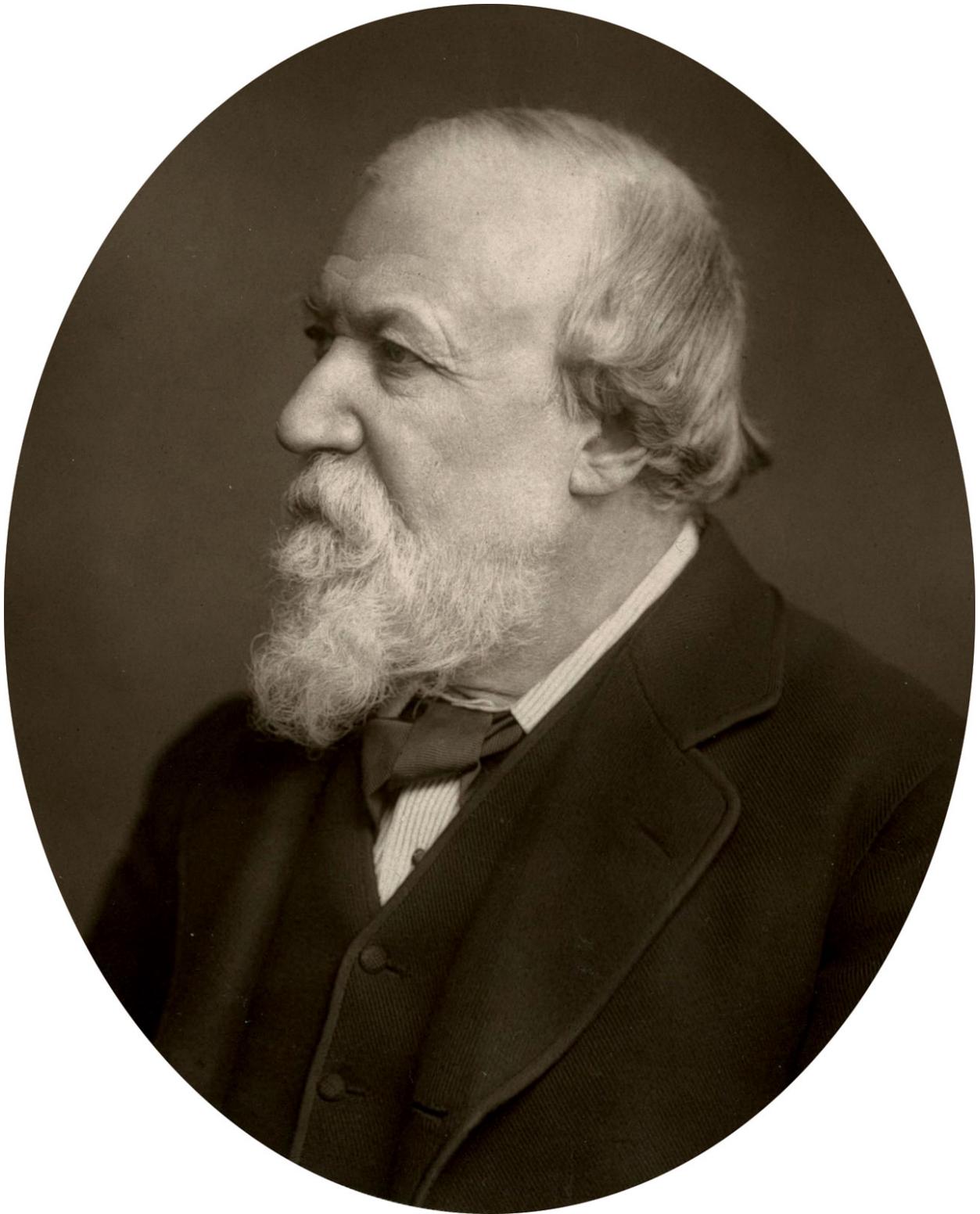


CC5T: British Literature : 19th Century

(1832-1900)

A Discussion of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"

This is an e-material intended for the students of English Honours students of 3rd Semester under CBCS syllabus of Vidyasagar University



Robert Browning

Text of “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 favour 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 pretense
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!

