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**Subject: Victorian poetry / Third class**

**Victorian poetry is characterized by both religious skepticism, inherited from the Romantic Period, but contrarily also devotional poetry that proclaims a more mystical faith.** Religion becomes more of a personal experience expressed through poetry. Victorian poetry also employs more humor and whimsy than the prior Romantic Period. Despite the whimsy, in the Victorian Era, poetry and literature take a more harsh and utilitarian view of nature and philosophy.

Victorian form favored narrative and length over the short, lyric poems that were previously popular. Poets also emphasized imagery less, and instead they focused on meter and rhythm. Themes were much more realistic, identifying emotions such as isolation, despair and general pessimism.

Several factors that influenced Victorian poetry and literature were the conflicts between scientific discoveries, such as evolution, and faith, the industrialization of nations and a growing social consciousness about reform movements for better working conditions for women and children.

Even though many Victorian poets struggled with a loss of faith, there was still a sense of high morality that they held close and revered. Victorian poets were enthralled with classical and medieval literature. They loved the heroic stories and courtly attitudes. Through their writing, they tried to encourage readers toward more noble actions and attitudes.

Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Era

Please visit the link below (very important)

https://concordian-thailand.libguides.com/c.php?g=568550&p=3916450

"The Lady of Shalott" by Lord Alfred Tennyson

Complete Text

*PART I*

*On either side the river lie*
*Long fields of barley and of rye,*
*That clothe the wold and meet the sky;*
*And thro' the field the road runs by*
*To many-tower'd Camelot;*
*And up and down the people go,*
*Gazing where the lilies blow*
*Round an island there below,*
*The island of Shalott.*

*Willows whiten, aspens quiver,*
*Little breezes dusk and shiver*
*Thro' the wave that runs for ever*
*By the island in the river*
*Flowing down to Camelot.*
*Four gray walls, and four gray towers,*
*Overlook a space of flowers,*
*And the silent isle imbowers*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*By the margin, willow veil'd,*
*Slide the heavy barges trail'd*
*By slow horses; and unhail'd*
*The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd*
*Skimming down to Camelot:*
*But who hath seen her wave her hand?*
*Or at the casement seen her stand?*

*Or is she known in all the land,*
*The Lady of Shalott?*

*Only reapers, reaping early*
*In among the bearded barley,*
*Hear a song that echoes cheerly*
*From the river winding clearly,*
*Down to tower'd Camelot:*
*And by the moon the reaper weary,*
*Piling sheaves in uplands airy,*
*Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy*
*Lady of Shalott."*

*PART II*

*There she weaves by night and day*
*A magic web with colours gay.*
*She has heard a whisper say,*
*A curse is on her if she stay*
*To look down to Camelot.*
*She knows not what the curse may be,*
*And so she weaveth steadily,*
*And little other care hath she,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*And moving thro' a mirror clear*
*That hangs before her all the year,*
*Shadows of the world appear.*
*There she sees the highway near*
*Winding down to Camelot:*
*There the river eddy whirls,*

*And there the surly village-churls,*
*And the red cloaks of market girls,*
*Pass onward from Shalott.*

*Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,*
*An abbot on an ambling pad,*
*Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,*
*Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,*
*Goes by to tower'd Camelot;*
*And sometimes thro' the mirror blue*
*The knights come riding two and two:*
*She hath no loyal knight and true,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*But in her web she still delights*
*To weave the mirror's magic sights,*
*For often thro' the silent nights*
*A funeral, with plumes and lights*
*And music, went to Camelot:*
*Or when the moon was overhead,*
*Came two young lovers lately wed:*
*"I am half sick of shadows," said*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*PART III*

*A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,*
*He rode between the barley-sheaves,*
*The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,*
*And flamed upon the brazen greaves*

*Of bold Sir Lancelot.*
*A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd*
*To a lady in his shield,*
*That sparkled on the yellow field,*
*Beside remote Shalott.*

