

1 THE GOTHIC NOVEL / FICTION (cititorul modern va ști să discearnă dincolo de conventii semnificația unor mutații în sensibilitate și artă) Is a type of romance very popular from the 1760s onwards until the 1820s. It has had a considerable influence on fiction since (still apparent in the 1990s) and is of much importance in the evolution of the ghost story and the horror story. One of the earliest examples of the genre is TOBIAS SMOLLETT's "Ferdinand Count Fathom" (1753), very probable the first novel to propose terror and cruelty as its main themes.* Much better known than this is HORACE WALPOLE's "The Castle of Otranto" (1764), which he wrote in his house at Strawberry Hill Twickenham, near London. WALPOLE (1717-1797) settled there in 1747. He made his abode into 'a little Gothic castle' and established a private press. 'Strawberry Hill Gothic' became a common term for any example of romantic gothicized architecture of the period. This was the era of the Gothic revival in architecture, brought about by a renewed and romantic interest in the medieval. 'The Castle of Otranto', a gruesome (groaznic, infiorator) tale of passion bloodshed and villainy (it includes a monstrous ghost) was set in the 12th and 13th century. It was an immensely popular book and is believed to have gone through no fewer than 115 editions since it first appeared. WALPOLE's intention was to scare the daylight out of his readers, and no doubt he succeeded. This novel proved a seminal (genial, a seminal article, book etc. is important and influences the way things develop in the future) work which was ultimately dubbed 'Gothic novel', partly because WALPOLE wrote his book in his 'Gothic castle', and partly because WALPOLE the content of such novels was associated with the Middle Ages and with things wild, bloody and barbarous of long ago. Most Gothic novels are tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine (sira spinarii) (in France = le roman noir, terrifiant, in German Schauerroman=schuddernovel) and curdle the blood (/ a îngheta sangele în vine / to make very frightened). They contain a strong element of the supernatural and have all or the most of the familiar topography, sites, props, presences and happenings: wild and desolate landscapes, dark forests, ruined abbeys, feudal halls and medieval castles with dungeons (carcere subterane; donjons-turnuri fortificate), secret passages, winding stairways, oubliettes (celule subterane), sliding panels (unde condamnatii erau uitati de lume) and torture chambers; monstrous apparitions and curses; a stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom; heroes and heroines in the direst (cele mai cumplite/groaznice) of imaginable straits (incurcături), wicked tyrants, malevolent witches, demonic powers of unspeakably hideous aspect, and a proper complement of spooky (fantomatic) effects and clanking (zanganitoare (lanturi, sabii)) spectres. The whole apparatus, in fact that has kept the cinema and much third-rate fiction going for years, is to be found in these tales. The most popular sold in great quantities and they were read avidly. 2 After "The Castle of Otranto" there came a succession of such novels, of variable quality. Many of them were dramatized (as was the "Castel of Otranto"). Some of the major examples of the genre are CLARA REEVE's 'The Old English Baron' (1778), WILLIAM BECKFORD's 'Vathek' (1786) – Beckford lived in the Gothic extravaganza of Fonthill Abbey – ANN RADCLIFFE's 'Mysteries of Udolpho' (1794), ANN YEARSLEY's 'The Royal Captives' (1795), M. G. (Monk) LEWIS's 'Ambrasio' and 'The Monk' (1796), C.R. MATURIN's 'The Fatal Revenge' (1807) and his 'Melmoth the Wanderer' (1820) and MARY SHELLEY's 'Frankenstein' (1818) --- the all-important progenitor of scores of horror films science fiction. GODWIN's 'Caleb Williams' (1794) has often been classed as Gothic, but has a special importance as an early instance of the propaganda novel (the novel of crime and its detection). By the turn of the 18th century dozens of Gothic novels and tales (many of them hackwork (banala) sunk without trace except in the vaults (pivnita) of the major libraries) were being published. The demand for cheap, sensational literature was high. Publishers scenting large profits, exerted themselves. So did the authors of such stories, they wrote fast. There were many short stories and this was at the time that the short story was developing as a form and genre in its own right. A good many were written by women and they were very popular among female readers. By early 18th century readers had sipped (au sorbit) full with horrors and there was a growing