Summary of the Poem

Browning's *My Last Duchess* is an exemplary dramatic monologue for which Browning is best known. The drama that this poem represents is set in 'Ferrara', the capital of a province in Italy that was famous for its 'high' culture during the Renaissance. This setting also hints at the fact that the poem's story is historical: a real incident of this kind had happened.

A duke had murdered his seventeen-year-old wife after three years of marriage, and married another girl. The main character and speaker of the poem is Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara. The other person listening to him (his addressee) is the envoy (marriage agent) sent by the Count of another place called Tyrol.

The duke is talking about the painting on the wall while preparing to go down to meet the Tyrol, the father of the proposed girl, and other people who have come to finalize the new marriage proposal. The poem looks like a piece of small-talk, but it is meant to reveal a story of oppression, jealousy, pride, corruption, murder and the greed for dowry. And the true story behind the episode of the duke's boasting, which the readers infer themselves is the theme of the poem. The theme of this poem is the wide gap between the so-called high culture and 'low' personal behavior in the upper and the ruling class of Renaissance Italy. The purpose of the poet is to expose the real character of the duke and satirize the culture that he represents, in general.

The monologue is designed in such a way that it reveals the true character of the duke who is having a small-talk with a visitor; the readers need to explore the story behind his boasting. As the duke is preparing to go downstairs, probably putting on his clothes, he sees that the messenger is looking at the paintings on the wall. He begins to talk about the painting of his previous wife (the duchess). He says that it was a painting by the famous Italian painter brother

Pandolf. The way he repeats the name and uses 'fra' or 'brother' before the artist's name suggests that the duke is trying to impress the visitor with his intimacy with artists. Similarly, we see that he is trying to give the impression of being an art-lover (aesthete) when he describes the painting with the words of an art-critic – "the depth and passion in the earnest glance..... reproduce the faint half-flush that fades along the throat..." Then he boasts about his art of speaking by indirectly saying that he doesn't have the skill of saying small things in the proper manner. But that is another example of his egotism. He claims that he is such a powerful man that no one has dared to ask him about the red spot on the cheek of the duchess. But we see that he is such a mean, evil-minded, jealous and cynical man who thinks that if his wife looks at or smiles at visitors and any other males, it is because of her sexual excitement with them: he guesses that the painter's small-talk had caused the spot of joy" to appear on her cheek! Then he boasts about his 'nine hundred years old name, and complains that the duchess did not give special regards to that. With normal people, that doesn't count in a marital relationship, because everyone's husband is a husband first of all and it is not necessary to address him by his status-name. He says that she used to bring the red spot of joy on her cheek not only he gave a 'favorable' (look) on her breast, but also when she saw any common person object or event. We know that some young girls' cheeks become red due to the sun, due to shyness, anger, or even without any reason when they simply smile or talk. The duke is a shameless tyrant who cannot think of anything positive; most probably because he is evil minded himself. He says that "her looks went everywhere", that she would thank and appreciate anything or anyone, that she was too easily impressed, and that she used to smile at anyone who passed by her. We never find any hint that the duchess was morally guilty of the kinds of accusations he is making against her; if she was actually bad, this shameless man would have said it no unclear words. No one will be

ever convinced that to smile, to thank, to be interested, to be shy, or to talk to people is such a crime, or immorality. No one will believe that a wife should look only at her husband, except in societies that believe that all women are naturally evil! In fact, in societies which do injustice to women, men are usually corrupted, evil and unjust. The duke is a symbol of tyranny and the demoniac male not only in Renaissance Italy, but in all societies of all times and place.

