
Presenting The Reality Of The Real World In Browning's My Last Duchess

"My Last Duchess" is a tremendous example of Browning's use of dramatic monologue. This poem is powerful representation of Renaissance. As the poem discloses, the reader learns the speaker of the poem, Duke Ferrara, is talking to a representative of his fiancée's family. Standing in front of a portrait of the Duke's last wife, now dead, the Duke talks about the woman's failings and imperfections. The irony of the poem surfaces as the reader discovers that the young woman's "faults" were qualities like compassion, modesty, humility, delight in simple pleasures, and courteousness to those who. Some critics have suggested that Blake is offering here a true vision of the joy which is available to the innocent. The boy's unpaternal human father is replaced by the loving fatherhood of God. Blake is implying that those who see from the perspective of experience are insensible to this, but the true 'duty' of the boy is to perceive the 'truth' of such visions via the power of imagination.

Using rich detail, Browning leads the reader to conclude that the Duke found fault with his former wife because she did not replacement her attentions for him, his rank, and his power. More importantly, the Duke's long list of complaints presents a thinly veiled threat about the behavior he will and will not bear in his new wife. The lines "I gave commands; / smiles stopped together" suggest that the Duke somehow, directly or indirectly, brought about the death of the last Duchess. In this dramatic monologue, Browning has not only depicted the inner workings of his speaker, but has in fact allowed the speaker to reveal his own failings and limitations to the reader.

My Last Duchess was written in the Victorian age, when women were seen more as property in a marriage than real humans capable of love. Generally speaking men were in charge in a relationship; serious notions of equality had not yet been raised.

He is variously described as:

- a deceitful, arrogant, acquisitive aristocrat;
- an innocent, loving but deeply vain soul;
- an unkind, cruel murderer;
- a psychopathic, egotistic, blowing killer.

My Last Duchess is a imaginary account of one man's attempt to explain away a picture behind curtains and by so doing convince himself (and the emissary) of the truth. But the truth could well be one extended lie - the duke being a pathological liar - an excuse for the continuation of control over his unsuccessful first wife.

Browning's genius lies in his aptitude to keep the reader on the tightrope of uncertainty. Throughout the ambiguous monologue there is no moral conclusion made; the audacious nature of the duke isn't questioned, we don't know if he's creating more untruths by fantasizing to reveal the truth. The debate goes on and will likely never end.

Robert Browning's dramatic monologue "My Last Duchess" is his best-known and most

commonly anthologized poem. What makes it so expressively effective is the strong contrast between the speaker and the subject of his prologue. The speaker is a methodically disgusting man, while his last duchess was obviously not only a beautiful but a loving and lovable young woman. The woman and the man are like Beauty and the Beast. That is to be found in the open couplets which are so deliberately ragged, staggered, awkward, discordant and forced that they serve as proof of the Duke's own admission that he has no skill in speech and highlight his obliviousness, selfishness and crudity. Here are a few examples:

That's my last Duchess decorated on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive . I call

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

If the entire poem is read with specific attention to the open verses, the calculated clumsiness of the meter and the rhymes becomes outstandingly apparent.

This discloses an aspect of human nature connecting to people who are just basely not good. Shakespeare in King Lear has the Duke of Albany make the exceedingly astute observation that "Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile: Filths taste but themselves." That is the case with Browning's proud, greedy, sadistic, insensitive, and ignorant Duke: because he had no capacity for goodness himself, he couldn't bear his duchess' sweet nature.