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### Biographical Sketch

Dr. Travis Langley, professor of psychology at Henderson State University, is the author of the book *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (Wiley & Sons). He has written chapters for the book *Our Superheroes, Ourselves* (Oxford University Press) and several encyclopedias. PsychologyToday.com carries his online column, “Beyond Heroes and Villains.” He appears in documentaries such as *Legends of the Knight*, *Comic Book Literacy*, and *Necessary Evil: Super-Villains of DC Comics*. The Huffington Post, CNN.com, the *New York Times* (front page), and other news outlets have featured Dr. Langley and his work.

### “[R]elations in the Unseen”:

### Oracular Romanticism and “The Cry of the Children”

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ABSTRACT: In “The Cry of the Children,” Elizabeth Barrett (not yet Browning) anticipates by nearly fifteen years the oracular nature of her Romantic epic, *Aurora Leigh*, which begins with Aurora crediting her psycho-spiritual survival to her “relations in the Unseen” and ends with her describing the colors of the dawn to her soon-to-be husband whose physical blindness is connected to his newfound awareness—to his ability, finally, to hear. With its sharp distinctions between the natural world (in which young lambs, birds, fawns, and flowers thrive) and the unnatural environment of industrialization (in which young children weep), “The Cry of the Children” is a Romantic’s indictment of those guilty, via direct involvement or silent complicity, of the abuse of child laborers in early nineteenth-century England. Beginning with the question from *Medea* which serves as an epigraph, Barrett communicates not one message but two: The nation is guilty of the murder of its own children, and the sight of suffering alone cannot arrest the willfully blind or single-mindedly self-absorbed. What is needed is an oracle,

and this is the role Barrett assumes in this poem in which she emphasizes the auditory over the visual, strategically counteracts inattentive and/or complacent listening through the varied use of stanza form, rhyme scheme, and meter, and pricks the religious conscience of her prospective audience, schooled (as she knew they were) in the language, tone, and themes of the Bible.

In “The Cry of the Children,” Elizabeth Barrett (not yet Browning) anticipates by nearly fifteen years the oracular nature of her Romantic epic, *Aurora Leigh*, which begins with Aurora crediting her psycho-spiritual survival to her “relations in the Unseen” and ends with her describing the colors of the dawn to her soon-to-be husband whose physical blindness is connected to his newfound awareness—to his ability, finally, to hear.

With its sharp distinctions between the natural world (in which young lambs, birds, fawns, and flowers thrive) and the unnatural environment of industrialization (in which young children weep), “The Cry of the Children” is a Romantic’s indictment of those guilty, via direct involvement or silent complicity, of the abuse of child laborers in early nineteenth-century England. Beginning with the question from *Medea* which serves as an epigraph, Barrett communicates not one message but two: The nation is guilty of the murder of its own children, and the sight of suffering alone cannot arrest the willfully blind or single-mindedly self-absorbed. What is needed is an oracle, and this is the role Barrett assumes in this poem in which she emphasizes the auditory over the visual, strategically counteracts inattentive and/or complacent listening through the varied use of stanza form, rhyme scheme, and meter, and pricks the religious conscience of her prospective audience, schooled (as she knew they were) in the language, tone, and themes of the Bible.

Although its date of publication (1843) may cause some readers to identify it as a Victorian poem, “The Cry of the Children,” like its author’s female epic *Aurora Leigh* (published in 1857), is closely associated with the ideological and formal repertoires of Romanticism. While historical context is far from irrelevant to the interpretation of literature, historical “period” does not, of course, completely determine “identity”—for people or for texts. Furthermore, while British literary Romanticism does have an historical matrix, this matrix has permeable boundaries, leading many contemporary scholars to read and understand Romanticism more as an “ideology” than a “period.” Thus, although the dates of Elizabeth Barrett’s birth (1806) and first publication (1820) place her within the traditionally termed Romantic “period,” and although she called Wordsworth the “king-poet of our Times” and Byron one of her “contemporaries” (quoted in Stone, *EBB* 1995, 58-59), I rely upon distinguishing characteristics more than dates in my categorization of Elizabeth Barrett as a Romantic poet and “The Cry of the Children” as a Romantic poem.

