

## Morality

Though morality saw a steep decline in the [Victorian Era](#), a number of poets tried to retain it to be honest and noble.

## Interest in Medieval Myths & Folklore

The [Victorians](#) showed great favour towards Medieval Literature. They loved mythical and chivalrous anecdotes of Medieval Knights, Courtly Love etc. This interest is on contrary to the of Romantics as the latter loved classical myths and legends.

## Use of Sensory Devices & Imagery

The poets of the preceding era used imagery vividly. However, the Victorians also used sensory devices to describe the abstract scenes of chaos between Religion and Science.

## Sentimentality

The Victorians wrote about artistic creations thus giving way to deeper imaginations.

## محتوى المحاضرة الثانية

### The Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Part 1)

More than any other Victorian-era writer, Tennyson has seemed the embodiment of his age, both to his contemporaries and to modern readers. In his own day he was said to be—with Queen Victoria and Prime Minister William Gladstone—one of the three most famous living persons, a reputation no other poet writing in English has ever had. As official poetic spokesman for the reign of Victoria, he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world with which he felt little in common, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England; the conflict between what he thought of as his duty to society and his allegiance to the eternal beauty of nature seems peculiarly Victorian. Even his most severe critics have always recognized his lyric gift for sound and cadence, a gift probably unequaled in the history of English poetry.

The lurid history of Tennyson's family is interesting in itself, but some knowledge of it is also essential for understanding the recurrence in his poetry of themes of madness, murder, avarice, miserliness, social climbing, marriages arranged for profit instead of love, and estrangements between families and friends.

Alfred Tennyson was born in the depths of Lincolnshire, the 4th son of the 12 children of the rector of Somersby, George Clayton Tennyson, a cultivated but embittered clergyman who took out his disappointment on his wife Elizabeth and his brood of children—on at least one occasion threatening to kill Alfred's elder brother Frederick. The rector had been pushed into the church by his own father, also named George, a rich and ambitious country solicitor intent on founding a great family dynasty that would rise above their modest origins into a place among the English aristocracy. Old Mr. Tennyson, aware that his eldest son, the rector, was unpromising material for the family struggle upward, made his second son, his favorite child, his chief heir. Tennyson's father, who had a strong streak of mental instability, reacted to his virtual disinheritance by taking to drink and drugs, making the

home atmosphere so sour that the family spoke of the “black blood” of the Tennysons.

Part of the family heritage was a strain of epilepsy, a disease then thought to be brought on by sexual excess and therefore shameful. One of Tennyson’s brothers was confined to an insane asylum most of his life, another had recurrent bouts of addiction to drugs, a third had to be put into a mental home because of his alcoholism, another was intermittently confined and died relatively young. Of the rest of the 11 children who reached maturity, all had at least one severe mental breakdown. During the first half of his life Alfred thought that he had inherited epilepsy from his father and that it was responsible for the trances into which he occasionally fell until he was well over 40 years old.

It was in part to escape from the unhappy environment of Somersby rectory that Alfred began writing poetry long before he was sent to school, as did most of his talented brothers and sisters. All his life he used writing as a way of taking his mind from his troubles. One aspect of his method of composition was set, too, while he was still a boy: he would make up phrases or discrete lines as he walked, and store them in his memory until he had a proper setting for them. As this practice suggests, his primary consideration was more often rhythm and language than discursive meaning.

## محتوى المحاضرة الثالثة

### The Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Part 2)

When he was not quite 18 his first volume of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), was published. Alfred Tennyson wrote the major part of the volume, although it also contained poems by his two elder brothers, Frederick and Charles. It is a remarkable book for so young a poet, displaying great virtuosity of versification and the prodigality of imagery that was to mark his later works; but it is also derivative in its ideas, many of which came from his reading in his father’s library. Most of Tennyson’s early education was under the direction of his father, although he spent nearly four unhappy years at a nearby grammar school. His departure in 1827 to join his elder brothers at Trinity College, Cambridge, was due more to a desire to escape from Somersby than to a desire to undertake serious academic work. At Trinity he was living for the first time among young men of his own age

who knew little of the problems that had beset him for so long; he was delighted to make new friends; he was extraordinarily handsome, intelligent, humorous, and gifted at impersonation; and soon he was at the center of an admiring group of young men interested in poetry and conversation. It was probably the happiest period of his life.

In part it was the urging of his friends, in part the insistence of his father that led the normally indolent Tennyson to retailor an old poem on the subject of Armageddon and submit it in the competition for the chancellor's gold medal for poetry; the announced subject was Timbuctoo. Tennyson's "Timbuctoo" is a strange poem, as the process of its creation would suggest. He uses the legendary city for a consideration of the relative validity of imagination and objective reality; Timbuctoo takes its magic from the mind of man, but it can turn to dust at the touch of the mundane. It is far from a successful poem, but it shows how deeply engaged its author was with the Romantic conception of poetry. Whatever its shortcomings, it won the chancellor's prize in the summer of 1829.

Probably more important than its success in the competition was the fact that the submission of the poem brought Tennyson into contact with the Trinity undergraduate usually regarded as the most brilliant man of his Cambridge generation, Arthur Henry Hallam.

Also in 1829 both Hallam and Tennyson became members of the secret society known as the Apostles, a group of roughly a dozen undergraduates who were usually regarded as the elite of the entire university. Tennyson's name has ever since been linked with the society, but the truth is that he dropped out of it after only a few meetings, although he retained his closeness with the other members and might even be said to have remained the poetic center of the group. The affection and acceptance he felt from his friends brought both a new warmth to Tennyson's personality and an increasing sensuousness to the poetry he was constantly writing when he was supposed to be devoting his time to his studies.

Hallam, too, wrote poetry, and the two friends planned on having their work published together; but at the last moment Hallam's father, perhaps worried by some lyrics Arthur had written to a young lady with whom he had been in love, forbade him to include his poems. *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* appeared in June 1830. The standard of the poems in the volume is uneven, and it has the self-centered, introspective quality that one might expect of the work of a 20-year-old; but scattered among the other poems that would be forgotten if they had been written by someone else are several fine ones such as "The Kraken," "Ode to Memory," and—above all—"Mariana," which is the first of Tennyson's works to demonstrate fully his brilliant use of objects and landscapes to convey a state of strong

emotion. That poem alone would be enough to justify the entire volume. The reviews appeared slowly, but they were generally favorable.

The friendship between the young men was knotted even more tightly when Hallam fell in love with Tennyson's younger sister, Emily, on a visit to Somersby. Since they were both so young, there was no chance of their marrying for some time, and meanwhile Hallam had to finish his undergraduate years at Trinity. All the Tennyson brothers and sisters, as well as their mother, seem to have taken instantly to Hallam, but he and Emily prudently said nothing of their love to either of their fathers. Dr. Tennyson was absent on the Continent most of the time, sent there by his father and his brother in the hope that he might get over his drinking and manage Somersby parish sensibly.

