

## MY LAST DUCHESS

by Robert Browning

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said 5  
 'Frà 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) 10  
 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 15  
 Frà 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 20  
 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, 25  
 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, 30  
 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 35  
In speech— (which I have not)—to make your will  
Quite clear to such an 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 40  
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; 45  
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 50  
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, 55  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!