*The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,*
*Like to some branch of stars we see*
*Hung in the golden Galaxy.*
*The bridle bells rang merrily*
*As he rode down to Camelot:*
*And from his blazon'd baldric slung*
*A mighty silver bugle hung,*
*And as he rode his armour rung,*
*Beside remote Shalott.*

*All in the blue unclouded weather*
*Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,*
*The helmet and the helmet-feather*
*Burn'd like one burning flame together,*
*As he rode down to Camelot.*
*As often thro' the purple night,*
*Below the starry clusters bright,*
*Some bearded meteor, trailing light,*
*Moves over still Shalott.*

*His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;*
*On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;*
*From underneath his helmet flow'd*
*His coal-black curls as on he rode,*
*As he rode down to Camelot.*

*From the bank and from the river*
*He flash'd into the crystal mirror,*
*"Tirra lirra," by the river*
*Sang Sir Lancelot.*

*She left the web, she left the loom,*
*She made three paces thro' the room,*
*She saw the water-lily bloom,*
*She saw the helmet and the plume,*
*She look'd down to Camelot.*
*Out flew the web and floated wide;*
*The mirror crack'd from side to side;*
*"The curse is come upon me," cried*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*PART IV*

*In the stormy east-wind straining,*
*The pale yellow woods were waning,*
*The broad stream in his banks complaining,*
*Heavily the low sky raining*
*Over tower'd Camelot;*
*Down she came and found a boat*
*Beneath a willow left afloat,*
*And round about the prow she wrote*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*And down the river's dim expanse*
*Like some bold seër in a trance,*
*Seeing all his own mischance—*
*With a glassy countenance*

*Did she look to Camelot.*
*And at the closing of the day*
*She loosed the chain, and down she lay;*
*The broad stream bore her far away,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*Lying, robed in snowy white*
*That loosely flew to left and right—*
*The leaves upon her falling light—*
*Thro' the noises of the night*
*She floated down to Camelot:*
*And as the boat-head wound along*
*The willowy hills and fields among,*
*They heard her singing her last song,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*Heard a carol, mournful, holy,*
*Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,*
*Till her blood was frozen slowly,*
*And her eyes were darken'd wholly,*
*Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.*
*For ere she reach'd upon the tide*
*The first house by the water-side,*
*Singing in her song she died,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*Under tower and balcony,*
*By garden-wall and gallery,*
*A gleaming shape she floated by,*
*Dead-pale between the houses high,*
*Silent into Camelot.*

*Out upon the wharfs they came,*
*Knight and burgher, lord and dame,*
*And round the prow they read her name,*
*The Lady of Shalott.*

*Who is this? and what is here?*
*And in the lighted palace near*
*Died the sound of royal cheer;*
*And they cross'd themselves for fear,*
*All the knights at Camelot:*
*But Lancelot mused a little space;*
*He said, "She has a lovely face;*
*God in his mercy lend her grace,*
*The Lady of Shalott."*

Summary

Part I: The poem begins with a description of a river and a road that pass through long fields of barley and rye before reaching the town of Camelot. The people of the town travel along the road and look toward an island called Shalott, which lies further down the river. The island of Shalott contains several plants and flowers, including lilies, aspens, and willows. On the island, a woman known as the Lady of Shalott is imprisoned within a building made of "four gray walls and four gray towers."

Both "heavy barges" and light open boats sail along the edge of the river to Camelot. But has anyone seen or heard of the lady who lives on the island in the river? Only the reapers who harvest the barley hear the echo of her singing. At night, the tired reaper listens to her singing and whispers that he hears her: " 'Tis the fairy Lady of Shalott."

Part II: The Lady of Shalott weaves a magic, colorful web. She has heard a voice whisper that a curse will befall her if she looks down to Camelot, and she does not know what this curse would be. Thus, she concentrates solely on her weaving, never lifting her eyes.