At the climax of the dramatic poem, the Duke reveals that he had killed his previous wife, the duchess painted on the wall. He says that he did not want to stoop (bend low) before her to say that she should not smile at other people, should not get impressed by ordinary people and things, should not blush, and should behave in the proper ways to 'demonstrate the great name of her husband! He adds that he didn't have the skill of speech and that she would not understand him; but even if he had it and she could understand him, he would not stop before just a wife to tell her what he didn't like. This also further reveals his true character. Then he says, even without caring what he is saying, that he "gave orders" to stop all her smiles together. That means he gave orders to kill her. The murder of his own wife and the way he carelessly takes, is shocking and disgusting. The duke is a perfect collection of all devilish qualities, the misuse of power and the extreme oppression and injustice.

There are also some dramatic actions in the poem, in the beginning, the duke tells the other man to sit down and look at the picture. Towards the end of the poem, he tells him to stand up: "Will it please you rise?" We also guess other things that the characters must be doing. As the duke is saying all the nasty things about his own wife, the other man seems to try to leave the place! But the duke tells him to wait: 'Nay, we'll go down together, sir". The next moment, we find that he is making the man wait just to give another piece of boasting! He points to a statue and tells his guest that it is his own statue in the form of god Neptune training the sea horse. This also

symbolizes this demand for a wife like a 'trained' horse. The poem ends with the duke still talking about himself as a great man and a lover of art.

Dramatic Monologue and Robert Browning

The 'dramatic monologue' was one of the most favourite forms of poetry for the Victorian poets . In this type of poetry the entire poem is spoken out at a critical moment of the speaker's life and the presence of a silent listener offers great insight into the feelings, temperament and character of the speaker .It is indeed 'a comprehensive soliloquy' , and Browning's dramatic monologues are regarded as the best master of this type. Margaret Willy claims this form to be the greatest and most original contribution of Browning to English poetry .

Browning had initially attempted dramas, but his interest in psychology and the human mind led to too little action, which is the sine qua non of the stage, hence, the dramatic monologue, with its scope for dramatic detachment as well as for probing the motives of character, proved the adequate instrument of Browning. His poems like "Fra Lippo Lippi ", "Andrea del Sarto", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "The Last Ride Together" etc reveal him to be almost Shakespearean in his understanding of the weak and erring and self- received. His theatre is the soul's development.

As C. Hugh Holman points out, in Browning's, dramatic monologues, the circumstances surrounding the conversation of the one side which we "hear", the dramatic monologues are revelation of an insight into the character of the speaker who speaks in and on his life's crisis. 'The Last Ride Together' is based on the theme of unrequited love. The opportunity of the last ride with his desired lady makes the young lover to lay bare his heart and occasions the poem. On the other hand, the fact that Porphyria's lover is meditating upon something sinister is implied from his remaining silent even at the lady's attempts at physical intimacy with him. The opening of "Fra Lippo Lippi" also shows how Lippo is caught by the guards after visiting the nocturnal brothel.

Wagner – Lawlor finds the presence of a silent listener in dramatic monologues. In "The Last Ride Together", the role is performed by the beloved lady whose reactions are only hinted at. Lippo Lippi is, on the other hand, having a conversation with the guards who have caught him. In 'Porphyria's Lover', however, the lover seems to be talking with himself rather than with the lady.

Hudson says that the ideal aim of a dramatic monologue is the faithful self-portrayal of the personality of the supposed speaker. As Browning himself confessed his monologues are soul studies: "The soul is the stage / moods and thoughts are characters". Browning spares no opportunity to depict the psychology of his speakers. In "The Last Ride Together" the complex feelings in the lover - his disillusionment in love, his fatalism beginning from "since now at length my fate I know", his vigorous optimism which makes him pluck the sting of failure ("Still one must lead some life beyond / Have a bliss to die with, dimly desired"), spiritual exaltation and

vivid imagination (“Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride”) – find fullest expression. The dark and abnormal psychology of the Porphyria’s lover is expressed in Porphyria’s Lover, Fra Lippo Lippi is an exposition of the cheerful, pleasure – loving nature of the Fra.