demand for even more lurid and sensational fiction. Decadence was setting in Graveyards charnel houses (capele mortuare), the crepuscular and the necropolitan (necropola), the macabre had become increasingly popular elements; and perhaps, one may discern the long-term influence of the so-called graveyard school of poetry of the 1740s which had marked a shift of sensibility and something of a reaction against the attitudes and codes of the Augustan Age. The first of these Gothic novels HORACE WALPOLE's 'The Castle of Otranto' (1764) takes place in a fantastic version of the author's own house, Strawberry Hill, fictionally expanded from a decorated villa into an ancient Italian castle. From the first, the gothic is associated with dream versions of reality and perceptions of the irrationality which might normally be suppressed in waking life. In RICHARDSON, irrational phenomena appear from time to time, rather as in a carefully regulated waking existence. In the gothic novel the subconscious, the dream, the nightmare, become the source of the story-pattern, and of the setting and the character typology too: WALPOLE and his successors, like ANN RADCLIFFE and M.G.LEWIS, developed a whole repertoire of symbols and devices which kept their art strangely in touch with the subconscious, with all its attendant anarchy and alarms. 'The Castle of Otranto' is haunted by the gigantic ghost of the founder of the house, who warns of its coming destruction because it has been usurped by the wicked Manfred. A monstrous helmet falls from the sky and crushes the usurper's son on his wedding day, and the action goes on to involve a threatened virgin, a cruel villain, supernatural portents (prevestiri, semen rele, minuni), 3 underground passages and so on – in fact, numbers of the prefabricated parts from which gothic novels were to be made right up into the 1820s. In his preface to the 2nd edition of Otranto WALPOLE said that the book was an attempt to unite the 'imagination and improbability' of romance with 'nature' because in recent fiction 'the great resources of fancy (had) been dammed up, by strict adherence to common life'. He meant to effect a 'Shakespearian' contrast by juxtaposing the sublime experiences of the principal characters with the comic naivety of the domestic ancillaries (subordonati, ajutoare), in order to set 'the former in a stronger light'. Indeed the effect of this and many later gothic novels depends on a whole series of contrasts, between the elevated and the bathetic, the sublime and the beautiful, terror and pleasure, darkness and light, destructive passion and reason, and malignancy and innocent purity and the psychoanalytical importance of the symbolic forms in which these oppositions appear is obvious. 'The Castle of Otranto' shows a release of subconscious energy unprecedented in English 18th century literature. Even readers innocent of Freudian theory easily recognize such a pattern as a virtuous heroine trapped between the hard demands of domineering parents and the fearful threats of the villain, or the dream situation of wandering through a perplexing labyrinth in which one stumbles over awful revelations in the form of skeletons bloody sobs or instruments of torture. Otranto is a supernatural novel written in an age of skepticism and relies on the social survival of feelings associated with superstitions which the author and his public had in fact rationally rejected. In the 1790s ANN RADCLIFFE took this contradiction between credence and skepticism to a logical solution by purveying (furnizand) all the thrills and terrors of the haunted castle and then providing a rational explanation of them at the end of the novel.

In 1764, the son and heir of a successful politician, Horace Walpole, launched his and humanity's first attempt at Gothic fiction with his remarkable novel, [The Castle of Otranto](#). Due to several elements that are present throughout the book, it is widely considered to be the initiating spark of a new branch in literature, and in arts generally. Despite the book's publication in the eighteenth century, the new form of fiction could not manage to fit until the Victorian period, where it started to gain popularity among readers.