However, as she weaves, a mirror hangs before her. In the mirror, she sees “shadows of the world,” including the highway road, which also passes through the fields, the eddies in the river, and the peasants of the town. Occasionally, she also sees a group of damsels, an abbot (church official), a young shepherd, or a page dressed in crimson. She sometimes sights a pair of knights riding by, though she has no loyal knight of her own to court her. Nonetheless, she enjoys her solitary weaving, though she expresses frustration with the world of shadows when she glimpses a funeral procession or a pair of newlyweds in the mirror.

Part III: A knight in brass armor (“brazen greaves”) comes riding through the fields of barley beside Shalott; the sun shines on his armor and makes it sparkle. As he rides, the gems on his horse’s bridle glitter like a constellation of stars, and the bells on the bridle ring. The knight hangs a bugle from his sash, and his armor makes ringing noises as he gallops alongside the remote island of Shalott.

In the “blue, unclouded weather,” the jewels on the knight’s saddle shine, making him look like a meteor in the purple sky. His forehead glows in the sunlight, and his black curly hair flows out from under his helmet. As he passes by the river, his image flashes into the Lady of Shalott’s mirror and he sings out “tirra lirra.” Upon seeing and hearing this knight, the Lady stops weaving her web and abandons her loom. The web flies out from the loom, and the mirror cracks, and the Lady announces the arrival of her doom: “The curse is come upon me.”

Part IV: As the sky breaks out in rain and storm, the Lady of Shalott descends from her tower and finds a boat. She writes the words “The Lady of Shalott” around the boat’s bow and looks downstream to Camelot like a prophet foreseeing his own misfortunes. In the evening, she lies down in the boat, and the stream carries her to Camelot.

The Lady of Shalott wears a snowy white robe and sings her last song as she sails down to Camelot. She sings until her blood freezes, her eyes darken, and she dies. When her boat sails silently into Camelot, all the knights, lords, and ladies of Camelot emerge from their halls to behold the sight. They read her name on the bow and “cross...themselves for fear.” Only the

great knight Lancelot is bold enough to push aside the crowd, look closely at the dead maiden, and remark "She has a lovely face; God in his mercy lend her grace."

Form

The poem is divided into four numbered parts with discrete, isometric (equally-long) stanzas. The first two parts contain four stanzas each, while the last two parts contain five. Each of the four parts ends at the moment when description yields to directly quoted speech: this speech first takes the form of the reaper's whispering identification, then of the Lady's half-sick lament, then of the Lady's pronouncement of her doom, and finally, of Lancelot's blessing. Each stanza contains nine lines with the rhyme scheme *AAAABCCCB.* The "B" always stands for "Camelot" in the fifth line and for "Shalott" in the ninth. The "A" and "C" lines are always in tetrameter, while the "B" lines are in trimeter. In addition, the syntax is line-bound: most phrases do not extend past the length of a single line.

Commentary

Originally written in 1832, this poem was later revised, and published in its final form in 1842. Tennyson claimed that he had based it on an old Italian romance, though the poem also bears much similarity to the story of the Maid of Astolat in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur.* As in Malory's account, Tennyson's lyric includes references to the Arthurian legend; moreover, "Shalott" seems quite close to Malory's "Astolat."

Much of the poem's charm stems from its sense of mystery and elusiveness; of course, these aspects also complicate the task of analysis. That said, most scholars understand "The Lady of Shalott" to be about the conflict between art and life. The Lady, who weaves her magic web and sings her song in a remote tower, can be seen to represent the contemplative artist isolated from the bustle and activity of daily life. The moment she sets her art aside to gaze down on the real world, a curse befalls her and she meets her tragic death. The poem thus captures the conflict between an artist's desire for social involvement and his/her doubts about whether such a commitment is viable for someone dedicated to art. The poem may also express a more personal dilemma for Tennyson as a specific artist: while he felt an obligation to seek subject matter outside the world of his own mind and his own immediate experiences—to comment on politics,

history, or a more general humanity—he also feared that this expansion into broader territories might destroy his poetry's magic.

