

My Last Duchess

By Robert Browning (1812- 1889)

Ferrara

1. 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.
5. Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Paldolf' 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
10. 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
15. Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
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
20. 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.
25. 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 her orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace - all and each
30. 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
 35. This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 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
 40. 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
 45. 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
 50. 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,
 55. Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!