

My Last Duchess

This much anthologised poem always repays a return visit. Here is a suggestion to help students get closer to it.

In the first column they note anything the poem reveals about the Duke's character and similarly about the Duchess's in the third column. In Word, the cells will expand to accommodate any number of words. If using a print out, expand the cells so that they are at least three times the depth.

An annotated teacher's version follows so that you can give students some idea of what they should be looking for.

DUKE		DUCHESS
	That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,	
	Looking as if she were alive. I call	
	That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands	
	Worked busily a day, and there she stands.	
	Will't please you sit and look at her?	
	I said 'Fra Pandolf by design, for never read	
	Strangers like you that pictured countenance,	
	The depth and passion of its earnest glance,	
	But to myself they turned (since none puts by	
	The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)	
	And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst	
	How such a glance came there; so, not the first	
	Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not	
	Her husband's presence only, called that spot	
	Of joy into the duchess' cheek: perhaps	
	Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'her mantle laps	
	'over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'paint	
	'Must never hope to reproduce the faint	
	'Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff	
	Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough	
	For calling up that spot of joy. She had	
	A heart - how shall I say? - too soon made glad,	
	Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er	

	She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.	
	Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,	
	The dropping of the daylight in the west,	
	The bough of cherries some officious fool	
	Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule	
	She rode with round the terrace - all and each	
	Would draw from her alike the approving speech,	
	Or blush, at least. She thanked men, - good! But thanked	
	- somehow - I know not how - as if she ranked	
	My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name	
	With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame	
	This sort of trifling? Even had you skill	
	In speech - (which I have not) - to make your will	
	Quite clear to such a one, and say, 'just this	
	'Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,	
	'Or there exceed the mark' - and if she let	
	Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set	
	Her wits to yours, forsooth and made excuse,	
	- e'en then would be some stooping; and I choose	
	Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,	
	Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without	
	Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;	
	Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands	
	As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet	
	The company below, then. I repeat,	
	The count your master's known munificence	
	Is ample warrant that no just pretence	
	Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;	
	Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed	
	At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go	
	Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,	
	Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,	
	Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.	

Teacher's Help Sheet

DUKE		DUCHESS
Sees her as his, to be owned	That's <i>my</i> last Duchess painted on the wall,	
like his other grand possessions	Looking as if she were alive. I call	
	That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands	
	Worked busily a day, and there she stands.	
He is used to commanding	<i>Will't please you</i> sit and look at her?	
	I said 'Fra Pandolf by design, for never read	
	Strangers like you that pictured countenance,	
	The depth and passion of its earnest glance,	
	But to myself they turned (since none puts by	
	The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)	
	And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst	
	How such a glance came there; so, not the first	
	Are you to turn and ask thus. <i>Sir, 'twas not</i>	
Jealousy?	<i>Her husband's presence only, called that spot</i>	
	<i>Of joy into the duchess' cheek:</i> perhaps	
	Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'her mantle laps	
	'over my lady's wrist too much,' or ' <i>paint</i>	
	<i>'Must never hope to reproduce the faint</i>	
	<i>'Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff</i>	<i>She is beautiful?</i>
	Was <i>courtesy</i> , she thought, and cause enough	<i>Courteous</i>
	For calling up that spot of joy. She had	
Critical of her	<i>A heart - how shall I say? - too soon made glad,</i>	<i>Happy</i>
	<i>Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er</i>	
	<i>She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.</i>	<i>She took an interest in many things – not just him.</i>
	Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,	
	The dropping of the daylight in the west,	

	The bough of cherries some officious fool	<i>Servants brought her little presents.</i>
	Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule	
	She rode with round the terrace - all and each	
	<i>Would draw from her alike the approving speech,</i>	<i>She enjoyed simple pleasures.</i>
	<i>Or blush, at least. She thanked men, - good! But thanked</i>	<i>She was polite</i>
	<i>- somehow - I know not how - as if she ranked</i>	
He is offended that she is not impressed with his title and family!	<i>My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name</i>	<i>She treated the Duke with the same level of courtesy -</i>
	<i>With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame</i>	<i>- perhaps she didn't love him</i>
	This sort of trifling? Even had you skill	<i>- or even like him?</i>
Expects to be obeyed without question	In speech - (which I have not) - to make your will	
	Quite clear to such a one , and say, 'just this	
He doesn't even like her	'Or that in you disgusts me ; here you miss,	
	'Or there exceed the mark' - and <i>if she let</i>	
Presumes to tell her how to behave	<i>Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set</i>	<i>She has a mind of her own -</i>
He is outraged that she answered him back!	<i>Her wits to yours, forsooth and made excuse,</i>	<i>- and does not allow herself to be 'lessoned'</i>
	- e'en then would be some stooping; and I choose	
How proud and pompous!	Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,	
Jealousy again	Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without	
	Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;	
Ruthless and cold	Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands	
	As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet	

	The company below, then. I repeat,	
Condescending	The count your master's known munificence	
	Is ample warrant that no just pretence	
Proud and avaricious	Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;	
	Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed	
	At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go	
	Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,	
Pompous showing off –	Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,	
- more possessions!	Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.	

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