Part I and Part IV of this poem deal with the Lady of Shalott as she appears to the outside world, whereas Part II and Part III describe the world from the Lady's perspective. In Part I, Tennyson portrays the Lady as secluded from the rest of the world by both water and the height of her tower. We are not told how she spends her time or what she thinks about; thus we, too, like everyone in the poem, are denied access to the interiority of her world. Interestingly, the only people who know that she exists are those whose occupations are most diametrically opposite her own: the reapers who toil in physical labor rather than by sitting and crafting works of beauty.

Part II describes the Lady's experience of imprisonment from her own perspective. We learn that her alienation results from a mysterious curse: she is not allowed to look out on Camelot, so all her knowledge of the world must come from the reflections and shadows in her mirror. (It was common for weavers to use mirrors to see the progress of their tapestries from the side that would eventually be displayed to the viewer.) Tennyson notes that often she sees a funeral *or* a wedding, a disjunction that suggests the interchangeability, and hence the conflation, of love and death for the Lady: indeed, when she later falls in love with Lancelot, she will simultaneously bring upon her own death.

Whereas Part II makes reference to all the different types of people that the Lady sees through her mirror, including the knights who "come riding two and two" (line 61), Part III focuses on one particular knight who captures the Lady's attention: Sir Lancelot. This dazzling knight is the hero of the King Arthur stories, famous for his illicit affair with the beautiful Queen Guinevere. He is described in an array of colors: he is a "red-cross knight"; his shield "sparkled on the yellow field"; he wears a "silver bugle"; he passes through "blue unclouded weather" and the "purple night," and he has "coal-black curls." He is also adorned in a "gemmy bridle" and other bejeweled garments, which sparkle in the light. Yet in spite of the rich visual details that Tennyson provides, it is the sound and not the sight of Lancelot that causes the Lady of Shalott to transgress her set boundaries: only when she hears him sing "Tirra lirra" does she leave her web and seal her doom. The intensification of the Lady's experiences in this part of the poem is

marked by the shift from the static, descriptive present tense of Parts I and II to the dynamic, active past of Parts III and IV.

In Part IV, all the lush color of the previous section gives way to “pale yellow” and “darkened” eyes, and the brilliance of the sunlight is replaced by a “low sky raining.” The moment the Lady sets her art aside to look upon Lancelot, she is seized with death. The end of her artistic isolation thus leads to the end of creativity: “Out flew her web and floated wide” (line 114). She also loses her mirror, which had been her only access to the outside world: “The mirror cracked from side to side” (line 115). Her turn to the outside world thus leaves her bereft both of her art object and of the instrument of her craft—and of her very life. Yet perhaps the greatest curse of all is that although she surrenders herself to the sight of Lancelot, she dies completely unappreciated by him. The poem ends with the tragic triviality of Lancelot’s response to her tremendous passion: all he has to say about her is that “she has a lovely face” (line 169). Having abandoned her artistry, the Lady of Shalott becomes herself an art object; no longer can she offer her creativity, but merely a “dead-pale” beauty (line 157).

**The Cry of the Children**

BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
    Ere the sorrow comes with years ?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers, —
    And that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows ;
  The young birds are chirping in the nest ;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows ;
  The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
    They are weeping bitterly !
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
    In the country of the free.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
Why their tears are falling so ?
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago —
The old tree is leafless in the forest —
The old year is ending in the frost —
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest —
The old hope is hardest to be lost :
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland ?

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy —
"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary;"
"Our young feet," they say, "are very weak !"
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—
Our grave-rest is very far to seek !
Ask the old why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold —
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old !"

"True," say the children, "it may happen
That we die before our time !
Little Alice died last year her grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.

We looked into the pit prepared to take her —
Was no room for any work in the close clay :
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying, 'Get up, little Alice ! it is day.'
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries ;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes ,—
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud, by the kirk-chime !
It is good when it happens," say the children,
"That we die before our time !"

