Lecture 4. The Gothic & The Romantic Novel: Mary Shelley & The Brontës

Introduction

This lecture explores the Romantic Gothic tradition by examining its key tropes and how they manifest in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The lesson will focus on how these novels critique scientific ambition, gender norms, and class structures, using Gothic elements as a mode of both social critique and psychological exploration.

Part I. Romanticism and the Rise of Gothic Fiction

4.1 Definition of Gothic Fiction

Gothic fiction is a literary genre that emerged in the late 18th century, characterized by its fusion of horror, the supernatural, psychological intensity, and a deep engagement with emotional and aesthetic extremes. It is marked by a fascination with the mysterious and the macabre, often set in antiquated or decaying locations such as castles, abbeys, or desolate landscapes. These settings serve not merely as backdrops, but as symbolic spaces reflecting internal states: madness, desire, fear, and the unconscious.

At its core, Gothic fiction is concerned with the boundaries between the known and the unknown, the rational and the irrational, the real and the imagined. It stages conflicts between Enlightenment rationality and emerging Romantic ideals, particularly emotion, imagination, and the sublime. The genre is a response to historical anxieties: the destabilization of traditional authority, the rise of secularism, scientific advancements, and shifting gender and class roles.

Some defining features include:

- **Haunted Landscapes and Architectural Spaces**: These are often symbolic of the characters' internal turmoil. In *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the bleak Yorkshire moors mirror the wild passions and social alienation of its characters. Similarly, *Jane Eyre* (1847) features Thornfield Hall, a gothic mansion hiding the literal and metaphorical madness of Bertha Mason, Rochester's imprisoned wife. The architecture becomes a site where secrets and repressions are embodied and dramatized.

- **Byronic Heroes**: Drawing from Lord Byron's poetic archetype, Gothic fiction often features brooding, charismatic, and morally ambiguous male figures. These characters; such as Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, and Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) embody a tortured complexity that blurs the line between villainy and heroism. Their tragic grandeur often arises from inner torment, isolation, and a defiance of conventional morality.

- **Themes of Madness, Repression, and Forbidden Knowledge**: Gothic fiction frequently explores psychological fragmentation and transgressive desires. Victor Frankenstein's obsessive quest to uncover the secrets of life itself, motivated by scientific ambition and emotional loss, culminates in a horrifying confrontation with the creature he brings to life, symbolizing the dangers of unchecked human aspiration. Similarly, the locked rooms and secret chambers common in Gothic texts represent psychological repression and social taboo.

4.2 The Romantic Movement and Gothic Fiction

The Gothic genre developed alongside and in tension with the Romantic movement. While Romanticism (c. 1780–1850) privileged the individual's emotional, imaginative, and spiritual engagement with the world, valorizing the sublime, the pastoral, and the power of nature, Gothic fiction emerged as its shadow form. It explored what Romanticism often repressed: fear, transgression, and the irrational.

Romanticism and the Gothic are not strictly oppositional, however; rather, the Gothic intensifies the emotional extremity and subjective experience central to Romanticism but redirects them toward darker terrains. Where Romantic writers celebrated natural beauty and human potential, Gothic writers questioned the price of that idealism, especially the cost of violating nature or society's moral codes in pursuit of personal or intellectual fulfillment.

For instance:

- **Emotion and the Sublime**: Romantic thinkers like Edmund Burke distinguished between the beautiful and the sublime, the latter evoking awe and terror. Gothic fiction adopts the sublime's emotional charge but places it in unsettling contexts: stormy mountain passes,

desolate ruins, or monstrous creations. Shelley's *Frankenstein* repeatedly invokes sublime landscapes that both inspire and dwarf human agency.

- **The Individual vs. Society**: Both traditions focus on the individual's struggle with society, but the Gothic dramatizes this through isolation, madness, or exile. The Gothic protagonist is often alienated, a figure of psychological or social liminality.

- **Ambivalence Toward Progress**: Romanticism often celebrated human creativity and imagination, but Gothic fiction interrogates their darker consequences. In *Frankenstein*, the very pursuit of knowledge; typically Romantic in its aspiration, is transformed into a source of horror, suggesting that certain boundaries, once transgressed, lead not to enlightenment but to chaos.

