

MY LAST DUCHESS, Robert Browning.

In the present text I am going to analyse Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess", based on title's expectations, structure, content, connotation and overall effect. The analysis is not meant to give a definite answer as it is based on a personal interpretation.

First of all, the title already gives the intelligent reader a little information about what the poem is going to discuss. It is composed by only three words: my, last and duchess.

The subject seems to be the duchess, who may or may not be whether the subject of the monologue. This implies that the poem deals with nobility.

Then, there is the possessive adjective "my", which, indeed, refers to the royalty woman. The intelligent reader may understand that this implies a subjective point of view: the poem is going to be written in first person narrator, leading the readers to listen to a very specific voice and not just to a general one.

In the middle of these two words, the third stands out: "last". This adjective creates the expectation of this duchess to be just the last of a long series of women (which may or may not end with her).

Moving on to the structure. The poem is arranged into a single long stanza, composed by fifty-six rhymed iambic pentameter lines. This kind of meter was largely used in England; in this poem it makes the reading feel like a conversation: it is fluent and perceived like a normal speech, whether than a fancy poem.

It is simple to read and follow the narrating voice's thoughts, somehow it is like been brought by the stream of a river. In fact the poem is a dramatic monologue, where the speaking voice – the Duke – talks to an invisible interlocutor about the duchess.

The intelligent reader can understand the Duke is the speaking voice right from the first few lines. In fact he points out a paint on the wall representing his last duchess: using the objective possessive "my" he points out he may have been married to the her, leading him to be the Duke himself.

Also he is speaking with someone, showing him/her the portrait painted on the wall. They could be standing anywhere but, as he is a member of the nobility, he could just be at his own palace.

Another aspect that comes right out is that the Duchess is no longer alive. The intelligent reader may think he is telling his interlocutor something about her: maybe how she died or how she used to be.

Moreover, the readers also get to know a little bit about the Duke. He's an authoritarian person, as he "kindly" asks his interlocutor to sit, "*Will't please you sit and look at her?*", while he is clearly giving him/her an order. It sounds like someone who is hardly questioned, someone with power.

Also, his possessive is revealed: he wanted to be the only one to get his duchess to blush.

He goes on revealing his wife's traits, almost judging her. Like, for example, that she got "*too easily impressed*", liked everything she looked on or that she treated everyone the

same. He sounds like he wanted a very different kind of woman by his side, like he had to do something dramatic to stop her from doing all that he hated.

It gets quite obvious the Duke did not stand the duchess' behaviour: he wanted absolute control, but she sounds like she did not give him enough importance or attention for him to be in control. For her, he was nobody special: she smiled at him, whenever he passed her, *"but who passed without Much the same smile?"*. By this line, the intelligent reader could almost feel the growing jealousy in the duke, but what would a jealous and powerful man do to his kind and almost too light-hearted wife? Is this the reason why she is dead? Did he murder her?

By the end of the poem, he is done speaking about his wife: his interlocutor and him have people to meet. Again he "asks" her to stand up in false politeness.

Then he introduces another character: The Count's daughter. She seems to be next in line to be the duke's wife. Just by this addition, all the poem seems to be a warning: his next wife will not have to behave like his last one, or she may die. It is clear, the duke only cared about the money, as he will probably marry a rich and wealthy man's daughter.

By the end of the poem the intelligent reader is put on the line, he has to understand whether the duke murdered his wife or not.

In this poem, written in the Victorian age, perfectly suits the beliefs of that time: women are seen as object more than as human beings. The duke himself says *"is my object"* referring to his next wife. Also he is attached to material things and only cares about his reputation.

The poet underlines this well using a language that perfectly fits the dark and pretentious man who may or may not have killed his wife.

Despite his horrible actions, the duke appears extremely charming: he knows how to use words for his own good.

Also he is presented as jealous and controlling: he has had his own loved wife killed because she was too "friendly". She was his object and he just wanted her for himself: that is probably why he decided to love the ideal image of her rather than her in the flesh.

He loved her but also was unable to accept her behaviour.

Concluding, there are many themes which are presented in this poem: the role of women in society and in relationships, ownership and power, control and dominance, art.

All these influenced the duke or were represented by him, but at the end it all comes down to him. These are his thoughts, his controlled life, his controlling desire to influence the others into seeing him as the right person to marry.

The poem ends with *"for me"*: he did everything for himself and will always do.