



My Last Duchess and Other Poems

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The Victorian poet Robert Browning (1812 –1889) is perhaps most admired today for his inspired development of the dramatic monologue. In this compelling poetic form, he sought to reveal his subjects' true natures in their own, often self-justifying, accounts of their lives and affairs. A number of these vivid monologues, including the famed "Fra Lippo Lippi," "How It Strikes a Contemporary," and "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," are included in this selection of forty-two poems. Here, too, are the famous "My Last Duchess," dramatic lyrics such as "Memorabilia" and "Love among the Ruins," and well-known shorter works: "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad," "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," and more. Together these poems reveal Browning's rare gifts as both a lyric poet and a monologist of rare psychological insight and dramatic flair.

My Last Duchess and Other Poems Details

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Nanette says

I just love porphyria's lover!

In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

Rosemary says

The Browning in my collection is scattered in older, more fragile volumes, but this Dover volume serves as a wonderful introduction to a great writer. There's no better short story/dramatic monologue than My Last Duchess. It just happens to be written in painstakingly perfect poetic language.

Ellen says

Have always loved Robert Browning. In addition to the chilling narrative voice of "My Last Duchess," a couple of my other favorites are Fra Lippo Lippi:

...Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do

And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

or Andrea del Sarto:

Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

John Yelverton says

It's a romantic poem about a man left with nothing but his wife's portrait to remind him of her, and yet the painting is done so well he doesn't really consider her absent from his life.

Hanna says

"Fra Lippo Lippi" - fantastic poem. I've always been fond of monologues in literature, so it's no surprise that dramatic monologue poetry is my type of entertaining. I feel like I learned a lot about writing and characterization just by reading this one poem - count me a fan. I'll have to return to this and check out more of his work sometime, he's a very great writer indeed..

Jorge medina says

Reading "My Last Duchess" really grabbed my attention through the whole story it created many possible scenarios about the Duchess paint in my mind about what could it possible means in this short poem by Robert Browning. I think this poem is very interesting because the main character fuel the plot, even when its dramatic and symbolic definition of duchess paints. Duke Ferrara is a very jealous, possessive and control man. Duke possess a portrait on the wall of his last wife covered with curtains and not letting anyone see the portrait; except for a man who has arrive into Ferrara's house to fix a marriage between another family's daughter and duke Ferrara. As duke shows the man the portrait, he started to express his feeling and thoughts about his ex-wife mentioning that she never appreciated his honorable name "Somehow I know not how as if she ranked. My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name with anybody's gift" and she always flirted with every

man who got close to her “Too easily impressed; she liked whatever she looked on, and her looks went everywhere”. Duke was possessive and when in the poem says “I gave commands, and then all smiles stopped together” when Ferrara mentioned that he let me think about if he was the one responsible for his wife’s death. The characters are somewhat round and static because through the play the main character which is the duke that surprise me when he started being educated and then he demonstrated his real personality being jealous, and a possessive man. The other character in the play I notice was the man that just listened to the duke expressing himself from the portrait and the man never changed anything in the story. I think that the fact that duke character changed his personality from the beginning to the end made the play very interesting and dramatic that grabbed all my attention, including how specific the duke character was using words while describing her ex-wife. This poem’s characters made the story very authentic and exiting in compared to other similar poems that I had read.

Huda Yahya says

My Last Duchess

*That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
“Fra 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)
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
Fra 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
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 favour 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,*

*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
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made 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,
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!*

Arlind Fazliu says

I have only read "My Last Duchess", "Home Thoughts from Abroad", and "Porphyria's Lover". I have been introduced to him in the classes that I've had as part of the Victorian Age in University. They are easy to read but hard to analyze because you have to constantly be aware of not only the things that are said by the characters but also of the things which are unsaid but have to be guessed. Robert Browning must have scared his famous wife Elizabeth Barret with his poems, for they all display themes such as: jealousy, madness, and misogyny. All three of them also found in my fave tragedy of Shakespeare "Hamlet" which is the reason why Robert is sometimes compared to Shakespeare, although there are many differences between them. All in all, I have become fond of poems written in the form of dramatic monologues and I hope I will run into such interesting poems again.

Dawn says

Browning is that rambly, wildly digressing neighbor who can't tell a story in a straight line. He has to visit every curve on the road to that story, describe every fruit on every tree and explain why they are so important, before he ever gets to a punch line.

However, his love of and skill with language is so deep, he's easily forgiven.

Plus, when he does hit that punch line, he hits it solidly and hard. So he's worth the wait.

carolyn.reads says

Most people know his wife Elizabeth Barrett-Browning instead of him; however, I prefer Robert Browning's poetry to his wife. The first time I read "My Last Duchess" was in my Brit Lit class, we were discussing works from the Victorian Era, I must say it was love at first read. There is something dark and ambiguous about his work that it makes people keep reading to find out where it's going to lead. The poem starts with a haunting sentence "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive. I call," readers can assume that something tragic and dark has happened, maybe a death. It's so intriguing from the very first sentence, and I think this is what Victorian poetry is supposed to be. I love that he did not explicitly write that the Duke killed his wife, thus, the ambiguity draws readers in. It makes one wondered what did happen to the previous Duchess. Is she still alive or is she dead? The readers do not know what happened to her, all we know is that they are not married anymore. The speculation drove me crazy, but I did some research of my own, turns out that the characters are based on real historical figures, but I admire what Browning did with their story. He drops a hint of curiosity to spark your interest, but the rest is up to you. It's interesting that in most of his work, he is not the speaker/narrator, instead he allows his characters to come alive through the use of first person narration. Browning introduced me to dramatic monologue, where a character unintentionally reveals a hidden secret about themselves, and for that I can enjoy the psychological chilling atmosphere of this particular poem. It's my favorite poem in the world.