In the summer of 1830 Tennyson and Hallam were involved in a harebrained scheme to take money and secret messages to revolutionaries plotting the overthrow of the Spanish king. Tennyson's political enthusiasm was considerably cooler than Hallam's, but he was glad to make his first trip abroad. They went through France to the Pyrenees, meeting the revolutionaries at the Spanish border. Even Hallam's idealistic fervor scarcely survived the disillusionment of realizing that the men they met were animated by motives as selfish as those of the royalist party against whom they were rebelling. Nonetheless, in the Pyrenees Tennyson marked out a new dimension of the metaphorical landscape that had already shown itself in "Mariana," and for the rest of his life the mountains remained as a model for the classical scenery that so often formed the backdrop of his poetry. The Pyrenees generated such marvelous poems as "Oenone," which he began writing there; "The Lotos-Eaters," which was inspired by a waterfall in the mountains; and "The Eagle," which was born from the sight of the great birds circling above them as they climbed in the rocks. Above all, the little village of Cauteretz and the valley in which it lay remained more emotionally charged for Tennyson than any other place on earth. He came again and again to walk in the valley, and it provided him with imagery until his death more than 60 years later.

Early the following year Tennyson had to leave Cambridge because of the death of his father. Dr. Tennyson had totally deteriorated mentally and physically, and he left little but debts to his family, although he had enjoyed a good income and a large allowance from his father. Tennyson's grandfather naturally felt that it was hardly worth his while to keep Alfred and his two elder brothers at Cambridge when it was only too apparent that they were profiting little from their studies and showed no promise of ever being able to support themselves. The allowance he gave the family was generous enough, but it was not intended to support three idle grandsons at the university. Worse still, neither he nor Dr. Tennyson's brother Charles, who was now clearly marked out as the heir to his fortune,

attended the rector's funeral, making the division in the family even more apparent. The widow and her 11 children were so improvident that they seemed incapable of living on the allowance, and they were certainly not able to support themselves otherwise.

This began a very bitter period of Tennyson's life. An annual gift of £100 from an aunt allowed him to live in a modest manner, but he refused his grandfather's offer to help him find a place in the church if he would be ordained. Tennyson said then, as he said all his life, that poetry was to be his career, however bleak the prospect of his ever earning a living. His third volume of poetry was published at the end of 1832, although the title page was dated 1833.

## محتوى المحاضرة الرابعة

### The Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Part 3)

The 1832 *Poems* was a great step forward poetically and included the first versions of some of Tennyson's greatest works, such as "The Lady of Shalott," "The Palace of Art," "A Dream of Fair Women," "The Hesperides," and three wonderful poems conceived in the Pyrenees, "Oenone," "The Lotos-Eaters," and "Mariana in the South." The volume is notable for its consideration of the opposed attractions of isolated poetic creativity and social involvement; the former usually turns out to be the more attractive course, since it reflected Tennyson's own concerns, but the poems demonstrate as well his feeling of estrangement in being cut off from his contemporaries by the demands of his art.

The reviews of the volume were almost universally damning. One of the worst was written by Edward Bulwer (later Bulwer-Lytton), who was a friend of Tennyson's uncle Charles. The most vicious review, however, was written for the *Quarterly Review* by John Wilson Croker, who was proud that his brutal notice of "Endymion" years before was said to have been one of the chief causes of the death of Keats. Croker numbered Tennyson among the Cockney poets who imitated Keats, and he made veiled insinuations about the lack of masculinity of both Tennyson and his poems. Tennyson, who was abnormally thin-skinned about criticism, found some comfort in the steady affection and support of Hallam and the other Apostles.



Hallam and Emily Tennyson had by then made their engagement public knowledge, but they saw no way of marrying for a long time: the senior Hallam refused to increase his son's allowance sufficiently to support both of them; and when Arthur wrote to Emily's grandfather, he was answered in the third person with the indication that old Mr. Tennyson had no intention of giving them any more money. By the summer of 1833, Hallam's father had somewhat grudgingly accepted the engagement, but still without offering further financial help. The protracted unhappiness of both Arthur and Emily rubbed off on the whole Tennyson family.

That autumn, in what was meant as a gesture of gratitude and reconciliation to his father, Arthur Hallam accompanied him to the Continent. In Vienna Arthur died suddenly of apoplexy resulting from a congenital malformation of the brain. Emily Tennyson fell ill for nearly a year; the effects of Hallam's death were less apparent externally in Alfred but were perhaps even more catastrophic than for his sister.

The combination of the deaths of his father and his best friend, the brutal reviews of his poetry, his conviction that both he and his family were in desperate poverty, his feelings of isolation in the depths of the country, and his ill-concealed fears that he might become a victim of epilepsy, madness, alcohol, and drugs, as others in his family had, or even that he might die like Hallam, was more than enough to upset the always fragile balance of Tennyson's emotions. "I suffered what seemed to me to shatter all my life so that I desired to die rather than to live," he said of that period. For a time he determined to leave England, and for 10 years he refused to have any of his poetry published, since he was convinced that the world had no place for it.

Although he was adamant about not having it published, Tennyson continued to write poetry; and he did so even more single-mindedly than before. Hallam's death nearly crushed him, but it also provided the stimulus for a great outburst of some of the finest poems he ever wrote, many of them connected overtly or implicitly with the loss of his friend. "Ulysses," "Morte d'Arthur," "Tithonus," "Tiresias," "Break, break, break," and "Oh! that 'twere possible" all owe their inception to the passion of grief he felt but carefully hid from his intimates. Most important was the group of unlinked poems he began writing about Hallam's death; the first of these "elegies," written in four-line stanzas of iambic

tetrameter, was begun within two or three days of his hearing the news of Hallam's death. He continued to write them for 17 years before collecting them to form what is perhaps the greatest of Victorian poems, *In Memoriam* (1850).

The death of his grandfather in 1835 confirmed Tennyson's fear of poverty, for the larger part of Mr. Tennyson's fortune went to Alfred's uncle Charles, who promptly changed his name to Tennyson d'Eyncourt and set about rebuilding his father's house into a grand Romantic castle, with the expectation of receiving a peerage to cap the family's climb to eminence. His hopes were never realized, but his great house, Bayons Manor, became a model for the home of the vulgar, nouveau riche characters in many of Tennyson's narrative poems, such as *Maud* (1855). Charles Tennyson d'Eyncourt's inheritance was the final wedge driving the two branches of the family apart; he and his nephew were never reconciled, but Alfred's dislike of him was probably even more influential than admiration would have been in keeping Charles as an immediate influence in so much of Alfred's poetry.

## محتوى المحاضرة الخامسة

### The Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Part 3)

The details of Tennyson's romantic attachments in the years after Hallam's death are unclear, but he apparently had at least a flirtation with Rosa Baring, the pretty young daughter of a great banking family. Tennyson wrote a dozen or so poems to her, but it is improbable that his affections were deeply involved. The poems suggest that her position made it impossible for him to be a serious suitor to her, but she may have been more important to him as a symbol of wealth and unavailability than as a flesh-and-blood young woman. Certainly, he seems not to have been crushed when she married another man.