In eighteenth's century England, the people's collective consensus was strongly established and well constructed when it came to regarding several issues. Simultaneously, other notions were undergoing sheer deconstruction. The scientific revolution implemented novel ways of considering and thinking, which is one of the consequences of the Enlightenment. Accordingly, there was a general tendency towards believing that everything was within the diameter of man's ability to analyze and explain; this notion flourished explicitly in the eighteenth century, supported by the accelerating technological advancement and England's extravagant exploration of the surrounding world. It seemed like nothing was impossible to penetrate, and not a thing was out of science's continually expanding reach. England stood on a solid ground of new discoveries, beliefs and deeply rooted social norms.

This was the historical context that shrouded the emergence of Gothic fiction, which as expected, was looked upon with confusion of the sort, combined with a sense of admiration.

Walpole's Castle of Otranto: A Gothic View of Humanity

When it comes to The Castle of Otranto, the plot of the book revolves around a castle that is inhabited by a family, consisting of Manfred, the father, his children Conrad and Matilda, and his wife Hippolita. Manfred's son is set to marry the Marquis of Vicenza's daughter Isabella. In the first chapter, a curse is mentioned that forebodes an ominous fate for perhaps all the members of the family.

"...the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it."

As soon as the reader is confronted with the curse, the instinctive gloomy anticipation is met with the sudden death of Conrad, who is crushed by a giant helmet that falls from the sky.

Instead of grieving the death of his only son, the accident weaves a thought in Manfred's head to divorce his wife and marry Isabella himself, so that he would not bear the risk of having no male heirs. The perverted design of the father petrifies Isabella and she attempts to escape with the help of a young peasant

named Theodore, initiating one of Gothic fiction's most prominent themes. When Isabella's father, Frederic, shows up in the timeline of the novel, Manfred tries to reach an agreement with him in order to be allowed to be married to Isabella, and in return, he would allow Frederic to marry his own daughter, Matilda.

Manfred builds a conviction of his own that Theodore and Isabella are lovers. Enraged by his illusion, he attacks Theodore and a woman that was with him. Tragically, the woman dies and she is exposed to be Matilda, Manfred's own daughter. In the end, it is revealed to the reader that the young peasant, Theodore, is in fact the rightful heir to the castle of Otranto. He and Isabella marry eventually while Manfred and his wife isolate themselves by moving into a remote monastery.

The importance of Walpole's Castle of Otranto lies within the fact that it introduces new elements, literary as well as intellectual, starting from the mere setting of the events, the castle. As it is put explicitly clear in the book, the newly founded form of fiction aims mainly at exploring the most secretive, hidden aspects of humanity and delving into the dark, gloomy labyrinth of desires within the psychology of human beings. Thus, due to their appearance, the use of Gothic architecture seemed to be the perfect method to artistically reflect the quintessential ominous essence of every work of Gothic fiction. To a great degree, the originally religious buildings stand on their own in Gothic stories as mirrors, on which a reflection of the plot's and characters' darkness appears.

This combination of delving into deserted territories of the human psychology and the use of vast, dark and full of maze-like corridors castles demonstrate a possible desire within the writer to defy the superb form of knowledge claimed by his contemporary realm, a world where everything is subdued to the power of science and experimental observation. It is arguably a battle set by the writer to present his "Age of reason" with non-reasonable events and manners of behavior, which stand in Walpole's novel as an opposition to its era's social and intellectual norms.

Horace Walpole – The Castle of Otranto

Another element that is featured in the book, and which will exist later on in most Gothic works, is Matilda, Manfred's daughter. The name itself would later be exploited by other authors for the figure of the forbidden woman in their works, and eventually it would become a sort of tradition for Gothic fiction. The name appears in Mathew Lewis's The Monk (1796) to refer to demoniacal, forbidden woman who drags the protagonist into the abyss of his downfall; it is also used by Percy Shelley for the female protagonist in his Gothic novella, Zastrozzi: A Romance (1810). However, this is not the only reason why Matilda is an essential Gothic element. As previously mentioned in the plot, Isabella tries to

flee after Manfred decides to marry her. Simultaneously, Matilda does not approve her father's design to give her to Isabella's father, Frederic. This image of women being put in torturous situations caused by heinous male figures is perhaps one of Walpole's most important contributions, for Gothic fiction would later often include a female figure trying to escape the cage of a tyrannical male, which in Otranto's case, is portrayed by the villainous Manfred.