Browning’s dramatic monologues are predominantly argumentative and analytical. The rejected lover arranges arguments against his mourning his failure in the field of love. He asks, “fail I alone in words and deeds?” and consoles himself by comparing his fate with those of the poets, soldiers, Sculptors or musicians (My riding is better, by their leave). Porphyria’s lover gropes for excuses for the killing of her, although they appear quite lame. Contrary to conventional ascetic Views of art and artist, Lippi argues why art should aspire to capture the beauty God has invested in the common objects of life.

To conclude, Glenn Everett has found out some distinctive qualities in Browning’s dramatic monologues:

First, the poet’s subject is the psychology of the speaker, and the author explores the speaker’s point of view by means of imaginative sympathy ‘Einfuhlung’. Thus Browning fully sympathizes with the rejected lover and Lippo Lippi.

Secondly, the presence of the auditor is not very important in Browning’s dramatic monologues. The case-making argumentative tone as found in the rejected lover, Porphyria’s lover or the Fra, is actually aimed at the speaker’s “Second self”

Thirdly, the dramatic monologues Of Browning never offer definite endings. Therefore, whether the ride lasted for ever, or what Porphyria’s lover did after daybreak, or whether the

guards let Lippo Lippi go , remains obscure . The form requires that we complete the dramatic Scene from within, by means of inference and imagination from the clues provided.

“My Last Duchess” as a Dramatic Monologue

As a chronicler of "the incidents in the development of a soul," Robert Browning often allowed a speaker's own words to reveal, and condemn, his or her own behavior. The Duke's monologue in "My Last Duchess" unveils his persona as courteous, cultured, and terrifying, as he describes a portrait of his late wife in stark detail. Browning's "My Last Duchess," first published in "Dramatic Lyrics" in 1842, is one of the best known of his many dramatic monologues. In the following lesson, students will come to understand the use of dramatic monologue as a poetic device, and they will learn to read beyond the speaker's words in order to understand the implications beneath.

Browning wrote poetry with a purpose – to explore the heart and mind of his characters, by making them talk in a particular situation about a certain incident, idea or experience. In his dramatic monologues, he looks at life from different perspectives. In the following paragraphs, an analysis of the techniques applied by Browning in his dramatic monologues with special reference to “*My Last Duchess*” shall be dealt with.

A dramatic monologue usually includes all or a few of the following elements: a fiction speaker and audience, a symbolic setting, Talismanic props, dramatic gestures, an emphasis on speaker's subjectivity, a focus on dramatics, problematics of irony or non-irony and involved reader's role playing. In 'My Last Duchess', the duke's egregious villainy makes especially apparent the split between moral judgment and our actual feeling for him. The poem carries to the limit an effect peculiarly the genius of the dramatic monologue i.e. the effect created by the tension between sympathy and moral judgment. Browning delighted in making a case for the apparently immoral position, and the dramatic monologue, since it requires sympathy for the speaker as a condition of reading the poem, is an excellent vehicle for the 'impossible' case. The combination of villain and aesthete in the Duke creates an especially strong tension, and Browning exploits the combination to the fullest. The utter outrageousness of the Duke makes condemnation the least interesting response, certainly not the response that can account for the poem's success. What interests us more than the Duke's wickedness is his immense attractiveness. His conviction of matchless superiority, his intelligence and bland amorality, his poise, his taste for art, his manners – high handed aristocratic manners that break the ordinary rules and assert the Duke's superiority when he is being most solicitous of the envoy, waiving their difference of rank; these qualities overwhelm the envoy, causing him apparently to suspend judgement of the Duke, for he raises no demur. The reader is no less overwhelmed. We suspend moral judgement because we prefer to participate in the duke's power and freedom, in his hard core of character fiercely loyal to itself.

