

1842

MY LAST DUCHESS

Robert Browning

Browning, Robert (1812-1899) - British Victorian Poet, noted for his dramatic monologues, his rejection of overly-florid language, and his mastery of psychological characterization. In 1846 he married Elizabeth Barrett and shared with her one of the world's most celebrated romances. My Last Duchess (1842) Browning's best-known monologue, it is spoken by Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara. Opening lines: That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call ...

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA

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 favor 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!

THE END