

Core 301

Hist. Of Eng. Lit. 1832-1890

Unit 2 : Poems

2. 'My Last Duchess'

-By Robert Browning

1. About the Author:

Robert Browning (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was an English poet and playwright whose dramatic monologues put him high among the Victorian poets. He was noted for *irony, characterization, dark humour, social commentary, historical settings and challenging vocabulary and syntax.*

Born

7 May 1812

Camberwell, London, England

Died

12 December 1889 (aged 77)

Venice, Italy

Notable works

“The Pied Piper of Hamelin”,

Men and Women,

The Ring and the Book,

Dramatis Personae,

Dramatic Lyrics,

Dramatic Romances and Lyrics,
Asolando ,
My Last Duchess,etc.

2.About the Poem:

Browning characterized this poem as a dramatic lyric; but essentially it is a dramatic monologue, a genre typically associated with Browning, where one person speaks to a presumed audience.

It is written in iambic pentameter, employing rhyming couplets and the enjambment technique of not always concluding the sentences at the ends of lines.

Because of these techniques, the poem has a conversational quality and can be read as a long speech.

Form and structure The poem is a dramatic monologue.

The Duke dominates the conversation and the messenger does not speak.

The poet has used iambic pentameter to mimic the style of speech/ conversational tone.

3. Rhyme Scheme:

The rhyme scheme of "My Last Duchess" involves twenty-nine rhymed couplets with no repeating rhymes. This means the rhyme scheme is

aabbccddeeffgghhkkllmmnnooppqrrssttuuvvwwxxyyzaaaabbbb

4. Critical Appreciation:

The poem "My last Duchess" takes us to the place of Duke in Ferrara, where the Duke speaks to the envoy of a Count. The envoy has come to propose the Count's daughter to the Duke. The Duke, while

talking takes his guest round the portrait gallery and draws a curtain aside from the portrait of his last Duchess painted on the wall. He says that it has been painted by Fra Pandolf, the imaginary name of the painter.

The Duke further adds that all those who saw that picture turned silent as if to ask him why the Duchess has such a passionate look on her face. He further explains that anything would delight the Duchess or would please her because she thought all this showed politeness and respect for her.

The Duke means to say that she had "an immense happiness that could be pleased very easily. Her earnest impression and smiling glance went alike to everyone. It was without any distinction of persons. The same smile light her face again when the Duke, her husband showed her special favour as when a fool would present her a bough of cherries.

It seemed to him from her manner of showing her gratitude for such simple and trivial thing that she deemed his gift subordinate and ordinary.

In fact, the Duke expected a different and special approach on the part of the Duchess. Regarding him or his gift. Her negligence and indifference filled him with anger and disgust. He could neither complain nor could he tolerate because it was below dignity for him. He could have corrected her and she would have yielded to his decision.

But his ego would have been hurt. Instead of expressing it, he decided to act. He gave commands "so that she would never smile. Thus, "All smiling stopped together." As a result, he says, "there she stands as if alive". Thus, the Duke got her killed by his order.

Then the Duke takes the Envoy to the other part of the palace. He talks about dowry which would be fetched in new proposal but he talk about it in a very clever manner. At the same time, he showed that his main attraction is a beautiful body and not the dowry. He speaks as if dowry is immaterial for him.

The Duke points out to a rare statue of bronze – the figure of Neptune taming the seahorse. From the poem it becomes clear that the Duke is a widower and he is strict and severe. He is also a man of egotism; he has aristocratic pride. He is least interested in the good qualities of the Duchess because nine hundred years old name of his family is more important for him.

The unfortunate fate of the Duchess provides a sharp warning to the next. It is an indication that even a new bride might join the portrait gallery if she follows the same path of his last Duchess. "My Last Duchess" is a perfect example of dramatic monologue composed by Robert Browning.

5. Conclusion:

'My Last Duchess' poem revolves around the theme of political and social power in the hands of the Duke. It depicts the harsh reality of a controlling marriage and a dominating husband who enjoys tyrannical power.

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