



Victoria University
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ASSIGNMENT

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1. What is Dramatic monologue? What are the characteristics of dramatic monologue? Do you consider My Last Duchess by Robert Browning a dramatic monologue? How? Show logic behind your answer.

Answer: A monologue is referred to as a long speech given by an individual. A poem that is written in a form of speech of an individual is referred to as Dramatic Monologue. There are many old English poem written as dramatic monologue. These poems have theatrical quality in extent they are meant to be read by someone to an audience. And the poem is monologue because these are spoken by one person with no dialogue coming from any other character. When a poet wants to express their point of view by the words of a fictional character, they choose to write poems in dramatic monologue form. Robert Browning is renowned for his highly sophisticated dramatic monologue. One such example is My Last Duchess.

There are some distinct characteristics of dramatic monologue.

- a. The dramatic monologue has only one speaker and its not the poet. There can sometimes be a listener. But there will be no dialogue from the other person.
- b. In Dramatic monologues of Browning poetry opens up with a setting, events and intensified action.
- c. Browning brings out inner conflict of human soul in his dramatic monologue. Dramatic monologue also shows the inherent realism of mental psyche.
- d. The views of the poet might not be projected through the speaker. The speaker may have different views than the poet.
- e. The speaker may interact with one or more people and might address them. But we don't get any dialogues from those people in the dramatic monologue. We can only assume what they say by the response of the speaker.
- f. The primary focus of the dramatic monologue is to tell a compelling story which have a moral in the end in order to insight curiosity in the readers.
- g. Self-revelation of the speaker is the main subject of dramatic monologue.
- h. In Dramatic Monologue the rhyme scheme is not important.

My Last Duchess was written in 1842 by Victorian poet Robert Browning in 1942. I consider it to be one of the most significant dramatic monologue written by Robert Browning. In this dramatic monologue the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara. In the beginning of this dramatic monologue the Duke of Ferrara directs everyone's attention to a painting. The painting on the wall was of the Duchess of Ferrara, his former wife. The duke admires the hard work of Fra Pandolf, the painter to make this painting so lifelike. The guests are asked to look at the paint by the Duke. The duke was asked many times before who painted this painting upon seeing the painting of his former wife. That is why Duke mentions the painter by name even before any of the guests asked about it. The duke says that the expression on the duchess' face might not be because of his presence. It could be something Fra Pandolf said or given her a compliment that made the Duchess blush. According to the Duke, she liked everyone and she was too easy to impress or make happy. The Duke criticizes her by saying only polite comments are reason enough to blush. But it seems as though the Duke was overly possessive and didn't appreciate the fact that anyone else can make the Duchess blush. The Duke claims in terms of make the Duchess happy every little gift was same to her. Whether it was a present from the Duke or some interfering person bringing cherries by snapping off from tree branches in the orchard. The Duchess would show the same kind of appreciation to everyone including

the Duke himself. According to him his name and social position was of equal value to the Duchess of any gifts presented to her. The Duke even thinks of hypothetical scenario where he confronts the Duchess about her behavior. But to him even the act of confronting her would be beneath him and he would lower himself by arguing about her behavior.

The Duke then returns to complaining about his wife to his guests that, although the Duchess would smile at him whenever she saw him, she would give the same smile to everyone else while passing someone else. For the Duke it seemed like she would smile at others even more than him which made the Duke furious. Then the Duke says that he ordered her smile to be stopped forever. It can be presumed that he ordered her to be killed in order to stop her smiling at others. And now she only lives on in this painting. The Duke then takes those guests and goes downstairs to meet the other guests. He also reveals that the father of Duke's bride to be is so generous with wealth that no matter what amount of money the Duke asks for dowry it won't be turned down. But Duke's main concern is count's beautiful daughter not the dowry. On their way out, the Duke draws the guests' attention to a statue of Neptune taming a seahorse forged with bronze which is an exclusive work of art made by Claus of Innsbruck.

In this dramatic monologue we witness the objectification of women. The poem starts with the Duke giving a monologue of his former wife using her painting to the family of his would be wife. He describes how he only saw her unfaithfulness and stubbornness while she was around. The Duke implies that he prefers her as a painting rather than a living woman. The Duke reveals his views throughout the poem how he believes that women are objects of possession, which are meant to be controlled and discarded if needed. This reflects the social norms of Victorian era of which Browning was a part of, where women were not fully independent. And through this poem Browning criticizes the viewpoint towards women of the Duke which is sexist and rob women of their basic human rights.

The way Duke treats the painting shows how he treats women, like an object to be owned. The way he depicts the painting doesn't sound like a testament to former love, rather it sounds like it is only a piece of art. The duke repeats the name of the painter several times showing that he values the painting more because of who painted it rather than whose painting is it. The painting is not honoring the woman in the portrait but boasting the wealth of the Duke. The Duke clearly intends to display the portrait to the guests and kept it in public view. And when he brings guests to display the portrait he reminds them several times who made this painting to show off his wealth. Similarly when the Duke addresses his new bride it is clear that he doesn't respect her as a person but value her as an ornamental object to be proud of. The monologue implies that the former Duchess' actions were unforgivable because she acted on her own accord and she was not easily controlled by the Duke. Her crime was not infidelity but her crime was standing up for herself, being self-confident and appreciative of others. But the Duke believes that a man owns his wife and he alone is deserving of her respect, kindness and happiness. If she displays any appreciation for any other person that is unacceptable. Which is why the Duke couldn't take it anymore and made sure that she wouldn't be happy or smile for anyone ever again. The duke never confessed of ordering the assassination of the Duchess. But in this monologue it is implied the Duke is capable and willing to do such a thing. This poem shows how objectification of woman robs them of their voice and silences them. There is no Duchess to speak of her side of the story. And no other

dialogue from any other character is found in this poem. This is clearly one of the best works of Robert Browning and a great example of Dramatic Monologue.