In the eighteenth century culture, women's disposition was to an extent critical, as it was a necessity amidst the society back then for a woman to be virtuous and distant from any behavior that would stain her reputation with shame. Women had to bear severe cultural and social oppression of their feelings in order to gain acceptance within society, and in order to appear morally attractive to men so that they would receive suitable suitors. This extreme sensitivity of women's place in eighteenth century's England is argued by many critics to be the original image of what female figures suffer in Gothic works of art.

On the other hand, this tyrannical male figure, Manfred, constructs a classic villain who is not merely innately good or bad, but an ordinary human being with a common human flaw, which is, not being able to master or control his passions and desires. The sub plot of Manfred's ancestors brings to the surface another theme that Walpole inserts as a robust foundation for Gothic fiction, which is the past haunting the present. As the story proceeds towards its end, the reader learns about Manfred's ancestor, Ricardo, who murdered the original owner of the castle, Alfonso the good. Ricardo then forged a will that allowed him to take over the castle and pass it to his children, which is the reason behind the curse in chapter one. Even though Manfred is a villainous figure, he still does not own a choice for his fate is haunted by the hideous deed of his murderous grandfather, which in a sense renders him to eventually be bestowed with some sympathy by the reader.

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Title: The Supernatural in Romantic Poetry

THE SUPERNATURAL IN ROMANTIC POETRY

“Romanticism”, declared the critic Thomas McFarland in 1987, “is the true beginning of our modern world.” It was an artistic, intellectual and literary movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution; it was also a rejection of the precepts of order, harmony, balance and symmetry that characterized Classicism in general, and 18th century Neoclassicism in particular. It was also to an extent a reaction against 18th century rationalism and physical materialism. Romanticism emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental elements in creation.

For better or worse, the work of William Wordsworth, William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and that of Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats after them changed the face of English poetry. In Romantic poetry, there is a clear emergence of a central emphasis upon the “imaginative genius” of the poet. To the Romantic poet, more emphasis is placed on a work of art that emanates from within and upon the “wondrous interchange” – in Wordsworth’s words – between poetic selfhood and the external world. In the Romantic period, the prominence given to learning, imitation, judgment and decorum by the Neoclassicists is shifted to a particular stress on the poet’s natural spontaneity and genius.

What do we define as the “Supernatural?”

- Relating to existence outside the known world.
- Attributed to a power beyond known and natural forces.
- An immediate exercise of the divine power and the miraculous.

Why was the Supernatural element so prevalent in Romanticism?

English Romanticism was particularly characterized by its conception of creation as an artist's natural gift or faculty. According to Engell and Jackson, "The great achievement of English Romanticism was its grasp of the principle of creative autonomy, its declaration of artistic independence." Thus, literary creation for the Romantics was the artist's production after having reconstructed or given a new interpretation to the world around him. It was the offspring of imagination applied to the writer's impressions of real life.

In Wordsworth's case, this meant depicting reality in such a way as to exhort his readers to appreciate the beauty of life. He is recognized more a poet of nature, of self and faith than that of the supernatural. As Coleridge puts it in *Biographia Literaria*, "Mr. Wordsworth was to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling, analogous to that of the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us."

On the other hand, Coleridge, Blake and Byron believed that literary creation was the product of transforming reality into something beyond reason, but not beyond the imaginable i.e. the supernatural. It was for the Romantics an attack on the pre-established limits of reason. It also included the possibility of creating fantastic characters, situations, places and objects that would give the human mind some relief from the constant barrage of moral and social patterns and taboos. Although the supernatural is not present in all of the Romantics' creations, it was an important strategy for Romanticism to achieve its purposes. With the supernatural, the poets took for granted the readers' faith or disposition (willing suspension of disbelief, in Coleridge's words) to believe in the situations they proposed.

