

My Last Duchess

94

4th Sem.

B. A. ~~DEGREE~~ ENGLISH

(Hons) (General)

EXPLANATIONS

(a) Sir, 'twas all one !..... Or blush, at least.

(Ll. 25-31)

These lines are quoted from Browning's *My Last Duchess*. Here the Duke of Ferrara analyses the character of his last duchess. He stands before the portrait of the last duchess and shows it to the ambassador of a foreign count whose niece is being sought in marriage by him. He says that his last duchess used to be too easily glad, too easily impressed. She loved everything she saw. And her looks went everywhere. She made no distinction between the favours she received from the Duke and those that she received from others. Even very small things impressed her as much as she reacted to his favours. She rated equally the favours of her husband, the glow of the sunset, the gift of a clown, the white mule on which she used to ride. She behaved with equal courtesy and kindness with all.

The Duke paints the natural gaiety and graciousness of the lady which he could not brook. The lady's expansive nature was gall and wormwood to him. He was a man who believed that his wife was his property and it was his right to get smiles from his wife. Her smile on others was an infringement of the rights of property. The Duke was of possessive instinct and jealous nature. He wanted to impress on the envoy that he demanded in his new wife the concentration of her whole being on himself.

The expansive nature of the duchess is a contrast to the sweet cruel, narrow nature of the Duke. In describing the character of the duchess, the Duke succeeds in painting his own narrow and hideous nature.

(b) She thanked men.....with anybody's gift.

(Ll. 31-34)

[See previous explanation]

Add : The last duchess thanked all. She ranked his gift with the gift of anybody. He had glorious ancestry of nine hundred years and so he expected his wife to behave with him in a different manner. Her courtesy and attention to all alike could not be tolerated by the Duke.

The Duke is proud of his ancestry and hoped that his wife would give him special responses.

(c) O Sir, she smiled.....stopped together.

(Ll. 43-46)

The Duke describes the character of his last duchess. The duchess put on her smiling countenance to one and all. The duke admits that she smiled on him whenever she met him. But she smiled on everybody that she passed. She showed equal attention and courtesy to her husband and others. The Duke could not brook this. Her habit persisted and grew. She was courteous to all alike. So he gave order for her murder. And then her smiles stopped.

Here an icy-hearted tyrant speaks of his murdering his wife in a matter-of-fact manner. He considered that his wife should pay exclusive attention to him. The duchess was his property and it was his right to demand in his wife the concentration of her whole being on himself, and the utmost devotion to his will. So the habit of the last duchess to show courtesy and attention to him and others alike was intolerable to him. He did not make scruples to get her murdered.

The cruel and tyrannical nature of the Duke is brought out here. He speaks of murder in a very cool and matter-of-fact way. The poet compresses the whole life story in two or three words. The heartless Duke instantly dismisses the memory of his last duchess and her fount of human love is sealed up 'by command'. The expression 'i gave commands' is a rare example of significant suggestion with economy in words.

(d) Notice Neptune.....in bronze for me! (Ll. 54-56)

These are the concluding lines of Browning's dramatic monologue, *My Last Duchess*. Here the Duke asks the envoy of the count whose daughter he seeks in marriage to go down the stairs. On the way is the statue of Neptune, the sea-god taming a sea-horse. It is a rare bronze made by the famous sculpton Clause of Innsbruck for him.

Through these lines, the Duke describes himself as art connoisseur and polished gentleman. He is proud of his possession of the picture gallery in which the portrait of the last Duchess is kept. He is also proud of the bronze statue of Neptune taming the sea-horse. But when he begs his guest to notice Neptune—taming a sea-horse. But when he begs his guest to notice Neptune—taming a sea-horse, he intimates how he had tamed and killed his last duchess. He suggests that his future wife would pay wholehearted devotion to his will.

—R.D.