Alas, the wretched children ! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have !
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city —
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do —
Pluck you handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through !
But they answer, " Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine ?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap —
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping —

We fall upon our faces, trying to go ;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground —
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

"For all day, the wheels are droning, turning, —
Their wind comes in our faces, —
Till our hearts turn, — our heads, with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling —
Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall, —
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling —
All are turning, all the day, and we with all ! —
And all day, the iron wheels are droning ;
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)
'Stop ! be silent for to-day ! ' "

Ay ! be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth —
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth !
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals —
Let them prove their inward souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels ! —
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
As if Fate in each were stark ;

And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray —
So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, " Who is God that He should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred ?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word !
And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door :
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
Hears our weeping any more ?

" Two words, indeed, of praying we remember ;
And at midnight's hour of harm, —
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words, except 'Our Father,'
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
'Our Father !' If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
'Come and rest with me, my child.'

"But, no !" say the children, weeping faster,
" He is speechless as a stone ;

And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to ! " say the children,—"up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find !
Do not mock us ; grief has made us unbelieving —
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."
Do ye hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach ?
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving —
And the children doubt of each.

And well may the children weep before you ;
They are weary ere they run ;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun :
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom ;
They sink in the despair, without its calm —
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom, —
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm, —
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly
No dear remembrance keep,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly :
Let them weep ! let them weep !

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they think you see their angels in their places,
With eyes meant for Deity ;—
"How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart, —
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,

And tread onward to your throne amid the mart ?
Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,
And your purple shews your path ;
But the child's sob curseth deeper in the silence
Than the strong man in his wrath !"

The commitment which Browning felt incumbent to use her literary gifts toward fulfilling include the pervasiveness of forced child labor to grease the machinery of the Industrial Revolution (sometimes literally, but mostly figuratively." Her long poem "The Cry of the Children" presents the inhumanity of these conditions as both a poetic plea and narrative invocation of the desperation of their plight: the horrors remaining silent to those ignorant of what goes on inside factory walls is transformed into a repetitive motif that commences with the opening line of this poem.

*The Cry of the Children* is representative not only of Barrett Browning's political poetry but also of her work in general. It contains themes and images that can be found throughout her work. The use of language, meter, and rhyme in the poem demonstrates her innovative poetics and singular style.

It is problematic that Barrett Browning actually heard the cry of the children whom she so eloquently laments in her poem. She wrote *The Cry of the Children* after reading a report on the employment of children in mines and manufactories. A master of language, she evokes its emotional power to engender a response of outrage in her readers. The poem is intentionally didactic, political in purpose as well as subject matter. It is an expression of her own alienation and abhorrence of industrial society seen through the eyes and feelings of factory children, represented as innocence betrayed and used by political and economic interests for selfish purposes.

Throughout the poem, demonic images of a Factory Hell are contrasted with the Heaven of the English countryside, the inferno of industrialism with the bliss of a land-based society. The children are implored to leave the mine and city for the serenity of meadow and country. The grinding, droning mechanism of industrial society destroys the promise and hope of human life.

Barrett Browning was concerned with the fate of a society that exploited human life for profit, and she ends her poem with an indictment of industrial society.

The reader is made to experience the dreariness of the factory inferno by Barrett Browning's use of language, as she describes the harrowing reality of the "droning, turning" factory wheels, relentlessly grinding the children's spirit and life as it molds its goods. The factory is depicted as a perversion of nature, a literal Hell seen as the absence and corruption of the natural world. Instead of the world revolving around the sun, the sky turns—as the wheels, similarly, turn. Barrett Browning's use of words ending in "ing" and containing long vowel sounds—"moaning," "droning," "turning," "burning"—invokes the monotony and despair of this awful abyss of industry.

The "Children" of the poem are silenced by the sound of the wheels turning, seek the silence of death as their only means of escape, and, finally, are reduced to a mere "sob in the silence" in a vain effort to curse. The struggle to speak is a constant theme in the poem, a motif that vies with the oppression of the factory and the plight of the children. The repetition of the phrase, "say the children" makes it a key element in the very structure of the poem. Words of speech and silence are used throughout—"hear," "ask," "listen," "sing," "answer," "quiet," "silent," "still,"...

