

Relationships issues in my last duchess

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



How do My Last Duchess and La Belle Dame Sans Merci present differing views on love and relationships?

Whilst ' My Last Duchess' is a poem showing the misogyny and megalomania which comes with absolute, total power, ' La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is a poem warning against the vulnerability and impotence caused by lusting for a woman. In the following I will be exploring the two poems and detailing their similarities and differences.

In LBDSM, the man appears to be at the mercy of the woman, whereas in MLD, the reverse appears to be true in that that the obsessive Duke controlling the Duchess and her actions. In LBDSM, the modifier " full beautiful" acts as a superlative demonstrating the woman's immense beauty, controlling the infatuated and impotent knight. The connotations of the word " full", being an absolute, is that the beauty of the woman, in the eyes of the knight cannot surpass any more levels and she is the perfect woman. The sexual realm in which these two meet is an infatuated fantasy shown through the overly excessive, suggestive sexual imagery. The knight, in this fantastical series of events, causes the woman to " make sweet moan". The use of the adjective " sweet" shows how he imagines her, a true depiction of perfection. His constant compliments towards his " lady" are reference to the courtly love tradition, but his own words condemn him in the reader's eyes, if not his own. In MLD, however, the Duke Experiences states far from impotence, the complete opposite, his potent control over his guests and his late wife. The structure of the poem is a clear indication of his megalomaniacal nature, in that it is an extended monologue, with no break of speech or pauses from the duke. The fact that there is no intermission

from his guest also depicts an image of destructive control, to the point where the rhetorical device employed, his voyeurism used to show his immense self-pride and righteous nature, makes his speech unreliable. The hyperbole employed by Robert Browning “ her looks went everywhere” is used by the Duke to imply that she flirted with everyone that she met, which is unlikely to be true, but not out of kilter with everything else he’s said. His sociopathic tendencies however, and the unreliable voice of the narrator, suggest to the reader that this is another fabrication on his part. This shows his misogyny because it shows how he restricted her freedom of speech and didn’t allow her to speak with anyone on a friendly level, as he interpreted it all as flirting.

Both MLD and LBDSM explore the obsession that both male protagonists have with the female in the poem. The duke shows his obsession with his last duchess, through the use of his innuendo and euphemism which he uses to renounce the promiscuity of the lady. As he describes her looks as they “ went everywhere”, he follows up with the rhetorical question “ who passed without much the same smile?” The rhetoric employed here suggests her promiscuous nature, from which we can infer that he is, again, manipulating his listener; he is attempting to induce sympathy from the listener as he describes her ‘ unthinkable’ nature and the fact that, despite all she did, he was able to rise above this and forgive her... The control in his voice, and the rhetorical sophistication shows a complete lack of emotional engagement, reference to his obsessive and megalomaniacal personality. The Knight, in “ La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, however, is obsessed with the woman in a far more sympathy inducing way, in that the tone he uses draws the reader in

and becomes so mellow and nostalgic, before explaining the heartbreak caused by the woman. The obsession on display here is reference to the courtly love tradition of Victorian poetry. The knight's devotion and adoration for the woman are shown through the actions carried out, such as when he "made a garland" for the woman and made "bracelets too", which show the time taken to create such beautiful accessories, a reference to how much he cares. The infatuated vocabulary used by the Knight showcases the obsession he has with her physical beauty. Her "foot was light" which suggests an apparition like nature of the woman, in that he sees her as angelic and her beauty as unreal, as he describes her as a "faery's child".

In both "My Last Duchess" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", there is a figure in control, though MLD expresses self-righteous and entitled views whereas in LBDSM, the controlling woman masks her malicious intent, an iron fist in a velvet glove. The paradox employed by the Duke in MLD "who'd stoop to blame this sort of trifling" shows how no one should have to bother themselves with this kind of trivial silliness, although, in fact, he's just spent the previous 33 lines doing exactly that. The word "stoop" is used here by Robert Browning to induce a scornful take from the audience as they see this entitled duke as a man of high society, the epitome of aristocracy, whereas "stoop" has connotations of the working class, back problems from heavy manual labour. This contradiction, and the Duke's willingness to openly contradict himself shows his superiority, in that he can say and do whatever he wants challenging his listener to pick up on it, illustrating his disdain for all around him. The control displayed by "La Belle Dame", however is of a similar malice, but is put across in a more subtle way. The main reference to

her absolute power is toward the end when he says she “ lulléd me asleep”. The connotations of “ lulléd” are that of gentleness and kindness, as one would send a baby off to sleep. This phrase, however is juxtaposed with the next stanza of the “ death pale” kings and princes showing how he has been tricked into a state of drowsiness which results in his slow and painful death. The taunting of the kings and princes and warriors, “ La Belle Dame Sans Merci/Thee hath in thrall!” shows his ignorance to her power over his life or death, in that these men of power and potency have all been brought to the same fate as this lowly knight.

In conclusion, I believe that both of these poems, though they have different relationship leaders, both hold the same message warning against what can come of an imbalance of power, impotence and infatuation, and on the opposite end the megalomania and misogyny.