

Poems



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* is more of a comment on the teller than on the tale as it is written in the form of an internal monologue which comments on the masculinity and gender conflict within the Victorian context. In his poem, Browning has portrayed the speaker as an egotistical Duke who objectifies women and always has to see himself as powerful and in control. The central irony of this poem is shown through the structure of this poem where the composer demonstrates the extent of the Duke's jealousy and how it results in his obsessive behaviour. In the poem *My Last Duchess*, the Duke of Ferrara is revealed to be an egotistical patriarch.

The quote, '...as if she ranked My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With anybody's gift', supports the idea of the speaker's pride in his family name and its level of high status in society. The effect of this line creates an image of the Duke's aristocratic lineage which evokes his egotistical manner. This comments on the speaker as his egocentric thoughts make him feel more powerful and therefore reaffirms his masculinity to uphold the values of the Victorian context. The Duke is not only exposed as an egotistical man, but one who also objectifies women and perceives them as disposable possessions. Through the technique of metaphor, Browning emphasises the teller's sense of objectification of women, yet at the same time, he is able to maintain the Duke's ego. The speaker states, '...sir! Notice Neptune, though, taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,' which suggests that the Duke views himself as powerful, as he refers himself to Neptune (the king of the sea) and the Duchess to a sea-horse. His objectification is emphasised in his thought for '...taming' the Duchess, this comments on the gender conflict of the Victorian context,

where men are considered to be dominant. Browning portrays the Duke's jealousy through the leadings to his obsessive behaviour to reassure his power and control over those who he possesses.

The speaker's tone in, "She liked whatever she looked on, and her looks went everywhere," expresses his jealousy over the fact that his Duchess's attention to him didn't meet the ethical standards of the Victorian era. His tone also confirms his dislike for not being able to control the Duchess's actions and therefore leads up to his own obsessive actions to kill her. The Duke's obsessive behaviour results in his choice of actions, "I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together." Through this ambiguous action, the Duke's sense of power and control is reinforced. Robert Browning uses this as an example for gender conflict within the Victorian context which gives rise to acts of malice.

In conclusion, Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess* is more of a comment on the teller than on the tale as it also comments on the masculinity and gender conflict within the Victorian context through the internal monologue of the teller. Browning uses the speaker's egotistical manner to demonstrate the extent of masculinity and power that is required to sustain the morals of the Victorian context. Gender conflict is commented through the way the speaker objectifies women and sees them as possessions especially towards his Duchess, where the Duke's jealousy results to his obsessive act to kill her.