**Dover Beach**

BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits; on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery; we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

"Dover Beach" is the most celebrated poem by Matthew Arnold, a writer and educator of the Victorian era. The poem expresses a crisis of faith, with the speaker acknowledging the diminished standing of Christianity, which the speaker sees as being unable to withstand the rising tide of scientific discovery. New research and intellectual inquiry cast doubt on humankind's central and special role in the universe. The speaker in the poem senses this change almost subconsciously, seeing and hearing it in the sea that the speaker is looking out upon. In its expression of alienation, doubt, and melancholy, the poem is often interpreted as a remarkably forward-thinking precursor to 20th century crises of faith—like Existentialism and Absurdism. In essence, the poem is an inquiry into what it means to be alive.

Matthew Arnold achieves a lonely tone in the poem “Dover Beach, ” through the use of imagery, simile, and personification.

The poem begins with a simple statement: “the sea is calm tonight”. At this early moment this is as yet nothing but a statement, waiting for the rest of the work to give it meaning. The statement bodes of the significance the sea is going to play as an image in the poem. The first part of the stanza seems to reflect on the sea’s calmness. As yet, there is no emotion or thought, only images, quiet. But! By the fourth line, already, something has changed. An ephemeral contrast to the timeless sea is introduced: “on the French coast the light *gleams and is gone*” (emphasis mine). Lonely imagery builds: the “cliffs… glimmering and vast”, the “tranquil bay.” In line nine another voice is added to the melody, literally—sound. “Listen!” the line starts, and goes on to add to the still, silent imagery that came before it—a voice, a presence, a roar—and movement, movement of waves which until now have not been described as moving. How are they moving? Out and in, returning ever, a cycle unending. This imagery will appear again and again in the poem. The last two lines of the stanzas start to add the feeling more pointedly, now that the mood has been set: the waves have a “tremulous cadence slow, ” that brings “the eternal note of sadness in.”

In the next stanza, the sound imagery continues, even as the poem reaches out through history—“Sophocles long ago heard [the eternal note of sadness] on the Aegean [sea]” and it brought to his mind human misery. Here we have a comparison between human misery, ebbing and flowing, and the sea, ebbing and flowing. Arnold continues the comparison by adding another note: not only is human misery like the sea, so too is human faith, which “was once, too, at the full, ” and then with a bit of simile continues: “like the folds of a bright girdle.” Perhaps that would count as personification of the earth, because a girdle is something humans wear. But the persona who speaks now hears only its “melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.” The tide is going out, leaving the “naked shingles” of the world, which literally means the loose pebbles that collect on beaches, but of course also brings to mind a lonely house.

The last stanza goes back to the beginning, to those beautiful calm images, and says, “the world, which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams, so various, so beautiful, so new, ” isn’t any of that. Really, the world “hath neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor help for pain.” The speaker and the listener, perched at the window (an edge-like place), are like the light that

gleams and is gone from the edge of the land (the French coast). The poem ends with its strongest lonely image of "a darkling plain… where ignorant armies clash by night." The speaker and the listener's lonely state—which they are trying to fend off with their mutual love—extends to all of humanity, as suggested in this final dark picture.

**My Last Duchess**

BY ROBERT BROWNING

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
"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
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

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.
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
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
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,
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 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
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Summary

This poem is loosely based on historical events involving Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara, who lived in the 16th century. The Duke is the speaker of the poem, and tells us he is entertaining an emissary who has come to negotiate the Duke's marriage (he has recently been widowed) to the daughter of another powerful family. As he shows the visitor through his palace, he stops before a portrait of the late Duchess, apparently a young and lovely girl. The Duke begins reminiscing about the portrait sessions, then about the Duchess herself. His musings give way to a diatribe on her disgraceful behavior: he claims she flirted with everyone and did not appreciate his "gift of a nine-hundred-years- old name." As his monologue continues, the reader realizes with ever-more chilling certainty that the Duke in fact caused the Duchess's early demise: when her behavior escalated, "[he] gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together." Having made this disclosure, the Duke returns to the business at hand: arranging for another marriage, with another young girl. As the Duke and the emissary walk leave the painting behind, the Duke points out other notable artworks in his collection.