Another factor could be that Romanticism privileged freedom of spirit including the Gothic privileging of the grotesque, of violence, of decay and of the supernatural. English Romanticism was greatly influenced by the German philosophy of romanticism, and the poetry and literature of the time had a preponderance of supernatural elements, most notably in the Sturm und Drang (storm and thunder) literary and artistic movement. Romanticism allowed a space for the consideration of the supernatural – especially in Coleridge's poems.

It was also a rejection of the values of the Enlightenment and those of rationalism and realism. Rationalism, the Romantics argued, with its emphasis on man's intellect, reason and

a solution for everything explained too much and that Romanticism gave room to what we do not understand and celebrated the limits of man's ability to reason and his intellect.

The 19th century provided further reasoning for the widespread prevalence of the supernatural element in Romantic poetry: the psychological dimension. While not emphasized deeply by the critics of the time, later scholars have provided explanations from the realm of psychology, most notably psychoanalysis as propounded by Sigmund Freud. Primitive modes of experience were an important concern for both Romantics and psychoanalysis. Indeed, in *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery*, Joel Laflak argues that the Romantics discovered the importance of psychoanalysis in understanding the world and expressing thought before Freud. In exploring the supernatural, the Romantics explored the unconscious long before Freud and discovered the heterogeneous nature of man, the palimpsestic psyche and the even the diagnostic relevance of dreams and childhood trauma. The Romantics are especially susceptible to Freudian interpretations because, as F.L. Lucas has asserted, Romanticism *is* related to the unconscious, to the gratification of the id and its conflict with the superego. The supernatural elements that are so readily available in Romantic poetry are believed to be manifestations of the unconscious yearning to break free. The expression of the instincts of life and death, Eros and Thanatos, can also be found in Romantic poetry.

A sub-genre of Romanticism, known as Dark Romanticism, is also an important genre in this regard. The best example of Dark Romanticism is Edgar Allan Poe. In the late 18th and early 19th century in America, the Transcendentalist movement began to gain representation. The basic philosophy of the movement was a belief in man's spiritual essence and the soul's ability to transcend the physical. This picture of the world was not acceptable to a lot of people; consequently, as a reaction to the Transcendentalist philosophy, there was an influx of a collection of works concentrating upon the themes of horror, tragedy, the macabre and the supernatural. These works, illuminating the ideas of obscurity of the human mind, its affinity towards the unknown and the dark etc. led to the birth of the dark romanticist.

Focusing on the supernatural, and relying heavily on imagery, it was a testament to the power of the imagination. The success of this movement also relied on the fact that the human psyche is attracted in a subtle way to the fear, pain and tragedy, especially when analyzing the subject objectively. This is also a part of the reason why works with supernatural themes have always been so popular.

Now we can take a look at a few poets and their works reflecting the influence of the supernatural in Romantic Poetry.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Rime of the Ancient Mariner

It is possibly the most famous of Coleridge's poems and details the misfortune that befalls a ship after one of the seamen kills an albatross, a bird which is considered to be a good omen by mariners. This piece does not only express supernatural and mythological elements but also expresses what is essential in all great work, emotional content. The multiple narrators give credibility to the supernatural and that is one of the most powerful elements of the poem. Coleridge manages to make the supernatural believable and convincing, something that he self-admittedly set out to do in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The poem begins in a familiar and comfortable setting; a journey at sea. This "natural" setting slowly gives way to a more chilling landscape. Coleridge has skillfully merged the natural and supernatural, the real and the fantastic, the credible and the impossible.

