

# Good jenny and my last duchess gender issues argumentative essay example

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Gender tends to affect any exchange between two human beings whether it be monetary or otherwise. However, it is to be noted that these exchanges can never be restricted to monetary limitations. They tend to consist of undertones of psychological and social effect because of their sensitive nature with society's dynamics.

Gender and the roles that it plays in any society has been under literary debate and discussion throughout time. Stereotypes pertinent to gender have been highlighted by numerous poets and authors in order to make the importance of its understanding clearer to audiences. All mediums including text, film, and theatre have played an important role in creating and removing stereotypes in culture and society, each to their own effect.

Exchanges whether monetary or social related to gender roles have also played an important role in literature. Many writers have written about them in the form of poems, essays and stories in order to help the audience ponder over the dynamics of these exchanges. The important thing to keep in mind here is that when whenever we talk about exchanges related to gender, both the social and monetary exchanges go hand in hand. This is mostly because gender plays a big role in the constructs of society and hence any monetary exchange related to it becomes an active part of the social construct automatically.

Similarly, gender also has an effect on all other matrices of identity such as race, sexuality and marital status. The stereotypes related to males are miles apart different for females and the various other matrices add another layer to their meaning. In order to understand the topic of this paper, it is imperative that the two texts be analyzed in terms of the mentioned

exchange.

Jenny is a long poem which was written in 1869 and published in 1870 in Poems. The poem basically narrates the internal dialogue of a young scholar who is employing the services of a young prostitute called Jenny who is sleeping in her room and he is watching her. The poem gives readers a clear insight into the mindset of the Victorian Era and the place the female gender had in society in that time.

Jenny being a prostitute is firstly considered an object mostly because of her profession. She is not a person to the young scholar but rather a means of obtaining his sexual gratification. He talks of how Jenny is his tool or aid to achieve what he wishes rather than a person with an identity (Rossetti). The poem basically aimed to specify the role of women in a Victorian society and their status in it based on their gender. The fact that a man in the first place is in the position of a woman says a lot about the point the poet is trying to make with his poem.

Jenny being a prostitute has to fend for herself against the world by utilizing her one asset that is her body. She is in a position of power here because she is a commodity which she herself can provide while any man who employs her service becomes the consumer. The exchange here seems quite simple, yet there are various layers that must be peeled off in order for better understanding. This exchange has like mentioned above automatically become social as well as monetary intricate nature of it. Unlike any other object for wealth exchange, this is the exchange which involves a human body, hence making it much more complex.

However, through this poem, the poet manages to very beautifully make it

clear to the audience how society still manages to make this exchange seem uncomplicated and devoid of human personalization. In the Victorian Era, prostitutes, whether highly paid or lowly paid were a subject of stigma and taboo. They would be looked down upon by the noble men and women but this did not refrain the men from employing their services. The hypocrisy of society is what makes these women resort to prostitution. The mere fact that these women are looked down upon society because of their profession is witness to them being turned into commodities by the society. They are not considered to be people and hence the exchange becomes completely monetary.

**The following lines from poem make another point very clear:**

“ Why, as a volume seldom read/  
Being opened halfway shuts again/  
So might the pages of her brain/  
Be parted at such words, and thence/  
Close back upon the dusty sense” (Rossetti).

In the above verses, the speaker tries to figure out the thoughts of the young woman without actually engaging her in conversation which is a comment on the behavior of these women by society. Their thoughts and emotions are of no consequence and all that matters to the men of that era is what these women can do for them.

Throughout the poem, the mention of a “ purse” has been used as a metaphor to highlight this certain exchange based upon the roles of gender. The poet is trying to bring to the attention of audiences how the simple fact that the consumer pays for something makes them entitled to anything a product. The young prostitute is at the mercy of any man who has the means

to afford her and feels like he is in a power of position because of this one simple exchange (Aspinall).

At the end of the poem, the author tries says various things which make the reader reflects upon the nature of the woman, her past and how she views the world. The poet speaks of Jenny with a kind of reverence because after all she is a woman and not just an object. He says that no matter what, she has a pure heart and a soul which is satisfied. It is men and society who have made women like Jenny a source of shame yet do not refrain from using them to satisfy themselves. He says that she is similar to any other woman as indicated in this line of the poem:

**“ Just as another woman sleeps! (Rossetti)**

He says this because Jenny is a woman and her profession or career choice does not make it justifiable for her to be viewed as an object. This is a comment by the poet on how society renders women who are prostitutes to be viewed as a type of plague or disease and dropped down to the level of merely being considered an object. It is a wise device which the poet has used to make his audiences aware of the hypocrisy of society.