Form

"My Last Duchess" comprises rhyming pentameter lines. The lines do not employ end-stops; rather, they use *enjambment*—gthat is, sentences and other grammatical units do not necessarily conclude at the end of lines. Consequently, the rhymes do not create a sense of closure when they come, but rather remain a subtle driving force behind the Duke's compulsive revelations. The Duke is quite a performer: he mimics others' voices, creates hypothetical situations, and uses the force of his personality to make horrifying information seem merely colorful. Indeed, the poem provides a classic example of a dramatic monologue: the speaker is clearly distinct from the poet; an audience is suggested but never appears in the poem; and the revelation of the Duke's character is the poem's primary aim.

Commentary

But Browning has more in mind than simply creating a colorful character and placing him in a picturesque historical scene. Rather, the specific historical setting of the poem harbors much significance: the Italian Renaissance held a particular fascination for Browning and his contemporaries, for it represented the flowering of the aesthetic and the human alongside, or in some cases in the place of, the religious and the moral. Thus the temporal setting allows Browning to again explore sex, violence, and aesthetics as all entangled, complicating and confusing each other: the lushness of the language belies the fact that the Duchess was punished for her natural sexuality. The Duke's ravings suggest that most of the supposed transgressions took place only in his mind. Like some of Browning's fellow Victorians, the Duke sees sin lurking in every corner. The reason the speaker here gives for killing the Duchess ostensibly differs from that given by the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" for murder Porphyria; however, both women are nevertheless victims of a male desire to inscribe and fix female sexuality. The desperate need to do this mirrors the efforts of Victorian society to mold the behavior—gsexual and otherwise—gof individuals. For people confronted with an increasingly complex and anonymous modern world, this impulse comes naturally: to control would seem to be to conserve and stabilize. The Renaissance was a time when morally dissolute men like the Duke exercised absolute power, and as such it is a fascinating study for the Victorians: works like this imply that, surely, a time that produced magnificent art like the Duchess's portrait couldn't have been entirely evil in its allocation of societal control—geven though it put men like the Duke in power.

A poem like "My Last Duchess" calculatedly engages its readers on a psychological level. Because we hear only the Duke's musings, we must piece the story together ourselves. Browning forces his reader to become involved in the poem in order to understand it, and this adds to the fun of reading his work. It also forces the reader to question his or her own response to the subject portrayed and the method of its portrayal. We are forced to consider, Which aspect of the poem dominates: the horror of the Duchess's fate, or the beauty of the language and the powerful dramatic development? Thus by posing this question the poem firstly tests the Victorian reader's response to the modern world—git asks, Has everyday life made you numb yet?—gand secondly asks a question that must be asked of all art—git queries, Does art have a moral component, or is

it merely an aesthetic exercise? In these latter considerations Browning prefigures writers like Charles Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde.

**Up-Hill**

BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

Poems that depict struggle are, generally speaking, poems that are universal. Everyone struggles in some capacity or the other, and this is hardly something that the average person needs a particular art form to tell them. Christina Rossetti was no stranger to struggle in life, and her

poem, Up-hill, seems to call up her perspective on the concept. It imagines a conversation told in such a way that the reader can easily hear one side or the other coming out of their own thought process, and relating to it one way or the other. “An uphill battle” is a common expression that likely informed the title of Rossetti’s work, so it is no surprise that both the expression and the poem are still very relevant today.