It is because the Duke determines the arrangement and relative subordination of the parts that the poem means what it does. The duchess goodness shines through the Duke's utterance, he makes no attempt to conceal it, so preoccupied is he with his own standard of judgement and so

oblivious of the world's. Thus the duchess's case is subordinated to the Duke's, the novelty and complexity of which engages our attention. We are busy trying to understand the man who can combine the connoisseur's pride in the lady's beauty with a pride that caused him to murder the lady rather than tell her in what way she displeased him, for in that *'would be some stooping; and I choose/ Never to stoop.'* The duke's paradoxical nature is fully revealed when, having boasted how at his command the Duchess's life was extinguished, he turns back to the portrait to admire of all things its life-likeness, *'There she stands/ As if alive'*. This occurs ten lines from the end, and we might suppose that we have by now taken the duke's measure. But the next ten lines produce a series of shocks that outstrip each time our understanding of the Duke, and keep us panting after revelation with no opportunity to consolidate our impression of him for moral judgement. For it is at this point that we learn to whom he has been talking, and he goes on to talk about dowry, even allowing himself to murmur the hypocritical assurance that the new bride herself and not the dowry is of course his object. Here, one side of the duke's nature is stretched as far as it can go; the dazzling figure threatens to decline into paltriness admitting moral judgement, when Browning retrieves it with two brilliant strokes. First, there is the lordly waiving of rank's privilege as the duke and the envoy are about to proceed downstairs, and then there is a perfect all-revealing gesture of the last two and half lines when the Duke stops to show off yet another object in his collection. The lines bring all the parts of the poem into final combination with just the relative values that constitute the poem's meaning. The nobleman does not hurry on his way to business, the connoisseur cannot resist showing off yet another precious object, the possessive egoist counts up his possessions, even as he moves towards the acquirement of a new possession, a well dowered bride and most important, the last duchess is seen in final perspective. She takes her place in one of a line of objects in an art collection; her

sad story becomes the cicerone's anecdote lending piquancy to the portrait. The duke has taken from her what he wants, her beauty and thrown the life away and we watch in awe as he proceeds to take what he wants from the envoy and by implication from the new duchess. Such a will undeflected by ordinary compunctions, calls into question and lingers as the poem's haunting after note: the Duke's sanity.

The Duke grows to his full stature because we allow him to have his way with us; we sub-ordinate all other considerations to the business of understanding him. To take the full measure of the duke's distinction, we must be less concerned to condemn than to appreciate the triumphant transition by which he ignores clean out of existence any judgement of his story that the envoy might have presumed to invent. By the exquisite timing the duke's delay over Neptune, he tries once more the envoy's already sorely tried patience, and as he teases the reader too by delaying for a lordly whim, the poem's conclusion. This willingness of the reader to understand the duke, even to sympathize with him as a necessary condition of reading the poem, is the key to the poem's form.

Moreover, the Italian Renaissance setting of "*My last Duchess*" helps to suspend moral judgement of the duke, since we partly at least take a historical view; we accept the combination of taste and villainy with taste and manners as a phenomenon of the Renaissance and the old aristocratic order in general. We cannot, however, entirely, historicize our moral judgement in this poem, because the duke's crime is too egregious to support historical generalization. More important therefore, for the suspension of moral judgement is our psychologising attitude – our willingness to take up the duke's view of events purely for the sake of understanding him, the more outrageous his view the more illuminating for us the psychological revelation.

It is thus, clear that arguments cannot make the case in a Dramatic Monologue but only passion, power, strength of will and intellect, just those existential virtues which are independent of logical and moral correctness and are therefore, best made out through sympathy and when clearly separated from, even opposed to, the other virtues. Browning's contemporaries accuse him of 'perversity' as they found it necessary to sympathize with his reprehensible characters. But Browning's perversity is intellectual and moral in the sense that most of his characters have taken up positions through a perfectly normal act of will.

