MY LAST DUCHESS

Robert Browning



WHAT HAPPENS? A Duke displays a portrait while revealing a disturbing need for control.

BIG IDEA **The Duke's attempt to control a woman's image exposes his own possessiveness.**

FOUR EVIDENCE FRAGMENTS · ZOOM IN, THEN EXPLAIN

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,"

Possessive determiner

The introduction presents a relationship through ownership.

"My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name"

Status imagery

Inherited rank becomes his measure of personal value.

"I gave commands;"

Euphemistic statement

He withholds details while implying devastating authority.

"Taming a sea-horse,"

Symbolic artwork

The closing sculpture echoes his wish to dominate living beings.

FORM

A dramatic monologue in rhyming pentameter couplets; enjambment complicates its polished surface.

CONTEXT

Browning places the speaker in Renaissance Ferrara. Aristocratic marriage, inheritance and patronage shape the negotiation.

COMPARE IT WITH…

Ozymandias: pride and power.
Checking Out Me History: control over a person's story.

VOICE, TONE & FEELINGS · FOLLOW THE SHIFTS

Showing the portrait

POLISHED AND PROPRIETORIAL

The Duke controls access to the picture and guides his visitor's attention.

Recalling her conduct

JEALOUS AND SELF-JUSTIFYING

Ordinary generosity becomes, in his account, an offence against his status.

Commands and next marriage

MENACINGLY CASUAL

The account of silencing gives way to another marriage negotiation and another artwork.

FULL POEM: use your anthology. Evidence fragments are prompts for close reading.

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