In sum, Gothic fiction within the Romantic period serves both as a mirror and a critique: it mirrors Romanticism's concern with emotion, nature, and subjectivity, but critiques its idealism by foregrounding the monstrous, the repressed, and the catastrophic potential of human ambition.

Part II. *Frankenstein* and the Critique of Enlightenment Science

4.3 Scientific Ambition and the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, spanning the 17th to early 19th centuries, was characterized by a profound confidence in human reason, empirical observation, and the potential for progress through scientific inquiry. Central to Enlightenment ideology was the belief that nature could be understood, categorized, and ultimately controlled by the rational mind. Philosophers like Francis Bacon and René Descartes helped shape a vision of science as a systematic, almost heroic endeavor to liberate humanity from superstition, ignorance, and suffering.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), however, serves as a profound literary interrogation; and at times, a scathing critique: of this faith in human mastery over nature. Through the character of Victor Frankenstein, Shelley dramatizes the dangers of Enlightenment hubris: the belief that knowledge and progress are inherently good and should be pursued at all costs. The novel is not anti-science per se, but it is deeply skeptical of unreflective scientific ambition divorced from ethical responsibility and emotional empathy.

Victor's obsessive pursuit of forbidden knowledge: the "elixir of life" and the animation of dead matter, echoes Enlightenment ideals of conquering nature, yet the consequences are catastrophic. The novel thus questions the morality of scientific overreach and the psychological cost of a purely rational worldview that neglects affect, community, and relational responsibility.

4.4 Key Passages for Analysis

4.4.1 Victor's Ambition

"What glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley 31)

This passage captures Victor's Promethean aspirations and echoes Enlightenment optimism about the transformative power of science. The language of "glory" reveals a desire not only for humanitarian progress but also for personal fame and god-like power. Victor imagines eradicating disease: an ultimate Enlightenment fantasy: yet this desire is driven by ego and isolation rather than collective good.

4.4.2 The Creature's Suffering

"I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (Shelley 104)

This line is pivotal in Shelley's exploration of emotional and social alienation: a consequence not only of Victor's scientific overreach but also of Enlightenment neglect of the emotional and ethical dimensions of humanity. The Creature, despite his physical monstrosity, is initially benevolent, intelligent, and empathetic. His descent into violence is a product of societal rejection, emotional deprivation, and paternal abandonment.

Shelley subverts Enlightenment assumptions that knowledge alone can lead to human betterment. The Creature educates himself by reading *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch*, and *The Sorrows of Werter*, gaining moral awareness: but his intellectual development does not protect him from pain. On the contrary, it deepens his suffering by making him fully aware of his exclusion from human community. His misery stems not from ignorance but from rejection.

The Creature becomes a mirror for Victor: both are alienated, both are creators (Victor of life, the Creature of his own morality), and both are victims of unchecked ambition. Shelley

invites us to consider the ethical responsibilities of creation: whether scientific, artistic, or parental.

4.4.3 Walton's Letters and the Cautionary Frame

"You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been." (Shelley 208)

The novel's epistolary frame, composed of Captain Walton's letters to his sister Margaret, positions Walton as a parallel figure to Victor: a man driven by the pursuit of forbidden knowledge, in this case, the navigation of the polar regions. Victor's final words to Walton serve as a cautionary tale, an admonition to temper ambition with wisdom and humility.

Shelley uses Walton to illustrate that the Enlightenment's legacy is not merely scientific; it is also imperial and exploratory. The drive to "conquer the unknown" is implicated in colonial expansion as much as scientific discovery. Victor's metaphor of the serpent evokes the Biblical Fall, implying that the pursuit of knowledge, if unregulated, can lead to a catastrophic loss of innocence and moral order.

Walton ultimately heeds Victor's warning, choosing to turn back and preserve the lives of his crew. This decision contrasts with Victor's unyielding obsession, suggesting that there is redemption in restraint and a more ethical model of curiosity.

In sum, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents a complex and prophetic critique of Enlightenment science by interrogating the costs of ambition, the limits of reason, and the ethical demands of creation. The novel does not reject knowledge or progress outright but insists that they must be pursued with humility, empathy, and responsibility. Through its layered narrative structure and complex characters, *Frankenstein* remains a foundational text for discussions about the intersection of science, ethics, and the human condition in both the Romantic and contemporary imagination.