The typical speaker of a Browning monologue is aggressive, often threatening, nearly always superior intellectually or socially to the auditor, a typically eloquent rhetorician who has complete control over what he speaks. Yet, such absolute control puts the listener on guard. The Duke's subtlety makes the listener and the reader look for hidden motives and purposes. The Duke's great care about what he says suggests that there is something behind the speech that he is determined not to reveal. And the assumption is that what is hidden is hidden for a reason. The Duke's care with words, calling for an equal attention to those words on the listener's part, places a new stress on interpretation. Language must be examined and studied to uncover the meaning it carries. Browning's obsession with language's function as the medium of interaction with men links him to the Victorian novelists, a world independent of the speaker is created in the process in which his words are interpreted by others, often in ways he never intended. The confrontation between selves implied in such a process is never far from the surface in a dramatic monologue. The auditor is a threat because he might break through the words offered by the duke to an interpretation that locates the duke's attitudes and actions within an entirely different context. The duke's monologue creates a world, like the lie in which everything is ordered completely in relation to the sensibilities and desires of the speaker. But the listener

might not accept the offered world as valid. Browning's speakers hence manifest a veiled hostility towards their listeners. While the Duke tries to close in on one interpretation of the Duchess's 'spot of joy', justifying his annihilation of her, his language contains within it entirely contrary suggestion, which the listener or reader may uncover. The poem, therefore, has a metapoetic quality to it. The main device it uses to address its own status as an interpretative form is irony. And irony is the key trope of internal differentiation. Irony involves distancing language from itself. Thus, reading the monologue often means reading the language of the poem against itself – turning its rhetoric inside out to glimpse what the speaker may, unconsciously or not, be trying to conceal from view. Browning works to undermine his speaker's control over the interpretation of his words, and this undermining function is a crucial element in establishing the reader's relation with Browning's own art.

The attempt to evade the reality of the other as an active agent is an interesting feature that is seen throughout the monologue. The duchess's vitality, that 'spot of joy' on her cheek that offends the duke so much when she is alive, makes her portrait a striking one. The duke can enjoy the blush when it exists within his control. The static thing, the work of art can be controlled in way, the living person cannot be. The logic of dehumanization is ultimately, the logic of murder. The other who cannot be manipulated must be murdered or else the other will destroy the world the speaker has constructed. The only way to keep reality within one's control, to prevent its creation by an intersubjective process that transcends the self, is to be alone in the world or to surround oneself with completely passive others. But the speaker even while viewing the other as a threat, needs the other. The speaker's constructed world lacks substance if others are not witnesses to it. A total escape from social reality is unsatisfying. Browning's speakers want a world that is entirely self-made but also peopled. The murdered duchess remains in the

duke's world as a portrait, a semblance of another who shares his world with him. But we assume that the satisfaction offered by these inanimate objects cannot be long-lasting. We learn of the last duchess and her fate during the duke's search for a new duchess, a new witness to his world. The duke needs a living witness to his world, even while fearing one, and his monologue is aimed at protecting himself beforehand from too much vitality in that witness. The poem's auditor, the envoy is also a witness to the duke's world, one whom the duke treats most carefully. The self's lack of power, its inability to create reality entirely on its own, is obliquely acknowledged in this fear of the other.

'My Last Duchess' thus, revolves around the attempt to control the other and reality itself by transforming life into art. Again and again in Browning's poems, art and life are presented as distinct, with art seen as a wilful human construction in contrast to a reality that transcends individual control. Reality proves threatening because contact with it might require altering and abandoning the constructions of imagination.

Interestingly, the ironic structure of the monologue is built primarily on a strict notion of over-determination, but opens out to a more mystical acknowledgement of the indeterminacy.