In 1836, however, at the age of 27, Tennyson became seriously involved with Emily Sellwood, who was four years younger than he. By the following year they considered themselves engaged. Emily had been a friend of Tennyson's sisters, and one of her own

sisters married his next older (and favorite) brother, Charles. Most of the correspondence between Tennyson and Emily has been destroyed, but from what remains it is clear that she was very much in love with him, although he apparently withheld himself somewhat in spite of his affection for her. He was worried about not having enough money to marry, but he seems also to have been much concerned with the trances into which he was still falling, which he thought were connected with the epilepsy from which other members of the family suffered. To marry, he thought, would mean passing on the disease to any children he might father.

In the summer of 1840 Tennyson broke off all relations with Emily. She continued to think of herself as engaged to him, but he abandoned any hope of marriage, either then or in the future. To spare her further embarrassment, the story was put out that her father had forbidden their marriage because of Tennyson's poverty; this legend has been perpetuated in the present century.

Through the second half of the 1830s and most of the 1840s Tennyson lived an unsettled, nomadic life. Nominally he made his home with his mother and his unmarried brothers and sisters, who continued to rent Somersby rectory until 1837, then moved successively to Essex and to Kent; but he was as often to be found in London, staying in cheap hotels or cadging a bed from friends who lived there. He was lonely and despondent, and he drank and smoked far too much. Many of those who had known him for years believed that his poetic inspiration had failed him and that his great early promise would remain unfulfilled; but this was to neglect the fact that when all else went wrong, he clung to the composition of poetry. He was steadily accumulating a backlog of unpublished poems, and he continued adding to his "elegies" to Hallam's memory.

One of the friends who worried away at Tennyson to have his work published was Edward FitzGerald, who loved both the poems and their author, although he was too stubborn to hide his feelings when a particular poem failed to win his approval. "Old Fitz" nagged at Tennyson, who in the spring of 1842 agreed to break his 10 long years of silence.

The two volumes of *Poems* (1842) were destined to be the best-loved books Tennyson ever wrote. The first volume was made up of radically revised versions of the best poems from

the 1832 volume, most of them in the form in which they are now known. The second volume contained new poems, among them some of those inspired by Hallam's death, as well as poems of widely varying styles, including the dramatic monologue "St. Simeon Stylites"; a group of Arthurian poems; his first attempt to deal with rampant sexuality, "The Vision of Sin"; and the implicitly autobiographical narrative "Locksley Hall," dealing with the evils of worldly marriages, which was to become one of his most popular poems during his lifetime.

After the reception of the 1832 *Poems* and after being unpublished for so long, Tennyson was naturally apprehensive about the reviews of the new poems; but nearly all were enthusiastic, making it clear that he was now the foremost poet of his generation. Edgar Allan Poe wrote guardedly, "I am not sure that Tennyson is not the greatest of poets."

But the bad luck that Tennyson seemed to invite struck again just as the favorable reviews were appearing. Two years earlier, expecting to make a fortune, he had invested his patrimony in a scheme to manufacture cheap wood carvings by steamdriven machines. In 1842 the scheme crashed, taking with it nearly everything that Tennyson owned, some £4,000. The shock set back any progress he had made in his emotional state over the past ten years, and in 1843 he had to go into a "hydropathic" establishment for seven months of treatment in the hope of curing his deep melancholia.

## محتوى المحاضرة السادسة

### A Critical Analysis of "The Lady of Shalott" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The first two stanzas of "The Lady of Shalott" cast readers into a landscape that has elements of both the magical and the everyday. There's an immediacy to the poem's first lines: the speaker leaps right into "the river." What river? The speaker doesn't say: it's *the* river, that's all. Right away, then, there's a sense that this poem will treat its world symbolically.

The river runs through a beautiful, autumnal landscape, a place that any English country-dweller of the 19th century would find familiar. Expansive fields of grain run to the horizon, willows and aspens (types of trees) move in the breeze down by the riverbanks. But this bucolic picture is also a scene from a legend, as the reader quickly discovers. This is the countryside that surrounds Camelot, the royal seat of none other than King Arthur. There's a contrast here between the eternal quality of the landscape and the mysterious no-time of legend:

- The fields, the trees, and the river could all be from almost *any* time in history.
- Camelot, though, is a place from old tales.

Already, then, this poem deals—on the one hand—with the natural, cyclical, and eternal, and—on the other hand—with the heroic, legendary, and magical.

These feelings are underlined by the shape of the verse. The poem quickly teaches its readers to expect a patterned [refrain](#):

- Each stanza's middle line will always end in "Camelot" (for now, at least);
- And each stanza's last line will end in "Shalott."

This pattern works with both the legendary and natural aspects of the poem. The repeated, predictable sounds turn round and round like seasons, but the echoing words describe legendary castles and enchanted islands. The other sound patterns in these stanzas do something similar. Dense [alliteration](#), [assonance](#), [consonance](#), and [sibilance](#) evoke the sounds of the natural world, but also draw attention to themselves, reminding the reader that they're reading a *poem*—a work of *art*.

Rhyme and [slant rhyme](#); assonance on short /ih/ and long /i/ sounds; consonance on /w/, /l/, /r/, /z/, /v/; sibilance throughout: there's a tapestry of woven sounds here.

These [euphonious](#) sounds mimic the sounds of trees by a river, with the winds and the water moving quietly through.

But sound also plays games with sense here, and in potentially unnerving ways. "Dusk" is a strange word to use as a verb, and while "[w]illows whiten" is an evocative image, the reader might be hard-pressed to imagine exactly what that means the willows are doing. Showing the undersides of their leaves in the wind? Or going pale, like a human?

It's not easy to say, and this creates a feeling that this landscape is as *magical* as it is *natural*. That the trees and breezes seem, perhaps, a little scared—going pale, quivering and shivering—suggests that there's something more going on here than just another autumn day.

Meanwhile, on the island in the middle of this lovely landscape, things are different. Rather than gentle whitenings and quiverings, here there are "four gray walls, and four gray towers." The [anaphora](#) here, plus the mostly-monosyllabic words, make the castle feel imposing among all the natural beauty. The "silent isle" these towers rise up on seems not a little mysterious. (Looking ahead, the reader might also note that those walls and towers are the same in number as the parts of the poem: itself a castle enclosing a Lady.)

It is within this castle—foreboding and strange in a landscape that is at once welcoming and ominous—that the speaker gets their first hint of the unknown Lady of Shalott.

## محتوى المحاضرة السابعة

### "Major Themes in Mathew Arnold's "Dover Beach"

- Loss of Faith and Certainty

Written during the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" admits to and laments the loss of religious faith that came with advances in various fields at the time: evolutionary biology, geology, archeology, and textual analysis of the Bible, to name a few. The poem senses the turn of a historical epoch and finds this change echoed in the transitional figure of the beach—the blurry border between land and sea. The poem thus asks the reader to consider what is lost in humankind's movement away from the (debatable) certainties of the Christian faith.