This is also an attempt to show readers that this type of exchange while is heavily influenced by monetary value, is quite personalized in its own way mostly due to the fact that it involves the exchange of wealth in return for a person's conscience and piece of their soul.

This is also food for thought as it makes one reflect upon how this exchange would be considered if the role were to be reversed. Would a man be looked to resort to down upon if he had to resort to a similar profession in order to

sustain himself? Would the status of a man in that era be somehow marred due to his career choices and how exactly would any monetary gain that he receives from it be viewed?

My Last Duchess is another example of a text which has explored gender roles and exchange. It is dramatic monologue written by Robert Browning and was first ever published in Browning's Dramatic Lyrics. The poem is a 28 rhymed couplet, with iambic pentameter. The poem narrates the story of a Duke who, it has been hinted in the poem, killed his wife. The poem starts with the speaker pointing to the painting of his wife and the readers are told that he will be talking about her. He refers to the lady in the painting as his "last Duchess" which points out that she is dead, being spoken of in the past tense.

The poem tells readers the story of how he was jealous of all eyes that were set upon his wife and hence he had no choice but to kill her. While this poem does not speak of any monetary exchange, it reinforces the objectification of women (Browning). The Duke considers his wife to be his property and hence expects the gratification expected of a beloved or prized possession. The exchange is her like "Jenny" is not material but more psychological.

The speaker feels that just because the Duke was married to the Duchess; he felt that it was only he who had the right to look at her, to view her beauty. He is in this case a consumer who feels entitled to a certain product because of the social bond which binds them rather than a monetary bond. The Duke has a collection of paintings and statues and each to him are a source of pleasure and pride. He holds objects of beauty in high esteem and such is his sentiment towards to the painting of the Duchess.

The Duke has been used by the poet to explain a harsh reality of society. Men tend to objectify women when they're in relationships with them whether marital or otherwise and hence believe that they have authority over them. The poet talks about it in a sinister way by pointing out how this becomes an obsession for men and just like a disease, overpowers them to take steps which they might not even consider wrong. The Duke as he feels that the Duchess is his kills her without regret and is quite happy looking at her painting (Browning). He is now a happy consumer because the object of his desire is only his and it is only he who can now enjoy its beauty. The Duchess is no longer a woman to him, but possession, an idea which has taken hold of his thoughts.

The Duke wanted to not just control his wife but even her smile which he felt won over hearts and hence he had her killed. As the poet says in the poem: "much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;/Then all smiles stopped together" (Browning). This clearly hints that now that she was dead, the Duke was content with the fact that her smile was only for him to see and no one else. The Duchess's smile is part of the exchange during these two. The Duke being a disturbed man, sees this as an exchange which gives him satisfaction that his prized possession owed him (Browning).

At the end of the poem, we see the Duke preparing for a second marriage and he is asking about a certain Lord's daughter. However, the Duke remains a man who is still objectifying women and hence speaks of his next wife as such as well. This is clear when he says "at starting is my object" while referring to a woman (Browning). The line mentioned above clearly refers to the fact that the Duke views all women as objects and will even regard his

next wife as a possession rather than a person. The poet has tried to highlight the fact that society tends to objectify women to a point where it becomes quite destructive, such as the case of the Duchess, who dies due to being wanted by her own husband to an obsessive extent.

## **Conclusion:**

The analysis of these two texts helps us understand how literature takes gender roles in context especially when it is about exchanges between the two genders. As far as monetary exchanges are concerned, there are various stereotypes related to gender which are not equal for both men and women. Society tends to have different values for women and different ones for men. Like mentioned in the analysis of Jenny, society judges women more harshly for their choices in profession and the things they do in order to sustain themselves as compared to the things men do. It also verifies the fact that as far as the gender and any exchange related to it cannot merely be monetary and somehow tends to have a social dynamic with it.

The analysis of “ My Last Duchess” made it clear that women are expected to be objects by most men. This makes it become a psychological exchange and one in which women tend to bear most of the brunt of it.

## **References**

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