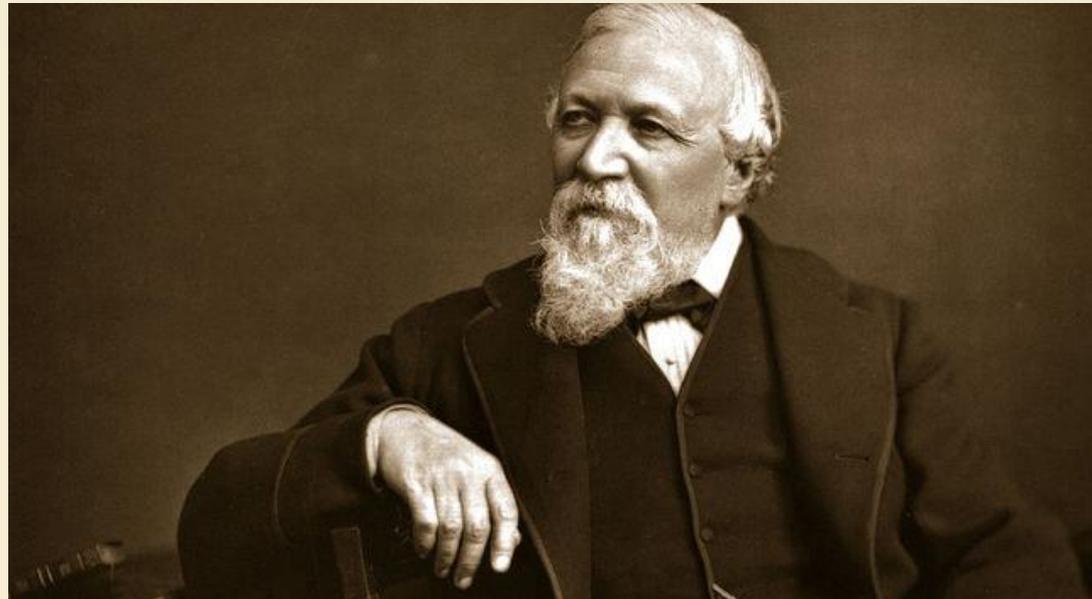


# My Last Duchess

Robert Browning



The poem is based on the real life events from the life of Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara, Italy.

Duke Alfonso married 14 year old Lucrezia de' Medici who died aged 17, only three years after he married her. Lucrezia died in suspicious circumstances and the theory is that she might have been poisoned.



Using this as its inspiration, the poem tells the story of a proud and arrogant Duke arranging his marriage to the Count of Tyrol's daughter.

The poem is in the dramatic monologue form as it is the Duke speaking to a messenger sent by the Count to arrange the marriage.

During their conversation, the Duke reveals that the first Duchess, his previous wife, has died in what appear to be very sinister circumstances.

The duke is speaking about his previous wife here - pronoun suggests a sense of possession.

Suggests she is dead - this is repeated later for emphasis.

Name of the painter - the duke is perhaps 'name-dropping' - materialistic nature.

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)

Suggests she was kept away from strangers - not seen by people - control?

Sense of power - he has complete control over who sees the painting - he wanted this level of control over her when she was alive. Also - a metaphor for the secret he is about to reveal.

She looks happy and vibrant in the painting - he sees this as flirtation/betrayal.

Reveals his jealousy and paranoia - he thinks that look of happiness should be reserved only for him.

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

She has been complimented by the painter - simple flattery. 'Perhaps' shows the Duke is guessing.

She is flattered and blushes at the attention she is given - reminds us that she is young girl and perhaps not used to this kind of flattery but she enjoys it.

Repetition of 'spot' suggests that her enjoyment is very small but it is enough to anger him - jealous and possessive.

Jealousy is becoming more apparent now - he suggests she is fickle and should be more grateful for what he provides.

Repetition emphasises his irritation. He thinks she should only be thankful for grand gestures but she enjoys all things in life.

Punctuation reflects his growing anger at her 'crime'.

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 favor 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,

It angers him that she takes pleasure in small things such as a sunset. He feels that she should show more respect and gratitude for him and his status.

Punctuation creates a pause -  
reflects his inability to  
understand her 'ingratitude'

He is almost  
suggesting  
that he is not  
good at  
communicating  
here - did this  
make their  
situation  
worse?

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

He is bitter and  
resentful. Feels  
that his title  
and social  
status should  
bring her more  
pleasure than  
anything.

He has very specific expectations of her behaviour  
- thinks she should instinctively know and that he  
shouldn't have to 'teach' her - he finds the idea  
degrading and beneath him.

Question reflects his jealousy and possessive nature - she was friendly to everyone - he feels he should have been placed above everyone else.

Trained how to behave

Herself be **lessoned** so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and make excuse,  
E'en 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,**

Disturbing - returns to normal conversation after this confession - was it perhaps a warning to the Count's daughter to behave in a certain way?

Repetition of 'stoop' reflects how superior the duke feels he is to those around him. Arrogance.

List of short clauses creates a sinister tone - suggests he stopped her smiles by having her killed. 'All' smiles has sense of finality about it. Shows his extreme power and control.

Returns to the focus of his conversation - is arranging to marry the Count's daughter. Duke knows the Count is wealthy and generous so will be asking for a 'decent' dowry - materialistic.

Sees his wife/wives as possessions - collections like his statues and paintings. 'Object' suggests ownership BUT could also mean his objective - predatory.

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!

Showing off his wealth and collection of precious items. Arrogant and superior - name drops again; cast for him in particular - trying to show he is better than others.