For the speaker, loss of faith equates to loss of certainty. The Dover beach itself seems to embody this loss, both in its sights and its sounds. At first, the poem offers no clues that its main subject is the loss of faith. Instead, it begins by describing the atmosphere in which the speaker stands. The descriptions of the sea and the sound of the pebbles on the beach are lyrically beautiful at first, but they mask "the eternal note of sadness" that is revealed at the end of stanza 1. This sudden intrusion of sadness hints at the speaker's sense of loss, which finds fuller expression later in the poem. Through the symbol of the sea, the poem suggests two key ideas: firstly, that major shifts in the fabric of society occur subtly—the beach's slow, repetitive movements symbolize the gradual but inevitable loss of faith that the speaker senses in this historical moment.

Secondly, mapping the loss of religious faith onto the movement of the waves implies that these kinds of historical changes come in cycles—waves, in other words. Indeed, the speaker imagines the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the sea that the speaker hears now. That is, the speaker sees an analogy between the irrelevance of the classical Greek Gods in the speaker's time with the coming irrelevance of the Christian God in the near future. That doesn't mean that religious faith will return, but more that something will come along to take its place (in this case, the dominance of science).

The speaker's position on this loss of religious faith becomes clear in the third stanza. Faith once made the world "full" and "bright"—that is, it offered comfort and joy in its certainty.

Its loss, then, represents “melancholy.” What’s more, the “Sea of Faith” once touched the shores of the entire world, but is now “withdrawing.” The poem is essentially saying that this loss of faith is *global*, in turn suggesting the vast reach of scientific advancements at the time. The speaker doubles down on the idea that scientific advancement represents a loss rather than a gain in the poem’s final couplet, saying that the new era will herald “confused alarms of struggle and flight,” and “ignorant armies clash[ing] by night.” In other words, the speaker believes that scientific advancement will bring only scientific—not spiritual—certainty and will lead to more doubt and questioning (which is, in fact, an important part of the scientific method of inquiry). Overall, then, the poem expresses a kind of resignation. The speaker fully admits the change that is in process—it is as inevitable as the waves rising and falling—and challenges the reader to consider whether this loss of faith is progress or a wrong turn. “Dover Beach,” then, is a deeply pessimistic poem that questions the dominant values of its day and embodies the sense of grief that some felt at the prospect of the loss of religion. This questioning still stands up in the 21st century, calling on its readers to examine whether their own lives are spiritually fulfilled.

### **Nature and Alienation**

Linked to the idea of a loss of faith is a shift in the way people relate to the natural environment. Written shortly after the era of the Romantic poets, who praised nature as an antidote to overly rational thinking, “Dover Beach” questions humankind’s relationship with nature. Instead of finding happiness or the sublime in the natural environment, the speaker finds a deep sense of sorrow (even while admitting to the beach’s beauty). The cold indifference and vast power of the natural world make the speaker feel small and



insignificant. The poem is therefore an attempt to capture the complexity of human experience as just one part of the natural world, rather than its center.

Central to the poem is an implicit admission that mankind is merely one part of a larger system—the natural world. The natural scene prompts the speaker to think about timescales that make their own life seem less significant. The speaker looks out on a scene that is, on the one hand, beautiful, but on the other, a powerful reminder of nature’s indifference to humankind. The beach and the sea are by far the most prominent figures in the poem. As products of millions of years of erosion and water movement, they represent scales of time well beyond the expanse of human life, and perhaps beyond the mind’s capacity to comprehend them too.

This sense of deep time alienates the speaker from the natural scene that the speaker is observing. The scene makes the speaker feel small and creates a feeling that nature is almost antagonistic towards the trials of humankind, as demonstrated by the harsh sound of the beach, which “roars” with the “eternal note of sadness” as the pebbles move with the waves. The mention of eternity here specifically links the idea of time to the speaker’s alienation—without God to provide the certainty of eternal afterlife, the timescales evoked by nature seem almost mocking of humankind’s limited place in the world.

The speaker's thoughts about the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles further emphasizes the tragedy that the speaker believes is occurring. The speaker imagines Sophocles hearing the same loneliness and sorrow in the sea as the speaker does in the poem. For the speaker, human life is fundamentally sad—and Sophocles, as a writer of tragedies, must have heard that same sadness in the sea. On the one hand, then, the poem argues that nature has always had this alienating effect. But on the other hand, it also seems that the speaker is particularly mindful of the present moment, the moment when the poem was written—the use of present tense throughout demonstrates that the speaker feels that the current moment is an *especially* alienating time.

The natural setting of the poem, then, makes the speaker question everything about human existence, a state that was once made certain by religious faith. There is a paradoxical nature about the beach—it is always shifting in shape, yet it can stay roughly as it is for millions of years, seemingly always in transition *and* always the same. This paradox embodies the way in which people try to make sense of their lives while the world itself offers no certainty. In this way, the poem is a precursor of 20th century [Existentialism](#) and is often considered ahead of its time. Ultimately, “Dover Beach” exposes the underlying melancholy of awe-inspiring natural sites. While the speaker does admit to the scene’s beauty, that beauty doesn’t compensate for the way in which the scene makes the speaker feel small and insignificant.

### Love

With the retreat of religion causing a crisis of spiritual faith, the speaker turns to love as an answer for the loss of God. Perhaps, the poem suggests, love between people can compensate for the loss of the connection between God and mankind. But the poem only argues that love has the *possibility* of creating the certainty that religion once did—it doesn’t make the case that this is inevitable.

It is generally agreed that Arnold wrote “Dover Beach” while on his honeymoon. Whether or not this is definitely true, the speaker is certainly not alone in the poem. The speaker’s interactions with an off-stage (off-page) lover demonstrate the possible restoration of a different kind of faith—in love, rather than in God. The first five lines of the poem give nothing away in terms of whether the speaker has an addressee (beyond the reader). But lines 6 and 8 offer clear instructions to the speaker’s companion to come and share the experience of looking out at Dover beach. Given that the beach scene inspires such melancholy in the speaker, the speaker's attempt to share the experience is an argument for

intimacy and honesty between people. Togetherness, the poem argues, can help in any situation.

Stanzas 2 and 3, however, lack the direct address to the other person, and therefore seem to show the speaker retreating into their own psyche. The melancholy of the sea echoes the loss of religion, and almost swamps the speaker's psyche entirely. But out of these depths comes the final stanza, which *is* spoken directly to the speaker's lover. If the two lovers can be true to one another, suggests the speaker, then that will in part provide solace and certainty in a world that offers neither of these. The poem ends on a literal cliff-hanger, with the two lovers standing *together*—only the second time the poem uses “we”—awaiting what will come. Love, then, may be the only answer to the problems identified by the speaker: loneliness and loss of faith.

But the poem does not end on an optimistic note, casting doubt on the idea that love will save the day. Instead, the speaker anticipates confusion, struggle, and violence. Though love might not be able to defeat these, the speaker presents it as the only potential solution. Love, then, is definitely valued in the poem, and the reader in turn is asked to share in that value. But love shows up in only a few brief moments, leaving its meaning far from certain. The poem can't say for sure that love will be able to make life meaningful, and perhaps even suggests that it ultimately can't—but it is presented as the best option, and worth trying.