The albatross as an omen of good luck, the sudden appearance of the mysterious skeleton ship, the spectre and her mate, the resurrection of the dead crew, the abrupt sinking of the ship, the polar spirits talking to each other - all these and other supernatural incidents are scattered in the poem.

At the core of it, this poem is about crime and punishment; the albatross hanging round the sailor's neck is used as a symbol for the internal guilt a human being feels when he has done something wrong. Through the use of supernatural elements, Coleridge has also explored the psychological implications of the sailor's choice and actions; his guilt and remorse are both clearly presented to the reader.

The poem uses supernatural beings from different sources – seraphs (from Christian mythology), the Furies (also known as the Erinyes – from Greek mythology) and the sea snakes. What is interesting is that in Greek as well as Christian mythology, the snake has a negative connotation but Coleridge uses it here in a much more positive sense; the way it is portrayed in oriental, and more specifically Hindu philosophy. Most probably, this was

because the Romantic poets, including Coleridge were familiar with Oriental philosophies, much more so than their predecessors.

Christabel

Christabel is a lengthy poem by Coleridge, comprising of two parts which were published separately. It is unfinished, however, as Coleridge planned on writing at least three more part for it but was unable to do so.

Unlike “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, the eerie sense of the supernatural is present in the poem right from the beginning, indeed the first two lines are very successful in creating an atmosphere that seems both haunting and haunted,

*Tis the middle of night by the castle clock;
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;*

Throughout the poem, there seems to be an ominous evil lurking about, just out of reach and not quite tangible, yet sufficiently terrifying. The constant invocations of *Jesu, Maria* by Christabel add to the feeling that something is not quite right. A demonic presence seems to underline most of the interactions in the poem. There have been many interpretations as to what or who exactly Geraldine is, but the most common seems to point to a vampire; other interpretations include a succubus or even a wraith. When we look at the psychological dimension of the poem, we find that Geraldine may very well be a personification of the darker, more perverse aspects of Christabel’s psyche; she is introduced very much like a mirror of Christabel herself but is revealed to be far more complex, both sexually and morally. She is much less inhibited than Christabel and this had led some critics to interpret her as a “shadow” of Christabel.

Coleridge’s frequent use of the supernatural may have had many factors but one usually pointed out by critics is his desire to give himself a surer footing as a creator. Regardless of whatever new and unpredicted charms a poet is able to coax out of everyday things, the fact remains that it all ultimately depends on an external creator – nature. Since the basis of the poem is an external factor, it allows for the possibility of the reader bypassing the poet and gaining direct access to the poetic vision; this may be difficult, but is certainly not impossible. To write about the supernatural, however, would eliminate any loopholes by

which the audience might evade the poet. The supernatural is beyond nature, is outside nature, and in such a case, whether the vision is given through revelation or created through the creative process, it conveys upon the poet a position of exclusive power. There is only one point of access, and it is entirely controlled by the person to whom that particular supernatural event was revealed. This sets up the relationship that Coleridge is concerned about - that of the dependency of an audience upon the poet. It is quite obvious that Coleridge uses this tension between the natural world and supernatural world, but his preference is for the supernatural world in which he is the indisputable creator and visionary.

JOHN KEATS

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

La Belle Dame sans Merci (which in French means: "The Beautiful Lady Without Pity") is a ballad written by John Keats. It exists in two versions, with minor differences between them. The original was written by Keats in 1819. He uses the title of a 15th century poem by Alain Chartier, though the plots of the two poems are different.