4.4 *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: Passion, Gender, and Social Class

4.4.1 Gender and Power in the Brontës' Novels

Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels are deeply concerned with the intersection of passion, gender roles, and social hierarchy. As works of the mid-19th century, *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) inhabit a Victorian culture that idealized feminine submission, domesticity, and moral purity; ideals famously crystallized in the trope of the "*Angel in the House*", a term popularized by Coventry Patmore's poem and critically interrogated by later feminist scholars.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their landmark feminist study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), argue that women writers of the 19th century were often forced to navigate a dichotomous vision of womanhood: the idealized, passive "angel" and the disruptive, emotional, and transgressive "madwoman." This binary structure is dramatized in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, where female protagonists negotiate their desires and identities within, and often against, patriarchal constraints.

4.4.2 *Jane Eyre*: Autonomy, Love, and Moral Integrity

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is often read as a proto-feminist bildungsroman that charts a young woman's quest for selfhood, spiritual integrity, and emotional fulfillment. Jane consistently resists the dominant gender ideology that equates femininity with submission and self-sacrifice. She asserts, *"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."* This iconic assertion of agency is spoken when Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress after discovering his existing marriage to Bertha Mason. Here, Jane not only asserts her moral autonomy but challenges the patriarchal assumption that love is conditional upon female subordination. Her refusal to be "ensnared" invokes the imagery of domestic entrapment and connects to a broader Gothic tradition of women imprisoned in literal or metaphorical cages.

Jane's insistence on equality in her relationship with Rochester, and her choice to leave him when such equality is impossible, subverts the Victorian model of the obedient wife. Her return to him later in the novel: after his physical and symbolic fall from patriarchal dominance,

marks a shift in the gender dynamic. Jane comes back not as a dependent but as an empowered equal, with financial independence and moral authority.

4.4.3 *Wuthering Heights*: Destructive Love and Social Constraint

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* offers a more radical, elemental vision of passion and identity, one that resists conventional moral or social resolution. At the heart of the novel is the obsessive, almost metaphysical bond between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff: a love that transcends earthly boundaries and social propriety. Heathcliff declares: "I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (203) This declaration is not merely a romantic exaggeration but a deeply Gothic articulation of existential despair and desire. Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship is often read as a union of kindred spirits violently torn apart by social structures, namely, class mobility and patriarchal expectations. Catherine famously says, "I am Heathcliff," suggesting a collapse of boundaries between self and other, eros and identity.

However, Catherine chooses to marry Edgar Linton for status and social stability, revealing the constraints imposed on women by class expectations and inheritance laws. Her internal conflict; between social duty and wild, passionate affinity, exemplifies the gendered cost of Victorian respectability. Unlike Jane Eyre, Catherine does not reconcile love and autonomy; instead, her divided loyalties lead to psychological breakdown and early death.

The novel's complex narrative structure (told through unreliable narrators and temporal layering) enhances its Gothic instability and reflects the chaotic emotional landscapes of its characters. *Wuthering Heights* refuses to moralize passion or punish transgression in conventional ways, offering instead a radical meditation on the destructive and sublime dimensions of love.

4.4.4 The Gothic, Gender, and Social Class

Both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* engage with the Gothic tradition not merely to create suspense or terror, but to dramatize the psychological and social realities of women's lives in a restrictive society. The "madwoman in the attic" trope, embodied by Bertha Mason, becomes a metaphor for the repressed rage, desire, and resistance of women who cannot conform to the

role of the angel. In both novels, madness, passion, and hauntings are ways of giving voice to what is otherwise silenced in polite, patriarchal society.

Moreover, both texts interrogate the rigid class hierarchies of Victorian England. Jane's refusal to marry Rochester as his mistress is also a refusal to transgress class boundaries under the pretense of love. Heathcliff's outsider status: racially ambiguous, orphaned, and without property, marks him as a class and cultural threat to the landed gentry. Yet his economic rise only deepens his alienation, suggesting that social mobility cannot redeem structural injustice.

