

# THE LAST DUCHESS BY ROBERT BROWNING: AN ANALYSIS

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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning was a renowned poet of the Victorian era who is known for his dramatic monologues. "The Last Duchess" is one of his most famous works, showcasing his mastery of the form and his ability to convey complex ideas through the voice of a single speaker. In this article, we will delve into the poem, exploring its summary, theme, and poetic devices. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the work, highlighting its most important elements and contributing to a better understanding of Browning's style and craft.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM

"The Last Duchess" is a dramatic monologue that was first published in 1842 as part of Browning's collection "Dramatic Lyrics". The speaker of the poem is the Duke of Ferrara, who is speaking to an emissary of the Count of Tyrol. The Duke is showing the emissary a portrait of his late wife, the last Duchess, and commenting on her behavior and character. Through the Duke's words, we get a glimpse into his twisted mind and the events that led to the Duchess' death.

## SUMMARY OF THE POEM

The Duke of Ferrara is showing the emissary a portrait of his late wife, the last Duchess. He describes her beauty and how she smiled too freely, which he perceived as flirtatious. The Duke explains how he had to put a stop to her behaviour, as he did not want her to shame the family name. He says that the portrait captures her smile perfectly, and that it is now his property. The Duke's tone is menacing, and his words suggest that he had something to do with the Duchess' death.

## THEME OF THE POEM

The central theme of "The Last Duchess" is the power dynamic between men and women in a patriarchal society. The Duke is a representative of a privileged and entitled class, and his control over the Duchess is a manifestation of the broader patriarchal structures that dominated Victorian society. The poem can also be interpreted as a commentary on the dangers of vanity and pride, as the Duke's desire to control and possess the Duchess is driven by his own ego and sense of superiority.

## POETIC DEVICES

Browning's use of dramatic monologue allows him to convey complex ideas through the voice of a single speaker. This form also allows for the use of various poetic devices, such as imagery, metaphor, and personification. The following is a closer look at some of the most prominent devices in the poem:

**Imagery:** Browning's use of vivid imagery is one of the poem's strengths. The description of the portrait captures the Duchess' beauty and her smile, allowing the reader to picture her in their mind. The use of light and dark imagery, such as the Duke's reference to "half-flush that dies along her throat," contributes to the mood of the poem and provides insight into the Duke's state of mind.

**Metaphor:** The Duke's reference to the portrait as a "thing" and his wife as "my last Duchess" are examples of metaphorical language in the poem. These metaphors serve to dehumanize the Duchess and emphasize the Duke's ownership and control over her.

**Personification:** The portrait is personified in the poem, as it is described as having a "nine-hundred-years-old smile". This personification contributes to the mood of the poem and emphasizes the Duke's obsession with the Duchess, even after her death.

## CONCLUSION

"In conclusion, *The Last Duchess* by Robert Browning is a masterpiece that showcases the poet's exceptional skill in using language and literary devices. The poem is a dramatic monologue that is full of imagery and symbolism, providing readers with a vivid picture of the Duke of Ferrara's obsession and jealousy towards his late wife. The theme of the poem revolves around the Duke's possessiveness, power and control over his wife, who is reduced to nothing more than a possession.