Up-hill is written in a common style for poetry; it consists of four verses with four lines each. Notably, Up-hill is written from the perspective of two distinct narrators, one who asks questions, and one who provides answers. These narrators are kept easily separate from one another by the simple rhyming pattern of the piece. It is rhymed in an ABAB style, where every “A” (which is to say the first and third line of each verse) rhyme is spoken by one narrator, and every “B” line the other. To further simplify this, the lines also alternate between asking questions and giving answers. In this way, Rossetti is able to craft a poetic conversation between two people without complicating her work in any way — normally a fairly difficult thing to do. Between the rhyming and the narration pattern, this is an easy poem to read and follow, and flows nicely, despite the somewhat erratic syllable count for each verse.

In the first verse, the author seems to be drawing on the common “uphill battle” metaphor to inform the title of the poem. The first speaker asks about “the road,” and whether or not it is uphill for its entire length, as well as whether or not the time it will take to walk the road will mean the entire day. The description of the “whole long day” is an unusual choice — especially since without the word “long,” this line would match the first one for syllables. Its addition is meaningful in showing the reader that the speaking asking questions is tired. Their uphill journey has clearly taken some time up to this point, and they are anxious for its conclusion. It is also possible that the “long day,” in contrast to simply “the day” refers to a twenty-four hour period. This seems likely based on the answer they receive — that their journey will not be over before sundown. The second narrator’s lines are much shorter than the first one’s; they are succinct. The only aspect of their character of particular note is that they refer to the other speaker as their friend.

The questions and answers continue with the second verse, where an atmosphere begins to become noticeable. The two characters portrayed here are clearly very different in their perspectives on the uphill journey. The first speaker is unsure and lacks confidence; here they ask if there is a place they can stay for the night, since their journey will take so long. As soon as they are told that such a place exists, they worry that they'll miss seeing it. The second speaker, by contrast, is certain not only that there is an inn for shelter against the dark, but that they will undoubtedly find it before it is too dark to see. It is an odd experience as a reader to alternate between fear and confidence on every line of the work; Rossetti has chosen to portray one journey through two opposite viewpoints, and yet it remains easy to follow and understand.

In the third (and second-to-last) verse, the questioning narrator wonders about the inn they are to find, and whether or not they will be welcome there. This is a strange line of thought — the idea of an inn, after all, is for anyone to find shelter, and an inn is constructed with nomads in mind. And yet, the speaker here is concerned that they will be unwelcome, despite assurances from their companion that they will be welcomed by the "other wayfarers." The first speaker hopes to find friends in their same predicament, and are told that they will. The anxieties of the initial speaker and the confidence of the second one continue to be the prominent theme of the work, though the identities of both remain concealed.

The idea of two friends walking up a hill for a full day is a rather unlikely scenario in the literal sense. The expression from which this poem likely was inspired refers to situations and scenarios that require harder work than usual to overcome — walking down a pathway versus walking up a hill. In a figurative sense, the speaker asking questions in this work is attempting to overcome an obstacle, and liken it to trying to walk uphill for a full day. The second speaker could be a friend encouraging them along the way, or it could be another aspect of their own personality, their sense of optimism or determination to finish what they have started.

The idea of an inn along the way, in which lies comfort equal to the work put in ("Of labour you shall find the sum"), as well as other people climbing the same hill, is a likely metaphor for friends and family. It is difficult — to put it lightly — to attempt to cross over any kind of obstacle without some kind of support. If it was easy to do, after all, it wouldn't be much of an obstacle. So the speaker draws on their own sense of self and imagines that at the end of the day,

there will be a roof over their head. Perhaps they are going home to their family, or perhaps the inn is a bar where they can meet up with friends and forget about the hardships of the day.

The amazing thing about *Up-hill* is that any of the above interpretations are plausible when the entire poem is read in a metaphorical context. At its core, the poem is about two voices, one struggling and seeking rest, and another encouraging them and telling them they will find it. Nearly everyone should be able to relate to this in some way, because the poem is intentionally written to stand on the fine line between vague and relatable. What exactly the speakers are doing in trying to ascend this climb is unspecified, because it doesn't matter. What does matter is that second voice that encourages them, assures them, and helps them to find rest. A friend, a family member, or an internal voice — to every reader, it will be someone different. The important thing, however, is that it will be someone.

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