Decades ago by now, texts like Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (1981) and Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) did much to broaden our understanding of Romanticism. Scholarship of this sort can certainly be drawn upon to paint Elizabeth Barrett as a Romantic author, but even more remarkable is the fact that much of her writing can be judged Romantic—even by or within older formulations of Romanticism. For example, if we consider the way that Romanticism has been understood, M.H. Abrams’s influence is undeniable. As the author of *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), as well as the general editor of *The Norton Anthology of English*

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*Literature*, his discussions and definitions of Romanticism have been read by generations of scholars. In “English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age,” Abrams presents five criteria for identifying and interpreting Romantic literature. All five criteria and the explanations of them which form the five sections of the essay can be used to discuss “Cry” as a Romantic text, but for the purposes of this essay, I will limit my comments to the third, “Romantic Oracles.” Discussing Blake, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge (and, later, Percy Shelley), Abrams explores their “shared attributes” (42). He discusses three in particular: They were political and social poets; their political/social concerns were often obscured by what Abrams terms “‘the politics of vision,’ uttered in the persona of the inspired prophet-priest”; they tried to incorporate what they regarded as the “stupendous events of the age in suitably great poetic forms” (42-53). Although Elizabeth Barrett’s political/social concern is not “obscured” in “The Cry of the Children,” intriguingly enough, she addresses the ways in which cultural vision is, frequently, obscured and, therefore, she emphasizes not what her readers need to see as much as what they need to hear, and she assumes the mantle of the “inspired prophet-priest” to prompt them to hear it. Part of her approach to the “politics of vision” is to emphasize the limitations of seeing and the necessity of listening, and her call for political/social change is couched, in great part, in religious rhetoric.

The poem begins with an epigraph—in Greek—from Euripides’ *Medea*, the English translation of which is, “Alas, my children, why do you look at me?” The murderous mother is indicted by her children’s gaze, but the sight of her own children—looking at her—does not stay her hand. Similarly, in 1843, “Mother” England continued to exploit and abuse its children in mines and factories, as Elizabeth Barrett learned in horrific detail from reading R.H. Horne’s report to parliament. The poem itself begins with prophetic tones and rhetoric, and Barrett uses the language of the King James Bible to draw her readers’ attention to the *sound* of suffering: “Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers[?]”

True to her Romantic roots, Barrett immediately directs her readers’ attention to Nature. She highlights the fact that, unlike her epic heroine Aurora, whom she will paint so powerfully almost fifteen years later, these traumatized children cannot “[draw]/ The elemental nutriment and heat/ from nature, as earth feels the sun at nights,/ Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark,” for their “relations in the Unseen” have been disrupted. Barrett clearly signals the unnaturalness of these children’s situation beginning in the fifth line of the poem and continuing at least until the one-hundredth, at which point she makes clear the connection between the children’s alienation from Nature and their growing doubt in the goodness of God. From stanza one:

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.

In stanza 5, Barrett presents the possibility of an excursion into Nature for these children, and, in stanza 6, she articulates their likely response:

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For oh, say the children, we are weary,  
And we cannot run or leap;  
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely  
To lie down in them and sleep.

