

MY LAST DUCHESS



- **Context:** Robert Browning was fascinated by the Italian Renaissance and the new-age ideas surrounding fashion and art which were being introduced in Italy (where he lived for a long time). This poem is based on Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara, whose wife Lucrezia died after supposedly being poisoned.

- **“Will’t please you sit and look at her?”** - this statement is very polite, however also creates a sinister and slightly forceful tone. This makes the Duke sound intimidating and very controlling over who can “see” his wife - perhaps he is trying to regain this feeling after being unable to prevent his wife (when she was actually alive) from having male friends. This also shows how the Duke sees

this painting as a symbol of his power and majesty. The theme of the objectification of women also runs through this poem, as the Duchess becomes just another one of his possessions. This may suggest her value and status, as the Duke collected expensive artwork, however also gives the sense that the Duke is a deeply unpleasant and unforgiving man.

- **“Too easily impressed.... And her looks went everywhere”** - this phrase implies that the Duchess, unlike her husband, did not require luxuries or expensive gifts to make her happy. This appears to anger and frustrate the Duke, who does not share the same opinions as her. She seems unappreciative of his **“gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name”** and perhaps isn’t as proud of his family’s heritage and class as her husband is. This makes the Duke seem of a higher status than the Duchess, and that perhaps they had very different or contrasting backgrounds. This is reflected in the repetition of **“stooping”** which may suggest that the Duke thought he was superior and above his lowly wife. This reinforces gender roles and stereotypes, and how they were prevalent even in an era of discovery and radical thinking. The phrase **“and her looks went everywhere”** appears to imply that the Duchess was flirtatious (or at least she was in the eyes of her husband, who appears to disparage any sort of relationships that she formed with anyone). This reinforces the theme of jealousy and how the Duke couldn’t stand how the Duchess treated him in the same way as everyone else. This portrays him as a needy and attention seeking man who required unachievable high standards from his wife (who didn’t care how other people saw her, unlike the Duke).

KEY THEMES, STRUCTURE AND FORM