Conclusion

Through Gothic motifs, the Brontë sisters probe the limits of love, autonomy, and identity in a society that polices women's bodies, desires, and voices. *Jane Eyre* offers a vision of female self-determination within a moral and emotional framework, while *Wuthering Heights* presents a more chaotic and tragic vision of passion's defiance of social order. Both novels contribute profoundly to the evolution of the Gothic tradition as a space for exploring transgressive emotion and radical subjectivity.

In our next lecture, we will shift from the Gothic and Romantic legacies in fiction to the poetic responses to modernity in the Victorian age. As Britain underwent profound economic and social transformation during the Industrial Revolution, poets like Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning grappled with questions of identity, agency, and alienation. We will examine *Tennyson's "Ulysses"* as a reflection of Victorian heroism and existential restlessness, and explore Browning's *dramatic monologues* as psychological portraits shaped by the tensions of a rapidly industrializing society. Together, these works reveal how poetry became a vital medium for negotiating the moral and philosophical dilemmas of the 19th century.

4.5 Evaluation Task

In a short essay (500–700 words), discuss how Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Your essay should:

- Present a clear argument or thesis.

- Analyze key moments that show Victor Frankenstein's ambition and its consequences.

- Include at least one quoted passage from the novel with MLA citation.

- Briefly connect the theme to the novel's broader moral or philosophical concerns.

Essays will be assessed on clarity of argument, use of evidence, and coherence of structure.

4.6 Works Cited

- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Margaret Smith, Oxford UP, 2000.
- Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Edited by Ian Jack, Oxford UP, 2008.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale UP, 2000.
- Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House*. 1854. Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25550.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus*. Edited by Marilyn Butler, Oxford UP, 2008.

Lecture 5: The Industrial Revolution and Victorian Poetry: Tennyson and Browning

Duration: 3hours

Operational Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand how industrialization influenced Victorian literature.

2. Analyze how Tennyson's *Ulysses* reflects Victorian ideals of perseverance.

3. Examine how Browning's dramatic monologues explore power, gender, and morality.

4. Compare Tennyson's and Browning's reactions to social and cultural instability.

5. Conduct close readings of poetic language, imagery, and tone.

Introduction

This lecture explores how Victorian poetry responds to the social and psychological upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Through close readings of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, the lecture examines how poets articulated ideals of perseverance, power, and moral complexity. The lecture considers how industrial modernity shaped new forms of poetic expression that reflected both the aspirations and anxieties of the Victorian age.

Part I. Industrial Modernity and the Emergence of the Victorian Self

5.1 Historical and Cultural Context

The Industrial Revolution (circa 1750–1850) was a transformative epoch in British history, marking the transition from agrarian economies to industrial capitalism. Innovations in textile manufacturing, steam power, and mechanized production catalyzed rapid urbanization and created new working-class and middle-class identities. These socioeconomic shifts were accompanied by unprecedented challenges: overcrowded cities, exploitative labor conditions, and the erosion of traditional social bonds.

For Victorian writers, these material changes posed profound questions about human agency, morality, and subjectivity. Literature, especially poetry, emerged as a site of both crisis and critique, reflecting anxieties about progress, identity, and the dehumanizing aspects of modernity.

5.2 Key Literary Consequences of Industrialism

- Moral and religious uncertainty (loss of spiritual authority in an industrial world).

- Tensions between individualism and collectivism (especially in the middle class).

- Psychological fragmentation and alienation, later theorized in modernist and psychoanalytic frameworks.

As such, poetry became not merely a vehicle for aesthetic expression but also a mode of cultural negotiation, grappling with the promises and discontents of industrial modernity.

Part II. Tennyson's *"Ulysses"* and the Victorian Ideal of Perseverance

5.3 Classical Myth and Victorian Anxiety

Browning's innovation lies in the development of the dramatic monologue, a poetic form that reveals character through indirect self-disclosure. Unlike Tennyson's mythic figures, Browning's speakers are deeply human, often morally ambiguous, and psychologically layered.

This form allows for:

- A single, often unreliable speaker.

- An implied audience (or listener).

- A revelation of inner conflict or obsession.

5.4 Key Themes and Passages *My Last Duchess* (1842)

5.4.1 Control and Patriarchy

"I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together." (Browning 4)

This chilling admission from the Duke reflects the commodification and control of women in patriarchal Victorian society. The Duke's refined rhetoric masks an authoritarian, perhaps murderous, disposition.