Romanticism's valuing of the supernatural and medieval legend is represented by the ballad form, dramatic pauses, the haunting presence the lady (said to be "a faery's child) and a plaintive repetition of the refrain. Keats uses pseudo-medieval English, simple stanza form, plot and the trope of the dream to explore the relationship between illusion and reality much like Coleridge does in *The Ancient Mariner*. Unlike objective traditional ballads of courtly love, the lady is symbolic of death, the poet identifies with the knight and Keats' fairy world is a metaphor for the dangers that obsessive focus on an idea or individual possesses. The lady is an idealization of the man's love, a product of his imagination which ends up destroying his life. Indeed the poem ends with the knight getting a vision of "pale kings and princes" who cry, "*La Belle Dame Sans Merci hath thee in thrall!*"

The structure characteristically reflects tensions between real and imagined worlds and the sequence of questions provides the quest and chivalric world with immediacy. The reality of death intrudes in the frequent theme of fleeting human love, captured by single syllables

creating uneven rhythm and dramatic dialogue. Romanticism's focus on supernatural and disturbed states of mind is personified by the sensuous lady.

Similarly, excitement and sensuality hint at the intensified focus on the supernatural and Keats creates a characteristic tension between the ideal of imagination and reality, suffering and death. Language captures the idealized love but imagination provides no lasting escape.

LORD BYRON

Manfred

This dramatic poem is prefaced by two lines from William Shakespeare's Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy". The presence of supernatural elements in Manfred is not surprising, considering the popularity of the ghost story in England at the time when Manfred was written (1816 or 1817). Since this was a dramatic poem, meant to be performed on stage, the supernatural elements also provided some tremendous staging opportunities. Manfred was adapted musically by Robert Schumann in 1852 and later by Pyotr Tchaikovsky as well. Even the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote music for it as he was very impressed by Byron's depiction of Manfred as an Übermensch (a super-human being).

Manfred is a nobleman living in the Bernese Alps. Internally tortured by some mysterious guilt, which has to do with the death of his most beloved who is also his sister, Astarte, he uses his mastery of language and spell-casting to summon seven spirits, from whom he seeks forgetfulness. The spirits, who rule the various components of the corporeal world, are unable to control past events and thus cannot grant Manfred's plea. For some time, fate prevents him from escaping his guilt through suicide. At the end, Manfred dies defying religious temptations of redemption from sin. Throughout the poem, he succeeds in challenging all authoritative powers he comes across, and chooses death over submitting to spirits of higher powers.

It is obvious that the very theme of the poem is a supernatural one. Byron was undoubtedly influenced by Goethe's Faust and some similarities are observable, especially in the character of Manfred. Manfred is emblematic of the type of hero that would soon become popular as

the Byronic hero – defined by Thomas Babington Macaulay as “a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind...yet capable of deep and strong affection.” Bertrand Russell sees the character of Manfred as someone who is “beyond good and evil”. Manfred repudiates God, Satan and his devils, organized religion and chooses to rely on the power of his nihilistic will. He is a Faustian hero, in that he spends his life pushing towards a union of himself with the invisible forces beyond.

Byron’s poetry owes a lot to the psychological dimension as well; this poem was written in a time when Byron himself was enmeshed in accusations of sexual impropriety and of having sexual relations with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh. Critics contend that the forbidden relationship between Manfred and his sister, Astarte as well as Manfred’s fate which dooms anyone he loves to death might be a reflection of Byron’s own mental state at the time.

Lord Byron has always been very closely associated with the Dracula myth. His 1813 poem, “The Giaour”, one of his oriental romances is notable for the inclusion of vampires. This work includes the following lines,

*But first, on earth as Vampire sent,
Thy corse shall fall from its tomb be rent:
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race:
There from the daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life.*

In 1999, Tom Holland in his essay, “The Undead Byron” wrote that “vampires recognizably remain Lord Byron’s descendants”; a statement justified by the fact that the model for today’s vampires remains John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, a story that was inspired by Byron’s short story *Fragment of a Novel*. Polidori’s story was written after the influence of the same summer spent with P.B. Shelley and his wife Mary that spawned another legendary monster of literature, film and psychoanalysis, Frankenstein’s Creature.

