

17 nov 2020 - Robert Browning

Life

He was born in 1820, and he died in 1889, in London.

He had a happy childhood, and his mother was very religious and a good musician.

It was his father who really educated him. He had little formal education, since he never attended school, and he only attended London University for short time.

He started writing poems when he was very young, still a boy, and he loved Italy, and he would spend all his youth and middle years in Italy.

The only memorable events of his life was his marriage with **Elizabeth Barrett**; she was 6 years older than him; they had to marry secretly because her father didn't want her to marry him.

She died in 1861, and after he died he went back to England from Italy.

At the end of his life, he settled in Venice, and he died there.

After his death his corpse was claimed by England, and he was buried in **Poet's corner** in *Westminster Abbey*.

Poetry

He appreciated the arts and intelligent tourism, and he believed in progress: he was absolutely Victorian (optimistic).

He believed that everything offered to our experience, be it good or evil, is useful: evil is the necessary challenge for man to achieve good; in that way life becomes a battlefield, on which human beings must use all their energy, will and activity.

Browning started writing under Shelly's influence, and he found his own style in the dramatic monologue, because he wanted to be objective and dramatic.

He wrote 3 types of dramatic monologues:

1. **Ironical self portraits** which continued the tradition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; the irony which is used in these monologues is involuntary, because the protagonist doesn't seem to realize that what he is saying will be imputed to him as guilt. *My Last Duchess* belongs to this group.
2. In the second group Browning sets out to explore a **human problem**, and the monologue

is usually a speech of defense made by the protagonist himself. *Frà Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto* belongs to this group.

3. The last group are **love lyrics**; here the poet offers his tender invitations and his reflections to a woman; the themes are *love, music, religion, painting*.

My Last Duchess

The poem is settled in Ferrara, when Alfonso II d'Este was the duke. It is set in the period of Italian Renaissance.

The speaker is the duke himself, but the real protagonist is her late wife; the silent listener is the ambassador of the Count of Tyrol.

Why is he there? He has to define together with the duke the amount of the dowry that the Count of Tyrol's daughter, who is promised to the Duke.

The Duke has had his previous wife killed, because she didn't behave as well as he expected. Now he is going to marry an other lady, the Count of Tyrol's Daughter, and he is defining the dowry that she will have to give him in order to became a duchess, since countess is lower than duchess.

The Duke is taking the Ambassador through his caste, to visit it, because he wants to impress him, in order to get a larger dowry: they are in front of a Canvas, which represents the Duchess, in all her youth and beauty.

There is this painting, hanging on a wall, representing the duchess. The Duke attitude while describing the painting is detached, cold, indifferent.

On *line 16*, in order to make the situation more realistic, the Duke quotes an imaginary monastic painter, in order to make the painting more precious in his listener's eyes. The painter looks like the prototype of the Renaissance artist, working at the service of a patron.