

D. B. College Tuguegarao Madaya
L.M. Mishra University Baguio
Dept. of English
BSc. Arund Kumar
M.A. No-3199895259
Topic - A critical
Appreciation 'My Last Duke'

A critical appreciation of 'My Last Duke'

This is a poem by Robert Browning
He was a Victorian poet. Tennyson, Arnold,
Browning - all these poets were representative
of their own age. Tennyson represented the
passing events of the time. Arnold represented
the melancholy mood of his age. Browning
represented the intellectual and psychological
curiosity of his time. We find astonishing
vigor and hope in Browning. There is an
difficulty in reading Browning. He is an
obscure poet. There is a saying about his
obscurity: once Tennyson read 'Sordello',
obscurity: once Browning read 'Tennyson's
'Sordello' is a poem by Browning. Tennyson
remarked that he understood only two lines
in it. These lines were the first line and
the last line of the poem. The first line is
'Who will now read Sordello's story told?'
The last line is 'Who would now read Sordello's
Sordello's story told?'

There are several reasons which
account for obscurity in Browning. Firstly,
the poet's thought is often obscure. It is extremely
subtle. It cannot be adequately expressed
in any language and by any person. Secondly,
Browning is led from one thing to another.
By his own mental associations of his readers. The
care for the associations may just be different
associations of the poets. Thirdly, Browning
is obscure in his English. He frequently clips
his words. He gives us a series of calculations
which do not quite understand the processes of
his thought. Fourthly, the obscurity of Browning
is often far-fetched. Ordinary readers
finds it difficult to trace them. Fifthly,
Browning wrote too much and revised too little.

The field of Browning's poetry is the individual soul. He tries to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. He is like a major delving under ground, seeking up mines of insight, earth and ore. In a world of doubt and timidity, Browning feels his mission of faith and courage. He has invincible optimism. He is not an entertaining poet. His range is enormous. He brings all sorts and conditions of men under analysis.

In this poem, the Duke of Ferrara, is exhibiting the Portrait of his wife to a guest. His wife is dead. Her portrait is painted on the wall. It was painted by Fra Pandolf. The guest is asked to look at the portrait. There is depth and passion in the lady's face. The lady was large-breasted. She was easily impressed. Her looks

went everywhere. She liked whatever she looked on. Everything would draw from her an approving speech. She thanked men. The Duke does not know how she thanked them. Whenever the Duke passed her she smiled. Her portrait gives the impression that she is alive. Then the Duke decides to go down stairs. The master of the guest is below. The Duke is going to marry his daughter. He knows that he will get sufficient dowry. The Duke then shows the guest the bronze figure of Sea-god Neptune. It is a rare statue. The poem is a monologue. There are fifty six lines in the poem. But the soul of the Duke is laid bare before us. The poem is a fragment of a scene. But we get the concentrated essence of a complete tragedy. There is faulty rhyme. The language is obscure. The theme is unattractive. It is difficult to read the poem without a sense of irritation.

Dr. Anand Kumar
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