Browning directs us as readers towards uncovering a finite set of causes that determine the speaker's words and actions. The assumption is that the speaker himself can never be in control of or aware of all these causes, and that the listener or reader will at times, recognize causes the speaker cannot or does not wish to acknowledge. The irony here is close to dramatic irony: the audience (reader) enjoys a position of superior knowledge relative to the actor (speaker). While the speaker is not entirely in control of the meaning of his actions and utterances, there is a true meaning to those actions, a meaning that is accessible to another. Eg. Various reasons of love are

given by the duke for killing the duchess, but an explanation of that love as a response to the threat of the other can only be supplied by the reader.

Another essential element of Browning's dramatic monologue is the importance of the auditor. Unlike the speaker, the auditor, cannot help but hear, as if it were, by generic definition, absolutely silent, a passive receptor of a verbal tour de force that leaves him no opportunity for response — indeed, that often actively discourages him from doing so. Far from being a silence of consensus, the auditor's is often a silence of intimidation. However, recent linguistic theories, viewed in terms of communicative acts, represented or otherwise, have deemed the silent listener as absolutely crucial, the dramatic situation in itself is obviously created by the presence of the other and he is necessary for the delineation of the speaker's self-portrait. Silence is clearly not mere absence of speech but is itself heavy with communicative value. As Wagner-Lawlor observes, "there is communication structured through silence just as through speech". The pragmatic ambiguity of second-person silence in monologues highlights the tension between consensus and resistance. The silence of the auditor, allows the reader sufficient freedom to make his own interpretations and in the process he not only undermines the authoritarian voice of the speaker but also becomes integrally involved in the dialogue.

The poem takes one of the central pre-occupations of romantic aesthetics to their potentially most devastating ends. If Romanticism redefined the perception of the world through the active projection of the individual will – so that the subject creates the object through say the faculty of the imagination – then it may well follow that the subject is in jeopardy of hallucinating reality. Overemphasis on the self can as we see here, lead to annihilation of the other, as is seen in case

of the Duke ending the Duchess's life. Thus, in his dramatic monologues, Browning explores the ultimate limits of execution of individual will and independence of action.

In his essay on "Sympathy versus Judgement", Langbaum argues that the duke reveals his identity accidentally. However, Rader observes that "the Duke reveals himself with deliberate calculation, for a specific purpose." Where Langbaum sees the Duke's motives exposed by chance, Rader considers them wholly purposeful. Why, then, has the duke's speech led to such entirely opposing conclusions. It is here the Tucker's criticism comes in. He helpfully sifts the debate from the rights and wrongs of the duke's empirical character on to issues of language and representation. Although critics recognize the disparity between statement and meaning, it is what is betrayed that keeps them in dispute. Tucker performs a reconciliation act here; he begins by noting the internal division within the duke's speech. On one hand, they express modesty, attempting to control the impression made upon the envoy. On the other, given their recurrence, they suggest the Duke's discomfort or even paranoia. The Duke seems to be wrestling with a language whose power to signify is troublingly greater than his own. Tucker is able to tease out the Duke's considerable discursive unease. The Duke begins to cast doubt on the values he espouses, almost in spite of himself/ As he discloses more about his 'last Duchess' (sounding chilling as though she was one of a series), her portrait lovingly executed by Fra Pandolf, and her sudden death, the wider gap opens between intention and meaning. "*My Last Duchess*", draws attention to a disjunction between verbal 'skill' and intent or 'will'. It concentrates on exposing competing interpretations between the Duchess's will and his skill to represent his intentions and its skill in doing the same. His rhetorical discomfiture deepens considerably when he reveals himself unable to decode the intentions of others. All the characters in the short history he

adumbrates himself, the Duchess and Fra Pandolf – have desires and demands that he chooses to regard in a damagingly restrictive manner.

In the end, it can be said that Browning uses the familiar techniques and requirements of a dramatic monologue in the most peculiar and exploratory fashion to yield an unfamiliar and unheard of art product that was to glorify his legacy for generations to come.