

ENGLISH (Hons) Part-I; Paper-II; Unit-I: Poems.

Topic: The Last Duchess; Lec, Series - 19

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The Last Duchess: Robert Browning:

"My Last Duchess" is a dramatic monologue written by Victorian poet Robert Browning in 1842. In the poem, the Duke of Ferrara uses a painting of his former wife as a conversation piece.

From the poem's opening line, Browning shows the Duke of Ferrara's obsession with possessing and objectifying the women. The duke is describing a painting of his former wife rather than the woman herself, but he still describes the painting itself as "my Last Duchess", thereby eroding the difference between the art and the woman who inspired it.

The duke personifies the painting throughout this passage, both by saying "there she stands" as though the duchess herself and not her image in the painting is standing against the wall, and "will't please you sit and look at her" instead of asking the messenger to look at "it" or the painting." This ~~age~~ suggests that he views the woman and the work of art as one and the same. The duke

also makes it clear that he cares for the status, the painting gives him, and not for the memories about his former wife. He remarks on the artistry of the painting, so life like, "looking as if she were alive", rather than ~~not~~ missing her. He describes the artwork as a "piece" and a "wonder" and exalts the famous Fra Pandolf who worked to paint it. Here, Duke wants to impress the emissary with the quality of his art collection and therefore his wealth. It is noteworthy that the Duke focuses only on Fra Pandolf's hand and not on any part of his former wife's body in her appreciation. It means that the Duke's interest in the painting's monetary rather than sentimental worth.

Further, Duke describes the circumstances in which it was painted and the fate of his unfortunate former wife.

Apparently the Duchess was easily pleased: "She smiled at everything", and seemed just as happy when someone brought her a branch of cherries as she did when the Duke decided to marry her. She also blushed easily. The Duchess's genial nature was enough to show the Duke into a jealous, psychopathic rage, and he "gave commands" that meant "all smiles stopped together." Here this

makes us guess that the Duke had killed his former wife. But, why did he commit murder? The poem reflects the causes as Duke describes the Duchess as "too soon made glad" and "too easily impressed". This is the main problem with her; too many things made her happy. She was easily impressed. She liked whatever she looked on. Everything from would draw from her an approving speech. She thanked men. The Duke does not know how she thanked them. Whenever the Duke passed her she smiled. Her portrait gives the impression that she is alive. Then the Duke decides to go down stairs. The Duke tries to impress the emissary, he tries to express his intentions, too. The Duke is going to marry his daughter. He knows that he will get sufficient dowry, and just to impress the emissary he shows the bronze figure of the sea-god Neptune.

Thus, the poem is in dramatic monologue form of fifty six lines. The poem is fragmented in scene. But we get the concentrated essence of Victorian higher society. The poem possesses the faulty rhyme and the language is obscure. The theme of the poem reflects the real picture of the then society.

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