Emily says

Duke of Ferrara -16th Century . Entertaining a emissary who has come to negotiate the Duke's marriage to another powerful family.stops on a picture of the late Duchess and reminises about portrait sessions.claims she flirts with everyone and didnt appreciate the gift of his 900 year old name.. And killed her.. Then goes back to discussing is marriage arrangement.

Written in couplets, dramatic monologues.

Does art have a moral component or is it merely an aesthetic exercise ?

Lindsay Paramore says

All of his poems are amazing, but Last Duchess in particular is quite astounding. Must read if you are really into poetry!

Jeff Hobbs says

Poems read--

Song from Pippa Passes

My Last Duchess--5
Incident of the French Camp
Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister
Johannes Agricola in Meditation
Porphyria's Lover
The Pied Piper of Hamelin
How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix
The Lost Leader
Home Thoughts from Abroad
The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church
Earth's Immortalities
Meeting at Night/Parting at Morning--2
Love among the Ruins
A Lover's Quarrel
Up at a Villa--Down in a City
Fra Lippo Lippi
A Toccata of Galuppi's
An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician
A Serenade at the Villa
My Star
Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came
Love in a Life
How It Strikes a Contemporary
The Last Ride Together
The Patriot
Memorabilia
Andrea del Sarto
In a Year
Two in the Campagna--2
A Grammarian's Funeral
Dis Aliter Visum, or le Byron de nos jours
Caliban upon Setebos, or Natural Theology in the Island
Confessions
Youth and Art
Apparent Failure
House--3
Wanting Is--What? --2
Never the Time and the Place--3
The Names
Why I Am a Liberal

Danny says

"Porphyria's Lover"

In which the eponymous lover murders his sweetheart after she comes to see him & make love to him in the middle of a storm; the demented narrator believes he is doing both a favor by strangling her with her long

yellow her: this way, he thinks, he can preserve their rare moment of communion forever--a moment threatened by some unnamed obstacle.

"My Last Duchess"

In which a Duke is to be newly married to the daughter of a Count--and in which he shows the Count's emissary a portrait of his most recent wife, his "last duchess"; it is suggested that he murders her out of spiteful jealousy because she bestowed her affection too liberally on others. He wishes to possess her entirely; even her portrait is concealed behind a curtain.

"Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister"

In which a friar attempts to persuade us of the odiousness of another friar in his monastery by pointing to the most venial peccadilloes (his interest in latin botanical names, his tendency to over-polish silverware, his alleged (and unsubstantiated) spying on bathing women) and persuades us of the opposite: of the speaker's mental instability and spiteful jealousy

"Love Among the Ruins"

In which a lover makes his way to his beloved, who is waiting for him in the turret of a ruined castle in a vast pasture; the spot used to be a center of empire, but all that is passed, and the speaker reflects on the superior beauty of his love--something greater than vast kingdoms, which inevitably decay.

"Fra Lippo Lippi"

In which the orphan-turned-artist is caught carousing late at night when he should have been at the home of his patron, C. de Medici. He tells his life story, with reflections on his realistic and bodily painting style, which is frowned upon by critics who prefer idealized representations of life and the soul.

"Andrea del Sarto"

About a gifted artist who can't find the will or motivation to produce the great art he is capable of making--partly because of his unsupportive and adulterous wife. An evocation of the life of the brilliant artist, stunted and enervated by life.

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"

A mysterious quest poem through a shifting topographical space--a barren wasteland that ultimately leads a daring knight to a fateful tower, where he blows his ominous slung-horn.

Maria L. Lucio says

Sincerely, I do not enjoy at all reading poems because they are almost always full of a strange vocabulary that goes beyond my capacity to think. However, there some poems such as "My last Duchess" that really catch my attention. "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning is a mysterious poem hard to understand due to its dramatic monologue. This poem was written in 1842, which makes it part of the Victorian poetry. The Victorian poetry was the poetry written during the reign of Queen Victoria. Thus, Mr. Browning used a lot of

this form of poetry in his works. The poem seems to be part of a mystery because the speaker describes his feelings and emotions of a dead woman in a portrait; nevertheless, it can also be seen as an artistic commentary.

This poem is full of mystery and an example of that is the speaker himself, the duke. The main character, the speaker, is portrayed as monster, arrogant, and as a possessive and controlling man, and yet he is ironically charming, both in his friendly address and his selection in the use of words. For example, “I gave commands, and then all smiles stopped together” effectively captures the Duke’s arrogant character (Browning, 206). I think that the most obvious demonstration of this is the murder of his wife.

The subject of this poem is the longing for a lover that passed away. Also, the Duke’s tone grows harsh while he retrospects how both nature and human could impress her. Likewise, this story made me remember about Porphyria’s Lover poem, which is one of the first dramatic monologues of Mr. Browning. I found them in common because both stories are about dead and love, so maybe the author may combine some his personal feeling in his creation when writing a poem.

This poem is very interesting because it shows how humans sometimes appreciate the beauty of women when there is not present alive anymore. The duke remains in loved with the duchess he has had killed, though his affection and love now rests on a just a simple picture of her. In other words, he has chosen to love the “ideal image” of her rather than to have her in real life.