## محتوى المحاضرة الثامنة

### A Critical Analysis of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"

Robert Browning wrote the well-known dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess.” It implies that the speaker murdered his wife and will do the same to the next one shortly. The Duke and Duchess Ferarra provided the poet with ideas for this poem. The Duchess passed away in eerie circumstances. At fourteen, she got married, and by seventeen, she was gone. Browning draws on these troubling circumstances to create a poem that explores the powerful Duke of Ferarra’s desire to dominate his wife in every facet of her life, including her emotions.

Robert Browning was an English poet and playwright whose dramatic monologues put him high among Victorian poets. He was noted for irony, characterization, dark humor, social commentary, historical settings, and challenging vocabulary and syntax.

The central theme of “My Last Duchess” is power, namely the political and social authority that the speaker (the Duke) wields and his endeavor to manage his marriage in the same manner that he rules his territories.

## Lines 1-5

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf’s hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said

The speaker refers to “his final duchess” in the poem’s opening lines. It conveys the impression that the speaker is a Duke and is speaking to an unidentified or unresponsive audience. The Duke gestures toward the wall-mounted picture of his deceased Duchess. The speaker claims that the Duchess appears to be standing alive in front of him since the painting of her is so exquisite. The Duke lauds the artwork and describes it as a masterpiece. He also provides information on the painter or artist who created this amazing work of marvel for the unidentified listener. He claims that Fra Pandolf put a lot of effort into it and needed a full day to finish it and give it a realistic feel. When the Duke exclaims,

“There she stands,” it suggests that the Duchess’s entire body is depicted in the picture rather than just a close-up, giving the impression that she is alive and standing in front of the Duke. The Duke then urges the audience to take a seat and concentrate on the artwork’s beauty. He invites him to study and appreciate the painting’s artwork.

## Lines 6-13

“Fra Pandolf” by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not

The Duke explains to the audience that he purposefully revealed the painter’s identity because everyone who views this painting is curious about the artist. People or outsiders who view this picture may wonder how the artist managed to capture the Duchess’s expressions as being so genuine-looking while still conveying such depth and passion. The Duke also informs the audience that only he is authorized to pull back the curtain covering the picture. It implies that only Duke can view this painting or, if he chooses, can display it to anyone else. Additionally, it suggests that the picture is kept in the Duke’s gallery, which is only accessible with his permission. He adds that he is not the only person who is astonished to view this exquisite work of art. Anyone who looks at it turns to the Duke as if they want to ask him how the Duchess’ painting looks so lifelike, but they never dare to do so. The Duke responds to everyone before they ask since he can read their faces and anticipates their questions.

## Line 14-21

Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps  
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff  
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

The Duke addresses his silent listener once more, this time addressing him as "Sir." He analyses the Duchess's facial expressions in the artwork and informs the audience that the flush and smile on her cheeks were not caused by the presence of her spouse. The Duke's presence made the Duchess unhappy. The Duke appears envious of this since he always desired for her to have these joyous emotions on her face solely for her spouse, giving the impression that something else was the cause of the Duchess' happiness. The Duke begins speculating on the cause of the Duchess' delight or blushing in the following words. He speculates that she may have grinned as a result of Fra Pandolf complimenting her beauty, telling her that the shawl or mantle was concealing too much of her wrist, or telling her that he would never be able to capture the beauty of her fading half-blush on her throat in a painting. The Duke criticizes his Duchess, claiming that she believed that simple acts of kindness or courteous remarks like these were sufficient to satisfy her. It demonstrates that the Duke didn't want her to smile or blush when everyone offered her insignificant compliments. He only cared that she was content when her husband was around or complimenting her.

## Line 22-24

A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

The Duke goes on to describe his late Duchess' character to the audience. The Duchess, according to him, had a kind heart that was readily made joyful at any time. Everything the Duchess looked at was to her liking and acclaim. In other words, it was quite simple for everyone to win her over or wow her in any way. The Duke is attacking the Duchess in these words, not complimenting her. Although the Duchess appears to be very friendly and down to earth in the lines above, she is not the type of person the Duke desired for his bride.

## Line 25- 31

Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked

The Duke refers to his listener as “Sir” once more and continues to explain his Duchess' actions in these lines. He explains to him that she treated everyone

equally and that everything made her happy. She used to smile and thank him when he brought her jewelry, brooches, or other items she could wear on her chest, but she also found joy in seemingly insignificant things like watching the sunset in the west, receiving a branch of cherries from an errant fool in the orchard, or riding the white mule around the terrace. He also claims that she gave each of these things the same praise or blushed consistently. It demonstrates how, despite the Duke's expectations, the Duchess treated everything equally. It is now obvious that the Duke expected his Duchess to give him extra attention, but she treated him equally and always reacted to him in the same way that she formerly reacted to any other regular person or item.

## Line 32- 35

Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame

This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

She used to praise men, the Duke continues. The Duke concedes that it's polite to express gratitude when someone gives you a gift or does you a favor. Although he had no issue with the Duchess saying thank you to everyone, he didn't like how she went about it. She received the honor and the nine hundred-year-old family name from the Duke. By appointing her as his Duchess, he gave her a position she had never enjoyed before marrying the Duke, but she didn't even consider this gift from him to be more significant than any other small favor performed for her by an ordinary person. Who would be so low as to question her about her odd behavior or to argue with her about it, the Duke then asks his audience. The Duke is aware that the response is "none." The fact that the Duke never informed the Duchess about her behavior also implies that there was a communication breakdown in their relationship.



## Line 36- 43

In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—  
- E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,

The Duke now describes the barriers that prevented him from protesting to his Duchess about her behavior. He believes she would offer defenses or put up a fight, demonstrating her reluctance to adapt for him. He claims that even though he lacks the necessary communication skills if he had tried to talk to her and told her about “the behaviour that disgusted him or where she did little or too much for him,” there is a chance that she might have tried to change herself and become what he desired. Nevertheless, the Duke claims he would never have even attempted to speak to her. The Duke didn’t want to speak to her because he believed that doing so would be equal to stooping and explaining what was wrong. Being a Duke, he feels that explaining anything to anyone, including his own Duchess, is an insult. Without uttering a word, he wanted his wife to know what he wanted even though he didn’t want to bend.

## Line 44- 47

Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet

The duke acknowledges to the listener that his Duchess was always cordial toward him. When she saw him or when he went by her, she always smiled and treated him kindly. The Duke then inquires once more, “Who passed her without giving the same smile?” Her grin for the Duke was unremarkable in any way. The Duke continues by informing the audience that “this grew.” He discusses how she acts and how sweet she is to everyone. He informs him that she continued to be kind and love everyone with greater intensity. The Duke acknowledges that he was unable to take it anymore and that he so issued orders against his own Duchess, which caused all of her smiles to cease. It suggests that he issued the orders to kill her so she wouldn't be able to grin anymore. The Duke finally comes to a close, pointing once again at the lovely portrait and saying, “Now there she is, and it appears like she is alive.” The Duke then gently requests the listener to stand up.

