 My Last Duchess

Ferrara1

That's my2 last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you3 sit and look at her? I said

"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance4

But to myself they turned (since none puts

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)5

1. Geographical allusion – “Ferrara” is the setting of the poem. The duke controls this area and the identification of the setting shows the duke’s extensive power.
2. First person possessive pronoun: The duchess is always spoken about – she cannot represent herself and therefore, despite her seemingly pleasant and positive nature, she is portrayed as completely dominated by her patriarchal husband.
3. Second person pronoun: The duke is directly addressing the audience (i.e. the emissary, as well as the reader). Again, he has complete control over the way that the duchess is represented.
4. Diction (word choice): The duke’s choice of words hints at the duchess’s perceived seductive nature. The duke believes that she is promiscuous because she is friendly, however this is most likely not the case. Early in the poem, readers are aware that the duke is an unreliable narrator.
5. Caesura: The use of brackets sections off this piece of information. It shows the duke’s wish to have complete dominance over the duchess and her image. He controls who see her and how she is represented.

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

Frà 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 20

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, 30

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 40

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 50

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!

Student Activities

1. 1. Read through the [glossary of key terms](http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/Dr_Adli/DocLib3/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85%20%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D8%A8/The%20Comprehensive%20Glossary%20of%20Literary%20Terms.doc) and continue annotating the poem. http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/Dr\_Adli/DocLib3/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85%20%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D8%A8/The%20Comprehensive%20Glossary%20of%20Literary%20Terms.doc
2. 2. The poem My Last Duchess is a dramatic monologue. What does the duke reveal about his character unintentionally as a result of this form?
3. 3. How does the duke attempt to control the actions of his wife? What, do you think, is his motivation?
4. 4. What is the fate of the “last duchess”? What is inferred about the fate of the Count’s “fair daughter”?
5. 5. How does the duke’s need to control his wife (along with his wife’s disempowerment) reflect the values of Victorian Britain?
6. 6. In what ways does the poem avoid being didactic? How does it instead present its point of view?