

10th Lecture
The Victorian Poetry

The main characteristics of the Victorian Poetry

- 1-It was an age of drastic changes in the British society as a result of industrialization and rich landowners were turning into businessmen.
- 2-It was an age of adventure, free enterprise and individual initiative.
- 3-It was age of imperialism. The reasons for imperialism were fundamentally economic:
A-Looking for cheap raw- materials.
B-Finding markets for manufactured goods.
- 4-Names of great imperialists and politicians appeared in the Victorian age: e.g. Disraeli and Gladstone.
- 5-It was an age of scientific progress in which great scientists and thinkers lived: e.g. Darwin, Huxley, Karl Marx
- 6-Faith in the reality of progress was the main characteristic of the early Victorian Age. Doubt, skepticism and questioning became the main characteristic of the later Victorian Age.
- 7-The Victorian Age was an age of agnosticism and skepticism. It was an age of weak religious belief.
- 8-These aspects were more or less reflected in the poetry of Tennyson, Browning and Matthew Arnold.

“My Last Duchess-**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**

I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 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!**

ROBERT BROWNING (1812-1889)

Browning was born of parents who were not rich but were well off enough to enable the son, whose genius they recognizes, to dedicate himself to literature. He married the poet Elizabeth Barret in 1846. He and his wife had lived in Italy since their marriage till his wife's death in 1861. Then he returned to London and lived there till his death in 1889.

Summary and Commentary

.....Upstairs at his palace in October of 1564, the Duke of Ferrara—a city in northeast Italy on a branch of the Po River—shows a portrait of his late wife, who died in 1561, to a representative of the Count of Tyrol, an Austrian nobleman. The duke plans to marry the count's daughter after he negotiates for a handsome dowry from the count.

While discussing the portrait, the duke also discusses his relationship with the late countess, revealing himself—wittingly or unwittingly—as a domineering husband who regarded his beautiful wife as a mere object, a possession whose sole mission was to please him. His comments are sometimes straightforward and frank and sometimes subtle and ambiguous. Several remarks hint that he may have murdered his wife, just a teenager at the time of her death two years after she married him, but the oblique and roundabout language in which he

couches these remarks falls short of an open confession.

“The duke tells the Austrian emissary that he admires the portrait of the duchess but was exasperated with his wife while she was alive, for she devoted as much attention to trivialities –as she did to him. , he says, “I gave commands; / “Then all [of her] smiles stopped together.”

.....Does *commands* mean that he ordered someone to kill her?

The poem does not provide enough information to answer these questions. Nor does it provide enough information to determine whether the duke is lying about his wife or exaggerating her faults. Whatever the case, research into her life has resulted in speculation that she was poisoned.

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.

The Portrait of the Duchess

.....The portrait of the late Duchess of Ferrara is a fresco, a type of work painted in watercolors directly on a plaster wall. The portrait symbolizes the duke's possessive and controlling nature in as much as the duchess has become an art object which he owns and controls.