## Line 48- 53

The company below, then. I repeat,  
The Count your master's known munificence  
Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go

To go and meet the other visitors who are downstairs, Duke invites him to get up and accompany him. The duke then begins to discuss the listener's “Count” master. It conveys the impression that the unspoken listener is the Count's servant. The servant is told that the

duke expects him to provide the dowry for her daughter in the amount he requests because everyone is aware of the generosity of his master. It implies that the duke is currently being remarried to the Count's daughter and that he discusses dowries with the servant. Here, Duke's greed is also demonstrated. Additionally, he says to the servant that, given the Count's generosity, he is not concerned about the dowry but, as he indicated earlier in their conversation, the Count's daughter's fairness will be his top focus.

## Line 54- 56

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

The duke concludes his conversation, and they begin to descend. As they proceed, the Duke directs the servant's attention to yet another stunning work of art in his gallery. He gestures in the direction of a statue of the god Neptune, who is portrayed riding a sea horse. The artist who created it is also mentioned by the duke to the servant. He reveals to him that this statue was created out of bronze specifically for him by Claus of Innsbruck.

## محتوى المحاضرة التاسعة

## A Critical Analysis of "The Cry of the Children" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning devoted her poetic efforts to protest the treatment of child laborers. The poem was first published in the conservative (Tory) publication Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in 1843, following a satirical poem, which perhaps influenced the way readers perceived the poem. However, Barrett Browning removed any doubts as to the

poem's place in protest literature when, in her 1844 edition of her collected poems, she placed it alongside "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," a poem she had written at the request of American abolitionists.

Protest literature draws attention to social ills and abuses in order to provoke change or reform, and abolitionists made effective use of it in the years leading up to the American Civil War. But this kind of literature can easily devolve into writing that pays more heed to its social purposes than to any artistic commitments to beauty and truth. Furthermore, protest literature of the first half of the 19th century often relied upon sentimental portrayals of suffering to make emotional appeals to the reader. In the essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin criticizes Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" and argues that the book leaves "unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved people to such deeds" (14). Because Stowe's novel wallows in sentiment and fails to answer the moral questions it raises, it fails artistically. Baldwin argues that there is a "power of revelation which is the business of the novelist, the journey toward a more vast reality which must take precedence over all other claims" (15). Indeed, any literature that completely fails to point the reader toward a "more vast reality" due to prioritizing the quest for social change or emotional appeal has slipped over the line between art and propaganda. As Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" is sentimental protest literature, it is well worth considering whether the poem falls into the same category as Stowe's novel. Does this poem wallow in emotion, leave the most important moral questions unanswered, and fail to exhibit a revelation of "a more vast reality"? Or does the poem somehow escape the perils of sentimentalism, and answer moral questions precisely by a revelation of a cosmic reality that recalls the social order to its most deeply held theological beliefs?

The title "The Cry of the Children" is drawn from Euripides' play *Medea* in which the titular character kills her children in order to get revenge upon their father Jason, who has sought a new wife in a quest for greater power and influence. The poem begins with a question appealing to the audience: "Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers, / Ere the sorrow comes with years?" (1-2). The "brothers," called upon throughout the 160-line poem, are the people with whom the speaker pleads on behalf of the children.

The speaker then continues with sentimental descriptions of the children "leaning their young heads against their mothers" (3), "weeping in the playtime of the others / in the country of the free... in our happy Fatherland" (11-12, 23-24). The children are contrasted with the "young lambs," "young birds," "young fawns," and "young flowers" (5-8), all innocent and lively manifestations of youth within the natural world. But neither are the

children like the “old tree,” “old year,” “old wound,” and “old hope” mentioned in the next stanza. Young children ought not to be the way these children are: They are neither young nor old; they are comfortless and bitter.

The image of crying children leaning upon their helpless mothers makes it clear that this is a sentimental poem. Since the early 20th century, the label of sentimentalism has been enough to dismiss any literary work as inartistic or propagandistic. But it was not always a pejorative label. “Sentimental” describes literature that depicts expressions of feelings (or sentiments) for the reader to empathize with. Sometimes, as Baldwin makes clear in his critique of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, these expressions of feelings are excessive and serve only as a self-satisfying emotional bath that leaves readers feeling as though they are virtuous simply for having felt rightly. Such sentimentality fails to take the magnitude of evil seriously, as it allows readers to *feel* as though suffering and injustice have been addressed, without any real action or change having occurred. Not all sentimentality in literature, however, assures readers of their own virtue and absolves them of the need to act. Sometimes subject matter that produces strong feeling is a galvanizing call to readers to enter sympathetically into the experiences of others, and to act differently based on their revived moral convictions.

In the first stanzas of “The Cry of the Children,” the repeated mention of children and their mothers in a poem addressed to “my brothers” and set in “our happy Fatherland” places the audience in a familial relationship with the weeping children and their powerless mothers. The speaker gives the children a voice, and they say that they long for the grave. After mentioning one of their number—“little Alice”—who has died already, they say “it is good when it happens... That we die before our time” (51-52). Having established that these children are—or ought to be—in the same family as the audience or “my brothers,” the speaker thus shows the audience the depths of their failure to protect these children whose lives are so miserable that they long for death.

The speaker continues the emotional portrayal of child suffering when she exhorts the children to “go out... from the mine and from the city, / Sing out... as the little thrushes do,” and also to go out to the meadows and pluck flowers and laugh (57-60). Again the children speak and again their words show the hopelessness of their lives. They ask if flowers are like the “weeds anear the mine” and ask to be left alone in the dark, not bothered by “your pleasures fair and fine” (62, 64). They go on to say that they could not play in any case, for they are too tired from stooping under their burdens. The children say that they spend all their days driving “the wheels of iron / In the factories” (75-76), and the

repetition of this wheel imagery across two stanzas highlights the futile, repetitious labor of these children. Indeed, even their souls “spin on blindly in the dark” (100).

After the children reject the offer of playing in the meadows, the speaker addresses the audience: “Now tell the poor young children; O my brothers, / To look up to Him and pray” and ask for God’s blessing (101-102). But instead of the brothers answering, the children interject: “Who is God that He should hear us, / While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?” (105-106). The children note that “the human creatures” who pass them in their work do not hear them or answer them; why should this God be any different?

The children then admit that they know only two words of prayer that they “say softly like a charm” (116). And those two words are simply “Our Father.” This talismanic prayer continues the speaker’s thematic focus upon the family of which these children ought to be a part. They have been cast out of the broader human family into a world predicated upon commodities and labor rather than bonds of love. They cannot imagine a father God. They conclude that this God must not hear them, and instead of being fatherly, “his image is the master / Who commands us to work on” (127-128). The children take on a mocking, antagonistic tone when they say “up in Heaven, / Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find” (129-130). Knowing only the tyranny of the master and the dark wheels of ceaseless industrial production, the children have created a horrifying image of God as mechanical and sinister. The poem began with the tears of the children, moves through an exploration of their longing for death, and ends with the children declaring that if there is a God, he certainly does not hear their cries, and if he did, he would not care.

