My last duchess

My last duchess is a dramatic monologue written by Robert Browning. The dramatic monologue was particularly popular between 1830 and 1930. The characteristics of the dramatic monologue are: the first speaking voice who is not the poet, a silent or at least unheard listener, a situation characterized by a specific time and place and an argumentative, rhetorical language which distinguishes the dramatic monologue from the soliloquy. Considering the title, the intelligent reader should focus his attention on two key words: the possessive adjective “my” refers to the substantive “Duchess” and the adjective “last” makes the reader understand that there will not be other Duchesses after her. The monologue consists of a single verse and 28 rhyming couplets. The speaker is a Duke, he talks with a messenger. The Duke wants the guest to look at his Duchess’ fresco that he commissioned to Fra Pandolf. He tells about his portrait which is hidden behind a curtain. The speaking voice focuses on her wife’s expression and glance. Thanks the description of the portrait the reader gets numerous pieces of information about the girl (she often blushes, her face suggests passion and depth and her eyes unveil devotion to the Duke. In all the monologue the Duke reveals more about himself than the relationship with his wife. The intelligent read understands that the Duke is a possessive and jealous man. During the reading of the monologue the reader can understand that the Duke caused the duchess’s death.

The monologue closes with an invitation by the Duke to the listener to follow him downstairs. The Duke can not along without showing to the messenger his sculpture in bronze.

In short, the intelligent reader understands that the monologue is not about the “last Duchess”, but is focuses on the Duke personality.