

My Last Duchess

FERRARA

Introduction

The poem entitled *My Last Duchess* is a dramatic romance. It was composed by Browning sometime in 1840 or 1841. But it was published in his poetic volume entitled *Dramatic Romances* (1845). The poem recaptures the atmosphere of the Renaissance in Italy. Technically, the poem is a dramatic monologue. The lone, central, speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. (Now, Ferrara was an important dukedom in Italy during the Renaissance period). He is a widower, and intends to marry a lady. So a Count of a neighbouring dukedom sends him his messenger, with a proposal of marriage. The messenger approaches the Duke. And he tells him that the Count, his master, wants to marry off his fair daughter to him (i.e. the Duke). Thereupon the Duke of Ferrara takes the messenger upstairs, and shows him his late Duchess's portrait painted on the wall of the chamber. The present poem begins at this point.

Then the Duke describes to the messenger the character of his late Duchess. His description reflects his own jealous and proud nature. The last Duchess is represented as a lady too easily impressed and made glad. She liked everything which attracted her attention. She thanked everybody for a service done to her. She had no sense of distinction. So she was equally happy when the Duke presented her with an ornament and when a servant brought her a bough of cherries from the orchard. Her worst fault was that she smiled at every Tom, Dick and Harry. She was not ready to be instructed. So when the Duke commanded her to stop smiling at everybody, she stopped smiling completely. The Duke then tells the messenger that his master will not deny him his just claim for a suitable dowry. Therefore, he shows the messenger a bronze-statue of Neptune riding a sea-horse, and brings him down the stairs. The poem comes to an end.

SUBSTANCE OF THE POEM

Pointing to a life-size portrait painted on a chamber wall, the Duke tells the messenger that it is his last Duchess's painted picture, a piece of wonderful painting. It was painted by a monk painter called Fra Pandolf. Then he tells the messenger to take a seat and look at the portrait. Thereupon