This declaration of utter disbelief in both God and justice, combined with the previous longing for death, means that these children have nothing to lose. This is not an exaggeration or excessive portrayal of the dangerous despair of the laboring poor. At the same moment in history that Barrett Browning was writing “The Cry of the Children,” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were busy formulating their thoughts regarding the proletariat class to which such children belonged. *Communist Manifesto* articulates the revolutionary spirit roiling Europe: It begins with the now-famous observation that “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.” Marx and Engels then argue that in the current struggle the laborers have become a commodity who are forced to sell their labor in a competitive market, and this commodification of their work, and indeed their very bodies, has rendered them desperate. The *Manifesto* concludes with a call for a complete overthrow of “all existing social conditions” and warns the bourgeoisie that “the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.” For Marx and Engels—and many others

at this time—the only solution to the proletariat’s miserable situation is a revolution that will turn the tables against those in power in the class struggle.

Although Barrett Browning’s poem recognizes the injustice of the exploitation of child labor, her protest poem is a call for reform rather than revolution. The reformation of society that she proposes is predicated upon a shared belief in a certain kind of God. Her protest is not so much against the eternal class struggle as it is against the failures of her culture to remain true to its long-held beliefs. Her poem is thus a bracing call to conserve culture rather than destroy it.

The final stanzas reveal the consequences of that hypocrisy. The speaker once again mentions the upturned faces of the crying children, but at the conclusion of the poem these faces are “dread to see” as they convict the reader: “for they mind you of their angels in high places, / With eyes turned on Deity” (151-152). This is an allusion to a sermon of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew when, after setting a child in the midst of his audience, Jesus warns his audience that they cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven unless they become like the child. He warns them, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. 18:10). This injunction follows an earlier warning to the one who “shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (18:6). The implication of this allusion is clear: The audience is under divine judgment, for they have made it impossible for “these little ones” to have faith in a loving and just God; they have offended against the children whose angels stand before God, who sees and condemns the “gold-heapers” who “tread onward” to the “throne amid the mart” insensible to the blood of children that “splashes upward” (156-157).

The final stanzas of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem do nothing to placate any self-righteousness tendencies in the audience. The sentimentalism of the first part of the poem is aimed at awakening sympathy and conscience. The second part of the poem is deeply theological and convicts the audience of failing to live according to the beliefs they espouse. The audience is not invited to wallow in a warm sense of virtue after being guided toward right feeling in “The Cry of the Children”; rather, the sentimentalism of the poem leads to a damning indictment of a culture that has strayed from its fundamental principles when it despises children and loves profit.

Thus, having escaped the trap of self-indulgent sentimentalism, the poem manages to avoid becoming the kind of facile protest literature that James Baldwin critiques. But it is not

revolutionary. It is a convicting call to return to long-held beliefs. The poem begins in the small sphere of crying children and helpless mothers, but by its conclusion it opens out into a vision of a cosmic reality that overturns the ruthless human power structures based on economic class and political strength. In setting a child in the midst of his listeners, Jesus declared a kingdom unlike the principalities and dominions of the world—one not based on power but on humility. In setting before her readers the image of the crying child laborers, Barrett Browning calls for culture to re-form itself around the teachings of the New Testament. Hers is a call to remember that the powerful have already been “subverted” by the Gospel which declared the fallen world and all its greed, aggression, selfishness and cruelty to be at odds with kingdom of Heaven whose proper citizens are truly children.

## محتوى المحاضرة العاشرة

### Major Themes in "The Cry of the Children" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

- **The Immorality of Child Labor**

“The Cry of the Children” is a poem about the experiences of child laborers in England during the Industrial Revolution. Toggling between the voice of a sympathetic speaker and the words of the children themselves, the poem calls attention to the cruelty of exploiting children as workers and argues that such exploitation destroys childhood innocence. Ultimately, the poem insists that child labor is a deeply immoral practice and seeks to persuade its audience that the exploitation of children must end.

Fittingly, given the title, most of the poem is dedicated to the children’s “cries” as they recount their plight. They testify to their unspeakable working conditions—“all day, we drag our burden tiring / through the coal-dark, underground”—as well as to their exhaustion and despair. By presenting these details in the children’s own voices—“we are weary, / and we cannot run or leap”—the poem hammers home again and again how wrong it is to force children to do hard labor, especially under conditions that even an adult would shrink from.



Additionally, throughout the poem, the speaker argues that child laborers in the mines and factories have been forced to mature before their time, and that this loss of their childhood innocence is itself immoral. Toward this end, the speaker compares the children's "bitter" tears and "sunken faces" to those of haggard old men, and makes clear that there is a cruel irony in an adult mourning the past and "weep[ing] for his to-morrow" when he has had so many of them, while child laborers weep because they have had their tomorrows stolen.

The poem also tells the tragic tale of Little Alice, a child laborer who dies. Disturbingly, however, rather than mourn her death, the children celebrate that Alice can finally rest. "It is good when it happens [...] that we die before our time!" they cry, a shocking statement that indicates these children have lost their hope of resting in life itself. The speaker then cries, "Alas, alas, the children!" leaving no doubt that the poem views the children's reaction as tragic, and that any system that causes children to welcome death is an immoral one.

Morality comes most explicitly into play, however, towards the end of the poem, when the speaker invokes God and religion as a potential force for good. The children swiftly reveal these hopes to be unfounded: "Is it likely God [...] Hears our weeping any more?" In their eyes, God resembles "the master / Who commands us to work on," and religious values exist only as talking points. This portion of the poem indicts child labor as an immoral force on a literal level, since it has stripped children of their religious faith and values.

The poem closes on a righteous note, condemning the "cruel nation" that crushes children's lives in its dedication to "the mart," or marketplace. It describes the child laborers as "martyrs" and their exploiters as "gold-heaper[s]," and depicts the prioritization of wealth and capitalism over children's well-being as deeply depraved.

However, the poem also offers the opportunity to imagine a different set of priorities, by posing this condemnation in the form of a question: "how long" must this immoral cruelty

go on? Implicit in this question is the suggestion that the country *could* change its values and prioritizes, if it wanted to, and thus put an end to the horrific practice of child labor.

### Classism and Injustice

Though “The Cry of the Children” is primarily focused on the experiences of child laborers, it is also deeply attuned to the vast distance between the rich and the poor in industrializing England, and the way the upper and middle classes’ greed and ignorance are responsible for the exploitation of working-class children. The poem explicitly condemns this classism and selfishness, both on an individual and a societal level.

Throughout the poem, many of the scenes and images that capture the immorality of child labor are also used to point to the wide gap between the rich and the poor. For instance, the child laborers “weeping in the playtime of the others” serve as a reminder of the stark difference between the lives of poor children and rich ones, due only to their class.

Likewise, the poem’s use of nature [imagery](#) also often reveals a gap between the experiences of the rich and poor. For example, when urged to flee to the countryside to frolic, the child laborers beg the speaker to “leave us [...] from your pleasures fair and fine”; even just hearing about joys and pleasures they themselves cannot partake in is painful.