“The Cry of the Children” is composed of thirteen stanzas, twelve of which are twelve lines each. Stanza four is sixteen lines long; excessive in comparison to the other stanzas, it prepares attentive readers for the speaker’s exposure of the psychologically and spiritually destructive effects of industrial labor on young workers. The poem’s rhyme scheme—heavily reliant on cross rhyme, typically alternating in a pattern of abab cdcd efef—suggests that one may read the 12-line stanzas almost as collections of quatrains. Each four-line segment tends to express a complete and unified thought—with the exception of the excessive quasi-quatrain of the fourth stanza, which is noticeably lacking in unity. The fourth stanza begins “‘True,’ say the children, ‘it may happen/ That we die before our time,’” then goes to a tale of Little Alice who “died last year” and is buried in a grave “shapen/ Like a snowball, in the rime.” The 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> lines continue the poem’s emphasis on the auditory, but this time the point is what one *cannot* hear: “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.” Lines 13 and 14 continue commentary on Little Alice, with the grave sounding like an hospitable cradle in which the child slumbers peacefully. But in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> lines, the children abruptly move from wistful commentary on the peacefulness of Little Alice to a statement meant to jar: “‘It is good when it happens’ say the children/ ‘That we die before our time.’”

The meter of the poem has gotten significant attention in recent years. Some of the most incisive commentary on the role meter plays in Barrett (and Barrett Browning’s) meaning-making was initiated in 2006 by Caroline Levine’s “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies,” which inspired Herbert Tucker’s “Tactical Formalism.” In a 2011 article, “Rhythms, Poetic and Political: The Case of Elizabeth Barrett Browning,” Levine builds upon her own foundation and identifies three ways of addressing the “politics of prosody”: via the “reflective,” the “expressive,” and the ideological (specifically, Marxist) models. As an example of the “reflective,” she quotes Tucker commenting on the meter of “Cry”: “Nauseatingly ill-proportioned to human measure, EBB’s stop-and-start versification mimics the strain and clatter of steam-driven machinery.” The validity of Tucker’s observation can be easily established by considering a number of passages in the poem; for example, these lines appear in stanza seven: “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!’” The parenthetical—(breaking out in a mad moaning)—does double-duty here as the moaning originates from the wheels and from the children tortured by their incessant turning. Despite Elizabeth Barrett’s own declaration of the haste with which she composed the poem, and the passion that drove her to it upon her reading of Horne’s report, an “expressive” reading—one that turns upon interpreting the meter as a conscious manifestation, on the poet’s part, of specific political convictions—is also viable. The years of reading and study of classical texts, and of writing and revision of her own poetry, which Elizabeth Barrett had engaged in by the time she was in her thirties, suggest the real possibility that the use of form, rhyme, meter, tone, and imagery to effect purpose would have become so habitual for her that

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the manipulation of those tools would have become virtually second nature; that is, as an accomplished poet, she could have used meter to express her “convictions,” and she could have done so quickly. The meter does, as Tucker asserts, “mimic” (that is, “reflect”) the reality that Barrett is determined to expose; it also, through its emphasis on certain words, expresses her theme(s) in such a way that it clarifies the social reality she hopes to participate in reforming.

While some refer to Barrett’s use of trochaic meter as the source of the halting and heavy movement of the lines (DO ye HEAR the CHILDren WEEPing, O my BROthers), the poem’s thematic emphasis on the necessity of hearing, and listening, suggests an alternative way of reading some of the lines, especially some crucial ones. Notice what happens to our hearing if we consider the possibility that Barrett opens the poem not with a trochee, but an anapest, followed by an iamb: “Do ye HEAR the CHILDren WEEPing O my BROthers/ Ere the SORrow COMES with YEARS?” Hearing this way, the lines begin with a lurch, followed by a monotonous repetition of sound that mimics a heartbeat, even in lines that suggest the heartbeat’s cessation. Again, that jarring line: “It is GOOD when it HAPpens,” SAY the CHILDren,/ That we DIE beFORE our TIME.”

Whether one reads lines of “Cry” as comprised of trochees, anapests, or iambs, or—most accurately—a combination of them, the words themselves are undeniably powerful and steeped in religious connotation. One would think that the children, living with cacophony, and praying to the wheels to stop, must surely crave silence. But in stanzas 10 and 11, the poet delivers some of her most heartbreaking lines, and the source of the heartbreak is the silence that the children are met with when they need response the most. These lines appear near the middle, at the heart, of the poem:

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.”

