*My last Duchess* analysis

The poem *My last Duchess*, written by Robert Browing in 1845, belongs to the collection *Dramatic* *Romances and Lyrics*.

Just looking the title you can understand that the Duchess is die or isn’t married yet with somebody. In addition the adjective last underlines that she is the last one and not the later one, therefore after her there weren’t any additional duchess. The poem can be addressed to a woman, maybe in love with poet, who belongs to the aristocratic class.

Considering the structure the poem is arrenged into a stanza of iambic pentameters with rhyming couplets.

Speaking about content the reader can understand that the story developes in 16th century at Ferrara’s court. The main character, Duke Alfonso II d’Este, is speaking to an emissary who is came to sign an accord: he wants to get the Duke married with the daughter of another aristocratic family.

While the Duke is showing his castle to the emissary he stops in front of her last Duchess’ portrait and starts to describe it. He makes references to her behaivour (“She had a heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,...”) and he seems does not appreciate it (indeed, he says that she flirted with everybody). In addition he doesn’t like her name, which sound older. The monologue goes on till the Duke realizes he is the cause of her Duchess’ death. After that he comes back to the business and accepts the accord.

The most recurrent figure of speech is the enjambment which has the function to link the previous line’s end to the following line’s start. As result the rhythm is slow.

This narrative technique can allude to the Duke’s marriage which is still live although his wife died. Indeed, they are still linked by the portrait.

The dramatic monologue puts at the centre the Duke who seems an actor. He builds himself the scene and his memory creates the setting. Therefore the reader can see the Duke and the Duchess discussing few year ago. An additional feature conveyed by the use of dramatic monologue his Duke’s personality: he appears possssive and violent. As consequences he punishes the Duchess for her sensuality and attitude.

Moving to the semantic level the poet uses words belonging to two different semantic fields. He juxtaposes the beauty and sensuality of Duchess to the cruelty of Duke.

The overall effect is to give a representation of a possesive Duke who pretends to controll his Duchess. Consequently the reader is involved into emotional sphere of Duke and tryes to understand the reasons why of his behaivour. Therefore, the ideal reader can belongs to any social class which is interested in reading a novel.

*Ulysses* exercises

1)

* Ulysses is speaking to somebody, maybe to the reader.
* The narrator doesn’t information about his age but he say he is old.
* He is in Ithaca.
* He is setting out on his life, actions and memory.

2)

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| Life on Ithaca (lines 2-5) | It is uncivilised and… Negative adjectives such as idol, aged convey Ulysses’s total dissatisfaction with life on Ithaca. |
| His past life (lines 6-18) | Ulysses says he lived hard times during his travel but he always took front and went away. |
| View of present and future (19-32) | He thinks about his past actions and reflects on death which is coming. |
| Attitude to Telemachus (33-44) | He says that his son, Telemachus, will lead the family and take care about the island. |
| Address to his mariners (45-70) | He refers to his mariners they have always been faithful. |

3) Ulysses appears a old man who is watching Ithaca, his land, and therefore he feels nostalgic. He thinks about his great actions and memories. The interior monologue provvides the reader the ideal he was a strong man who never gave up. Speaking about the contrast with Telemachus, Ulysses didn’t acept his son’s attitude because he didn’t care about island and he didn’t share his father’s valours. Ulysses can be considered a symbolic figure because he is not only a hero who travelled a lot facing up bad moments and fighting, but he is also characterized by to be a common person who has a family and trouble. However he represents the poet who tryes to differentiate from the middle class and standardized society.

4) Hallam’s death certainly influenced Tennyson to write Ulysses. Hallam was a dear friend of Tennyson and his death marked the poet. Indeed, one of the themes of Ulysses is the concept of death which is affronted by the protagonist. However the poem doesn’t reflect a sense of loss because Ulysses provvides the reader a model of someone who never give up in front of troubles. Therefore the poet wants to react positively to his friend’s death.

5) The nostalgic tone and the use of enjambment make the rhythm slow and reinforce the ideal of Ulysses’ sense of loss. Moreover the overall sound effect is created by the several use of alliterations, repetitions and assonances. In addition the poem consists in verse of different lenght and there aren’t any rhyme. Even if the tone is nostalgic and nelancholic, the intelligent reader can understand that some verse has the function to explain glorious actions of the hero.