**MY LAST DUCHESS**

Ferrara

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| ***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, 'twas not Her husband's presence only, called that spot Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps*  *Frà 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 (even) 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 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*! | Questa è la mia ultima duchessa dipinta sul muro,  sembra come se fosse viva. Chiamo  questo pezzo una meraviglia, ora: Le mani di Frà Pandolf  lavorarono alacremente una giornata, e lì lei sta.  Volete per piacere sedervi e guardarla? Ho detto  “Frà Pandolf” apposta, perché mai hanno letto  estranei come voi questa dipinta espressione,  la profondità e la passione del suo sguardo senza filtri,  ma a me si volsero (dato che nessuno scosta  la tenda che ho tirato per voi tranne me)  e sembrava come se mi chiedessero, se essi osassero,  come tale sguardo venisse lì; così, non siete  il primo a voltarvi e chiedere così, Signore, non era  solo la presenza di suo marito, quel segno  di gioia sulla guancia della duchessa; forse  Frà Pandolfo per caso disse “il suo mantello copre  troppo il polso della mia signora” o “la pittura  non deve mai sperare di riprodurre il fioco  mezzo rossore che si attenua lungo la sua gola”: tale cosa  fu una cortesia, lei pensava, e una causa sufficiente  per evocare quel rossore di gioia. Ella aveva  un cuore – come posso dire? – troppo presto reso contento,  troppo facilmente impressionato; le piaceva qualunque cosa  lei guardasse, e i suoi sguardi andavano ovunque.  Signore, era tutto uguale! La mia coccarda al suo petto,  il cadere della luce del giorno a Ovest,  il ramo di ciliegie che qualche sciocco invadente  staccò nell’orto per lei, il mulo bianco  che lei cavalcava attorno alla terrazza – ogni cosa  soleva generare da lei similmente un discorso di approvazione,  o un rossore, almeno. Ringraziava gli uomini, - bene! Ma ringraziava  In un modo – non so come – come se lei classificasse  Il mio dono di un nome di novecento anni  Con il dono di chiunque. Chi si abbasserebbe a rimproverare  Questo tipo di cosa futile? Anche se si avesse l’abilità  Nel parlare – (che io non ho) – di fare (rendere) la tua volontà  Abbastanza chiara a una tale persona, a dire, “Proprio questo  O quello in te disapprovo, qui  sbagli,  O là vai oltre il segno” – e se lei permette  Di essere ripresa così, né chiaramente ponesse  La sua volontà contro la tua, veramente, e si scusasse,  Persino allora ci sarebbe un po’ di abbassarsi, ed io scelgo  Di non abbassarmi mai. Ah signore, lei sorrideva, senza dubbio,  Ogni volta (che) le passavo (accanto); ma chi passava senza (ricevere)  Esattamente lo stesso sorriso? Questo aumentava; diedi ordini;  Poi tutti I sorrisi cessarono allo stesso tempo. Là lei stava  Come se (fosse) viva. Volete per piacere alzarvi? Incontreremo  La compagnia sotto, dopo. Ripeto,  La nota munificenza del Conte vostro signore  È ampia garanzia che nessuna giusta pretesa  Mia per la dote sarà disattesa;  Anche se la personalità della sua bella figlia, come ho ammesso  All’inizio, sia il mio scopo. Sì, andremo  Assieme giù, signore. Osserva Nettuno,  però, Domando un cavallo marino, considerato una rarità  Che Claus di Innsbruck ha fuso in bronzo per me! |

**TEXT ANALYSIS**

“My Last Duchess” was written by Robert Browning in 1845. It is a dramatic monologue and it is set in Ferrara, at Alfonso II d’Este castle. This specific time and space reference tells us the scene take place in the Renaissance. The speaking voice is different from the poet’s one and it belongs to the Duke Alfonso.

He is showing his interlocutor a fresco of his wife. The interlocutor doesn’t speak (monologue), and it can be incorporated in the reader of the monologue.

The title let the reader make some hypothesis about the content of the text: “my” implies possession, close relationship, and it’s referred to the Duchess; the adjective “last” instead tells the Duke will never get married another time.

The poet uses deictic which are specific references of space and time, and we can find it right from the first line of the monologue: “That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall” that recalls also the title of the monologue. The speaking voice tells us the fresco is about his wife. The duke describes it like “a piece of wonder”. His wife is dead but he can still see her through this portrait. It was painted by the friar Pandolf and the speaking voice invites the interlocutor to see it. The false start “I said”, and the use of the words “by design”, underlines the importance of the speaker (Alfonso) that has the power in his hands. He uses this false start to speak again about the friar and his art work. Frà Pandolf is the only one, with the Duke, that could have the possibility to see the fresco because it is covered by a curtain which can be moved only by Alfonso.

This possibility to see it is given also to the interlocutor.

In the first lines the poet instead of showing the features of the portrait, points out the features of the speaking voice which are: a patronising attitude, an obsession with the picture and the self-centred personality.

The power of the Duke is showed also with the repetition of the pronoun “I” and with the assonance of the words “my” and “by”, that points out the choice of using the first person narrator. The strong power of the speaking voice is shown also when he decides what the interlocutor has to see in the portrait, the glance of the lady.

The duke is very jealous of his fresco. The portrait of the woman shows the depth and passion (pathos 🡪 obsession, jealousy) of its earnest glance that the duke wanted to be addressed only to him.

He wants to know what was the reason of her glance and he tries to give an explanation. He said, the young woman was “too easily impressed; she liked whate'er she looked on” and he couldn’t bear that her duchess could smile to everybody. His “gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name”, his favour, has for her the same relevance to anybody’s gift. She didn’t distinguish his husband from the others.

Going back to the text, we can understand the interlocutor is probably a noble man because Alfonso calls him “Sir”. The reader can also understand, through the friar word’s, which are reported by Alfonso, that the Duke himself could have probably ordinated the murder of his wife; the words are: “Paint must never hope to reproduce the faint half-flush that dies along her throat”.

Alfonso’s jealousy grew up day by day, while her wife continued smiling to everyone, until he “gave commands, then all smiles stopped together”. Here the reader is sure that his conjecture was true: The Duke murdered his wife.

Now Alfonso’s “ego” is satisfied, he can see her whenever he wants and she smiles only for him: she’s “as if alive” in the fresco.

At the end of the text, the speaking voice asks the interlocutor to go downstairs to meet the company. In this section, the reader understands the interlocutor is a messenger of his master (a Count), sent by him to survey the intentions of the Duke about the dowry and his daughter.

Before they start going down, Alfonso another time tells the messenger what he has to see: (he did the same with the fresco) a statue made of bronze figuring Neptune who’s taming a sea-horse (a rarity). With this last scene the speaking voice will underline another time the power he would have above the Count’s daughter. Has showed the fresco and the statue to the messenger to make him reports the master the will of superiority of the Duke of Ferrara.