5.4.2 Aesthetic Possession

The Duke's obsession with the painting reflects a desire to objectify and contain female vitality. The artwork becomes a symbolic site of dominance: echoing how Victorian gender ideology idealized passive femininity. Myth, History, and Modern Ideology

Tennyson's *Ulysses* (1833, pub. 1842) draws upon the classical figure of Odysseus to explore existential themes central to the Victorian ethos. The poem becomes a vehicle for articulating heroic persistence in the face of disillusionment, a key concern in an age that increasingly questioned the certainties of religion and tradition.

5.4.3 Restlessness and the Myth of Progress

"I cannot rest from travel: I will drink / Life to the lees." (Tennyson 603)

This opening reflects the psychological disquiet of modern man: Ulysses, emblematic of the imperial and scientific adventurer, cannot be content with domestic stasis. His journey becomes a

metaphor for the Victorian imperative to strive and achieve, echoing the capitalist and imperial ideologies of continual expansion and conquest.

5.4.4 Heroism, Age, and Individual Will

"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." (Tennyson 605)

This famous concluding line encapsulates the ideology of perseverance. Yet the poem's speaker is not a triumphant hero but an aging man confronting decline and death. Tennyson therefore constructs a melancholic heroism, where individual will resists entropy; mirroring Victorian anxieties about mortality, legacy, and purposelessness.

5.4.5 Ambiguity and Irony

Although the poem is often interpreted as affirming Victorian values, it also opens itself to ironic readings. Ulysses' speech may reflect hubris, escapism, or dissatisfaction, suggesting the existential cost of relentless ambition. Literary critics such as Herbert Tucker and Isobel Armstrong have emphasized the poem's dialectical structure, in which stoic resolve masks deeper ontological instability.

Part III. Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues: Voice, Power, and the Fractured Self

5.5 Formal Innovation: The Dramatic Monologue

A dramatic monologue is a poetic form in which a single speaker addresses a silent or implied audience at a critical moment, revealing not only their thoughts but also key aspects of their character, often unintentionally. The form blends dramatic and lyric elements, creating a unique space for psychological exploration and social critique.

5.5.1 Key Features

1. Single Speaker: The poem is delivered entirely in the voice of one character, distinct from the poet.

2. Implied Audience: The speaker addresses another character whose presence is felt but who never speaks.

3. Revealing Character: The speaker often reveals more than they intend; especially flaws, contradictions, or moral ambiguities; through what they say and how they say it.

4. Dramatic Context: The monologue occurs at a moment of high tension or significance, giving the speech a dramatic immediacy.

5. Irony: A central feature is dramatic irony, where the reader discerns truths that the speaker either conceals or is unaware of.

5.5.2 Literary Significance

The dramatic monologue allows poets to explore subjectivity, power, and psychological complexity, often revealing the social and ideological structures that shape individual consciousness.

5.5.3 Formal Innovation: The Dramatic Monologue

Robert Browning's development of the dramatic monologue marked a significant departure from lyric subjectivity. The form typically features:

- A single speaker in a psychologically revealing situation.

- An implied audience whose responses are inferred but never voiced.

- A disjunction between what the speaker intends to reveal and what is actually exposed.

This mode invites the reader into an interpretive role, revealing the self as fractured, contradictory, and performative. The dramatic monologue anticipates later developments in modernist psychology and post-structuralist subjectivity.

5.6 *My Last Duchess* (1842): Aesthetic Control and Gendered Violence

"I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together." (Browning 206)

This line chillingly implies the murder of the Duchess, revealing the Duke's pathological need for dominance and aesthetic control. The poem becomes a case study in patriarchal authority, where women are reduced to possessions to be observed, judged, and ultimately silenced.

5.6.1 Art as Objectification

The Duke's obsession with the Duchess's portrait demonstrates a desire to objectify and control female subjectivity. The poem critiques Victorian norms that idolized female purity while denying women autonomy.

5.6.2 Ambiguity and Irony

The Duke's rhetorical polish contrasts with the moral horror of his actions, showcasing Browning's use of dramatic irony to expose the violence underlying Victorian propriety. Scholars such as Angela Leighton have explored how Browning's speakers reveal the ideological contradictions of gender, class, and culture.