Not only does the poem frequently draw attention to these social inequalities, but it also rebukes the middle and upper classes for selfishly turning a blind eye to injustice. This occurs most often through a direct address to the poem’s readers, whom the speaker refers to as “my brothers.” “Do you question the young children [...] why their tears are falling so?” the speaker demands, a [rhetorical question](#) that suggests the upper classes in fact

do *not* ask questions about the workings of their own society, and thus willfully ignore the exploitation of working-class children in their midst. At one point, the speaker begs, “Let them touch each other’s hands” and “Let them prove their inward souls,” confirming that the poem’s intended audience is indeed those who have the power to “let” these children lead different lives—in other words, the very institutions and members of society who depend on child labor, and thus prefer to ignore its human cost.

However, as the children themselves confirm, this audience is indifferent to their plight. Later in the poem, the children describe “human creatures” who, in response to their sobs, simply “pass by,” ignoring the sound and letting their exploitation go on. The speaker’s references to “the country of the free” and “our happy Fatherland” must therefore be read as [ironic](#) indictments of 19th-century England, not as honest praise; the poem makes devastatingly clear that everyone in England is *not* equally free or happy, least of all child laborers. As such, these references serve as a pointed reminder to those who *are* living freely and happily that their lifestyles are founded on the exploitation of others, namely those in a lower class than themselves.

Ultimately, the poem closes with a resounding and explicit condemnation of the greed that underpins the entire exploitative system of child labor, which is itself part of the structures of industrialization and capitalism. In an image that casts child laborers as “martyrs” and the wealthy benefitting from their labor as “gold-heapers” (who “tread onward to [their] throne amid the mart” while the children’s “blood splashes upward”) the children denounce the selfish, classist society that treats their lives as disposable, and privileges wealth and economic gain above all else. They conclude by arguing that a “child’s sob in the silence curses deeper / than the strong man,” an implicit reference to the poem itself—both a sob and curse—leaving no question as to how the poem views those who let them suffer.

## The Human Cost of Industrialization

In addition to criticizing child labor, “The Cry of the Children” also strongly condemns industrialization as a whole. This was a timely subject when the poem was first published. In the 1840s, England was shifting from a largely agricultural economy to one increasingly centered on mining and manufacturing, which became the subject of great societal and political debate. The poem clearly picks a side in this argument—using vivid [imagery](#), it depicts industrial settings as hellish and deadly, while the countryside is portrayed as peaceful and heavenly. Ultimately, the poem argues that industrial labor is an unnatural way of life that robs people of their humanity.

The poem is primarily set in a wretched industrial landscape. It describes this world in great depth, from “the dark of the coal-shadows” in the mines to the “cold metallic motion” of factory life. In particular, the poem pays close attention to the deafening sound of the iron wheels, which “grind life down” whether in the mines or the factory. It also explicitly compares the child laborers to these wheels, for they too “are turning, all the day,” like cogs in a machine. The repeated emphasis on wheels and work captures the gruesome monotony of industrial life, as well as the despairing effect it has on the human soul. “Stop! be silent for to-day!” the children cry, but the wheels and their work drone on.

The poem also describes industrialization’s harmful impact on the physical body and the mind. The children’s knees “tremble sorely in the stooping,” their “heavy eyelids droop,” and they describe themselves as “weak” and “weary,” sapped of any youthful energy they might otherwise have had. In addition, the way the children celebrate Little Alice’s death because it finally gives her body a chance to rest indicates that industrial life inflicts severe psychological damage as well as physical pain.

In sharp contrast to this nightmarish industrial setting, the speaker of the poem often depicts the natural world as a heavenly place of refuge. The speaker laments that child laborers

“have never seen the sunshine” and uses natural imagery as metaphors for human growth and development, essentially equating human well-being with the natural world in much the same way industrial life represents human misery.

In particular, the natural world takes on special significance for children, as the speaker draws a clear connection between nature and an ideal vision of childhood innocence, then makes strikingly clear that child laborers cannot access either. At one point, the speaker urges child laborers to “go out [...] from the mine and from the city” and “pluck you handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,” but the children confess they are unfamiliar with meadows and flowers, and that even if they could visit the countryside, they would simply “drop down [...] and sleep.”

In sum, the poem paints a clear picture of industrialization as a force that robs people of their humanity—both figuratively transforming them into machinery and literally grinding down their bodies and spirits until they die. The natural world stands in profound relief as a better, purer alternative, equated with childhood innocence and human happiness—but the poem makes devastatingly clear that it remains out of reach for those condemned to an industrial life, who know no other existence than their own.

### **God and Religion**

In the latter half of “The Cry of the Children,” the poem turns to God and religion. Though the speaker clearly believes in a God who wants the best for all humanity, including child laborers, the children themselves do not, insisting that God does not hear their prayers or seem to care about their plight. The poem very pointedly lays this lack of faith at the feet of society at large, delivering a scathing rebuke of those who promise heavenly reward rather than seeking to end exploitation on earth. Ultimately, the speaker directly addresses the

poem's readers, calling on their religious values and pushing them to move past pious words and intentions to meaningful moral action.

After clearly establishing the children's misery, the speaker argues that they deserve to know that their suffering "is not all the life God fashions or reveals." The speaker even insists that God "is calling sunward" the children's souls, and wants better for them than their lives of toil. These lines make clear that, in the speaker's worldview, God is a moral force for good who wishes for humanity's well-being.

Nevertheless, the speaker does not feel the same way about the people responsible for bringing God's word to life on earth. With a heavy helping of sarcasm, the speaker instructs the poem's audience to do what they normally do in the face of suffering: "Now tell the poor young children [...] To look up to Him and pray." The hypocrisy of this gesture—telling impoverished children prayer will solve their problems—is immediately revealed by the children themselves. They chime in, "Who is God that He should hear us?" and argue, "Is it likely God [...] hears our weeping any more?"

Over the next two stanzas, the child laborers dismantle any notion that a heavenly power is enough to put an end to their suffering. They describe their desperate pleas falling on deaf ears, both human and divine, and ultimately reveal that they have lost all faith: "Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving— / We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."

After allowing the children's moving testimony to hammer home the injustice of relying on faith as a solution to social ills, the speaker then offers a fierce indictment of readers' own hypocrisy: "Do ye hear the children weeping and disproving, / O my brothers, what ye preach?" The speaker makes the case that religious beliefs and pious words are not enough to ensure a moral world, arguing that society's supposed religious values must be backed up by action—"For God's possible is taught by His world's loving."

The speaker culminates this argument by decrying that these children “have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory” of God, and explicitly linking “liberty” and “Christdom.” In short, the speaker argues that child laborers have been denied the spiritual benefits of faith, specifically Christian faith, which the speaker views as endowing people with eternal heavenly freedom—but not through any fault of their own. Instead, the speaker paints child laborers as religious “martyrs” and “orphans,” abandoned by those who might have saved their souls by making Christianity’s values reality.

Finally, the speaker and the poem explicitly argue for society to change its ways and do otherwise, asking “How long, O cruel nation, / Will you stand, to move the world, on a child’s heart?”