Again, death is the only true relief these children can imagine, even as a result of divine intervention. Finally, though, the children doubt that God hears them—or that He cares, even if He does hear:

“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,

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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.”

The 11<sup>th</sup> stanza ends with an ear-catching, succinct summation: “For God’s possible is taught by His world’s loving,/ And the children doubt of each.”

Elizabeth Barrett lived in a cultural moment in which the language of the Bible was ingrained in the minds of the literate, even the literate who grew to become skeptics or atheists; some may have come to reject the concept of the Bible as truly “holy,” inerrant, authoritative, but they had certainly read and heard what they rejected. So Barrett would have had reason to hope that her “brothers” got the message she was sending in those lines: The blood of children was on their hands, and not only in the sense of their being culpable for the physical harm done to these little ones; no, Elizabeth Barrett was suggesting that if these children utterly lost faith in God, their spiritual deaths were the direct result of their abuse and exploitation at the hands of Christian England. The final stanza of the poem ends with imagery and language that prophesies dire consequences for that nation; the children’s “cry”—should it continue to be met with silence from those human beings who heard it—will become the nation’s curse; as she writes in the final lines of the poem: “Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,/ And your purple shows your path!/ But the child’s sob in the silence curses deeper/ Than the strong man in his wrath.”

Barrett’s language and imagery suggest that her hearers will not escape punishment; unlike Medea, they will not be whisked away by the chariot of the sun. And her audience, schooled in the scriptures, would surely have remembered the words of Christ, recorded in three of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matt 18:5-6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2); this from Matthew: “And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt 18:5-6). Their upturned faces with eyes blinded by tears, like their halting “Our Father,” suggest the last gasp of faith in the hearts of children whom Barrett likens, in the final lines of the poem, to “martyrs”; the “offence” of which England is guilty is the spiritual murder of its own children. And the punishment should give the “brothers” pause; taken on a literal level, the prospect of drowning is horrible enough, but read symbolically, this death by drowning, which Christ says would be better than the actual consequence of “offending” these little ones, suggests spiritual burial—the denial of resurrection. Millstone attached, the criminal descends to the depths, never to rise again.

Appealing first to her “brothers” hearts, then to their self-interest, in “The Cry of the Children,” Elizabeth Barrett, true to her oracular role, exhorts and prophesies; she also gives a voice to those whose exploitation and abuse resulted in great part from a view of them—not as fully human children at all but merely small bodies ideally suited to keep the wheels of industrial England turning. What her audience could not—or would not—see, she hoped to make them hear.

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### Biographical Sketch

Dr. Peggy Dunn Bailey is Professor of English and Chair of English, Foreign Languages, and Philosophy at Henderson State University. British Romanticism is one of her primary areas of teaching and research, and she has published on Romantic-era authors as diverse as Anna Letitia Barbauld and Ann Radcliffe. Her essay on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's female epic, *Aurora Leigh*, appears in *Approaches to the Anglo-American Female Epic* (published by Ashgate in 2006).

## The Effect of Parent's Education on the Educational Aspirations of College Students

Kayla Smoke

(Mentor: Allison Vettor, Ph.D.)

### Abstract

This study examines the relationship between parents' education and their children's educational aspirations. During the fall of 2013, 360 full-time, undergraduate students at a southern college participated in a survey. The analysis revealed that males students whose parents' highest level of education is high school or lesser are more likely to choose a major in a mathematics or science program than male students whose parents' highest level of education was some college or more, that students whose parents' highest level of education is some college or higher are more likely than students whose parents' highest level of education is high school or lesser to continue their education past a two or four year degree, and that there is not a relationship between parents' education level and student GPA.

### Literature Review

Predictors of college students' academic choices include their parents' level of education. Studies have shown significant relationships between student and parent academic success and aspirations.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Parents of higher academic standing, and usually high-socioeconomic status, often influence their children to further their education after high school. Data from the 2003 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFI, 2003) show that 88% of students whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher had parents who expected them to finish their college education, while only 44% of students whose parents highest education was high school or less