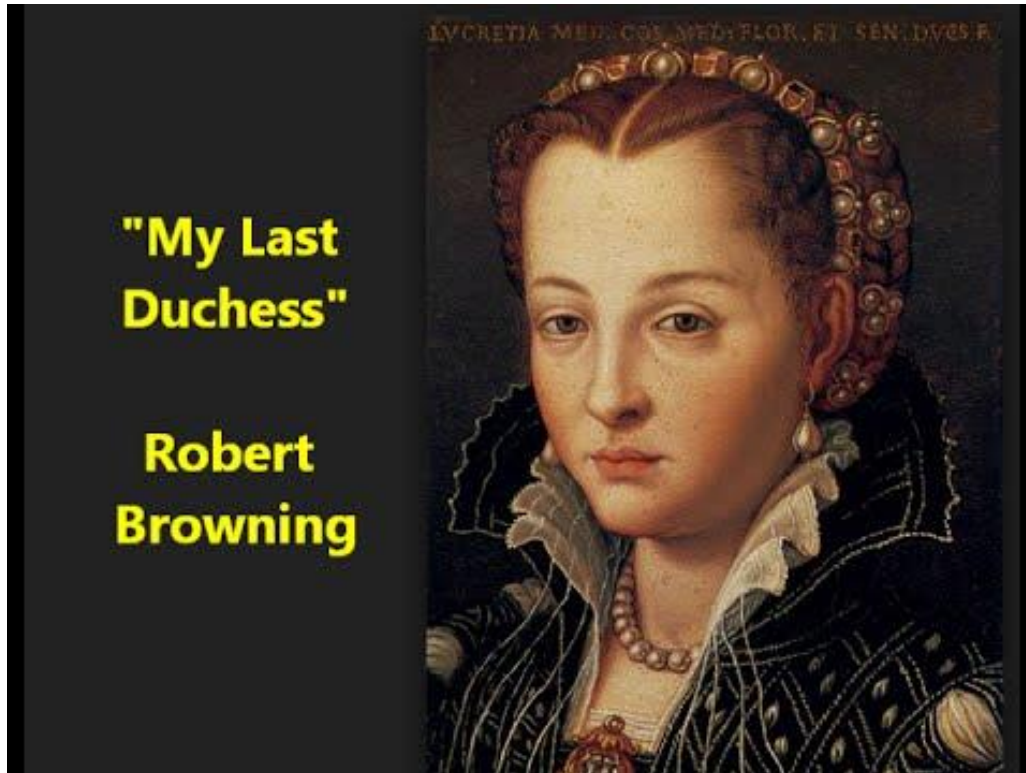


UNIT-IV



My Last Duchess by Robert Browning

Robert Browning's inspiration for *My Last Duchess* came from the Duke and [Duchess Ferrara](#). The Duchess died under very suspicious circumstances. She was married at fourteen and dead by seventeen. [Browning uses these suspicious circumstances as inspiration for a poem](#) which dives deep into the mind of a powerful Duke who wishes to control his wife in every aspect of her life, including her feelings. Browning, of the Victorian age, wrote real life poetry that reflected upon some of the darkest aspects of Victorian life. One of those aspects, of course, being the treatment of wives by their husbands. Everyone is familiar with Henry the VIII and his many wives whom he accused and executed when he tired of him. [Robert Browning](#) reveals that this mentality was widespread during this time. Wives were viewed as disposable, and their husbands would often accuse them to do away

with them when they desired to marry someone else. The life of a Victorian wife was a perilous

My Last Duchess Analysis

Section 1

[SEE MORE](#)

Lines 1-15

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà 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, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

My Last Duchess opens up with the [speaker](#) asking a listener if he would please sit down and look at a portrait of his last Duchess. This makes the readers wonder why this Duchess is no longer his present Duchess. He does not reveal whether she is deceased or put away in a convent somewhere. He asks his listener to sit and look at the life sized painting of her. He reveals that this painting is behind a curtain, and that no one but he is allowed to draw the curtain to view the painting or to show it to anyone. This is very suspicious behaviour. The reader can immediately sense that the Duke is controlling. The question that still remains unanswered is, why is this his *last* Duchess? The Duke describes the look on the Duchess' face, and that she had a joyous look and an earnest glance. He notes that "twas not her husband's presence only called that spot of joy into the Duchess' cheek". This is a curious thing to say. Why would he expect that his presence alone, and nothing else, would bring joy to her face? He does not answer that question, but the fact that he notes this gives a little bit of insight into why he was the only one who was allowed to open the curtain. All

along, he wanted to be the only one who would bring a look of joy to his Duchess' face. Now that she was put away somewhere, and her life-size painting was on the wall, he could be the only one to ever see that look of joy on her face, because he would allow no one else to look at the painting without his permission. Suddenly, our speaker seems somewhat psychotic.

Section 2

Lines 16-24

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.

In this section of *My Last Duchess*, the Duke seems to be remembering his former Duchess and all that bothered him about her. It would seem that she was too easily pleased by everyone around her. The Duke was not happy with this. He didn't like that if someone like "Fra Pandolf" (we don't know much more about this character) were to tell her that her shawl covered her wrists too much, she would blush. The Duke did not like that she would blush at the flirtations of another man. He did not like that the things which he called common courtesy would "call up that spot of joy" which she seemed to always have on her face. The Duke accuses her of having a heart that was "too soon made glad" and "too easily impressed". He was annoyed that she liked everything that she looked at. This man seems more and more psychotic and controlling as *My Last Duchess* goes on. It would seem that he put away his Duchess because he could not control her feelings. He wanted to be the only one to bring her joy and make her blush.

Section 3

Lines 25 -35

Sir, 't was 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?

In these lines of *My Last Duchess*, the Duke continues to explain all of the flaws in the Duchess’ character. He says that she values her white mule, a branch of cherries, and a sunset as much as she values a piece of jewelry that he had given her. He is irritated that she does not seem to see the value in what he gives to her, or that she seems to value the simple pleasures of life as much as she values his expensive gifts to her. He also seems irritated that she does not seem to understand the importance of his place in life. By marrying her, he had given her a “nine-hundred-years-old name”. This reveals that his family had been around for a very long time and thus he gave her a well known and prestigious name in marrying her. She did not seem to be any more thankful for this than she was thankful to watch the sun set. This irritated the Duke so much that was was not even willing to “stoop” to her level to discuss it with her. He thinks it would be “trifling” to do so.

Section 4

Lines 35-47

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;

Duke, The speaker



- The 16th cen. Speaker tells the story
- His wife gives attention to other men
- This affection causes the speaker to kill her
- Her actions seriously upset him.

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet

~~Do not move yet, though. I'll be with you straight. Who's the new knight?~~

Section 5

Lines 47-56

The company below then. 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!



This section of *My Last Duchess* reveals the identity of the Duke's listener. He is the servant of a Count in the land, and they are trying to arrange a marriage between the Duke and the Count's daughter. The Duke says that his "fair daughter" is his "object". He brings the man back downstairs with him, and as they walk, he points out bronze statue that was made especially for him. The statue is of Neptune taming a sea-horse. Neptune, of course, is the god of the sea. This [symbolizes](#) the Duke, and the sea-horse symbolizes any Duchess he would acquire. The Duke views himself as a god, and he wishes to tame his wife to do whatever he wishes her to do, and even to feel whatever he wishes her to feel. This man is clearly demented and controlling, and the speaker in *My Last Duchess* reveals Browning's ideas of his fellow men.