5.7 "Porphyria's Lover" (1836): Desire, Transgression, and Moral Narcissism

"That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good…" (Browning 173)

This monologue explores the psychology of possessive love, culminating in a murder the speaker justifies as preserving a perfect moment. The act is framed as a perverse sacrament: suggesting the theological inversion of Victorian sexual morality.

5.7.1 Narrative Unreliability

The calm, rational tone of the speaker juxtaposed with the violence of the act invites critical attention to the unreliable narrator and the instability of moral judgment.

5.7.2 The Gothic and the Domestic

Like Tennyson, Browning reworks Romantic and Gothic traditions; but in *Porphyria's Lover*, the Gothic is domesticated, suggesting that violence and obsession lurk within the heart of respectable society.

5.7.3 Gendered Psychosis

The poem highlights Victorian fears of female sexual agency. Porphyria is active and autonomous: qualities the speaker eliminates through violence. The murder reveals not only his pathology but the cultural anxieties about shifting gender norms.

Part IV. Comparative Reflections: Victorian Poetry and the Self in Crisis

5.8 Tensions and Paradoxes

Together, Tennyson and Browning illustrate the multifaceted role of poetry in the Victorian period. Their works respond to the contradictions of an age defined by:

- Faith in progress vs. fear of decline.

- Individual will vs. societal constraints.

- Moral certainty vs. psychological ambiguity.

Where Tennyson's *Ulysses* articulates an aspirational, even stoic model of heroism, Browning's dramatic monologues present characters consumed by ego, desire, and violence, revealing the unconscious forces shaping Victorian subjectivity.

5.9 Theoretical Connections

- **New Historicist** critics (e.g., Jerome McGann) have argued that Victorian poetry must be read in light of the ideological structures of its time, particularly imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

- **Psychoanalytic theory** (Freud, Lacan) illuminates the internal conflicts in Browning's monologues, where speech acts betray unconscious drives.

- **Feminist criticism** (e.g., Elaine Showalter) reads these texts as cultural symptoms of Victorian gender anxiety.

Conclusion

This lecture has examined how Tennyson and Browning use poetic form and voice to navigate the personal and societal crises generated by the Industrial Revolution. Tennyson idealizes endurance in a world losing metaphysical certainty; Browning dissects the masks of Victorian respectability to expose the self's deeper conflicts. Both poets demonstrate that in the age of machinery and moral complexity, the poetic voice becomes a site of both resistance and revelation.

In our next lecture, we will turn from the introspective and often symbolic landscapes of Victorian poetry to the socially grounded worlds of Victorian prose fiction. As the 19th century progressed, novelists like Charles Dickens and George Eliot employed the realist mode to confront the concrete realities of industrial society: poverty, class inequality, and moral hypocrisy. We will explore how realism functioned not merely as a stylistic choice but as a tool for ethical engagement and social critique. Through close readings of *Hard Times* and

Middlemarch, we will examine how these authors used narrative perspective, character psychology, and social detail to challenge complacency and imagine forms of communal responsibility.

5.10 Evaluation Task

Victorian poetry often reflects the tensions between personal ambition and social responsibility, inner desire and public duty, as shaped by the profound changes of the Industrial Revolution.

Write a short essay (800–1000 words) that analyzes how either Tennyson's *Ulysses* or one of Browning's dramatic monologues (e.g., *My Last Duchess* or *Porphyria's Lover*) engages with these tensions.

In your essay, you should:

- Provide close textual analysis of key passages.

- Explore how form (e.g., dramatic monologue, blank verse) contributes to meaning.

- Situate the poem within its historical and cultural context.

- Reflect on how the poem critiques or upholds Victorian ideals such as duty, perseverance, individualism, or gender norms.

5.11 Works Cited

- Browning, Robert. *The Poems of Robert Browning*. Edited by John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins, Penguin Classics, 1981.

- Leighton, Angela. *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

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- Tennyson, Alfred, Lord. *The Major Works*. Edited by Adam Roberts, Oxford UP, 2009.

- Tucker, Herbert. *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*. Harvard UP, 1988.