Byron is an important figure for all types of supernatural literature – his influence and that of the Romantics can be felt even today in the conventions of the gothic novel and modern fantasy literature, be it Tolkien’s works or dark phantasmagoria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the essence of Romanticism, and the principle that allowed the Romantics to create a new conception of the world around them, was their belief in the power of creativity and imagination. Imagination gave the Romantics the possibility to dream of situations that surpassed reality; situations that poked fun at reason, by playing with the supernatural.

The supernatural, together with elements such as the emphasis on the simplicity and richness of nature, the innocence and wisdom of children and country people, the continuous desire to explore and exploit the enigma of Death and existence, among other trends made Romanticism one of the most far-reaching literary movements in England.

Features of Gothic Novel

The gothic novel was invented almost single-handedly by Horace Walpole, whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) contains essentially all the elements that constitute the genre. Walpole's novel was imitated not only in the eighteenth century and not only in the novel form, but it has influenced the novel, the short story, poetry, and even film making up to the present day. Gothic elements include the following: 1. Setting in a castle. The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavor with their branchings, claustrophobia, and mystery. (Translated into modern filmmaking, the setting might be in an old house or mansion--or even a new house--where unusual camera angles, sustained close ups during movement, and darkness or shadows create the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.) 2. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense. The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable event. Elements 3, 4, and 5 below contribute to this atmosphere. (Again, in modern filmmaking, the inexplicable events are often murders.) 3. An ancient prophecy is connected with the castle or its inhabitants (either former or present). The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing. "What could it mean?" In more watered down modern examples, this may amount to merely a legend: "It's said that the ghost of old

man Krebs still wanders these halls." 4. Omens, portents, visions. A character may have a disturbing dream vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. For example, if the statue of the lord of the manor falls over, it may portend his death. In modern fiction, a character might see something (a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure) and think that it was a dream. This might be thought of as an "imitation vision." 5. Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events. Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as ghosts or giants walking, or inanimate objects (such as a suit of armor or painting) coming to life. In some works, the events are ultimately given a natural explanation, while in others the events are truly supernatural. 6. High, even overwrought emotion. The narration may be highly sentimental, and the characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are frequent. Breathlessness and panic are common. 7. Women in distress. As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and/or sobbing. A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings are even more pronounced and the focus of attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times. 8. Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male. One or more male characters has the power, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, to demand that one or more of the female characters do something intolerable. The woman may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime. 9. The metonymy of gloom and horror. Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as a quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes. Note that the following metonymies for "doom and gloom" all suggest some element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural. wind, especially howling rain, especially blowing doors grating on rusty hinges sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds footsteps approaching clanking chains lights in abandoned rooms gusts of wind blowing out lights characters trapped in a room doors suddenly slamming shut ruins of buildings baying of distant dogs (or wolves?) thunder and lightning crazed laughter 10. The vocabulary of the gothic. The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary set creates the atmosphere of the gothic. Using the right words maintains the dark-and-stimulated feel that defines the gothic. Here as an example are some of the words (in several categories) that help make up the vocabulary of the gothic in *The Castle of Otranto*: Mystery diabolical,

enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision. Fear, Terror, or Sorrow afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched Surprise alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder Haste anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly, anger, angrily, cholera, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully Largeness enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast Darkness dark, darkness, dismal, shaded, black, night Walpole himself lays on most of these elements pretty thick (although he's a lot lighter on darkness than many modern gothic works), so it might be said that another element of the classic gothic is its intensity created by profuse employment of the vocabulary of the gothic. Consider this from Chapter 1 of *The Castle of Otranto*: The servant "came running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth. He said nothing but pointed to the court. The company were struck with terror and amazement." Gets your interest up on page two, doesn't he? Then, "In the meantime, some of the company had run into the court, from whence was heard a confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise." *The Castle of Otranto* is available at Amazon.com An Example The 1943 Sherlock Holmes film, *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death* (one of the classic Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce films), contains all the elements of the gothic. Here is a brief rundown of the items above: 1. Setting. It's not quite a castle, but it is a huge mansion with several levels, including a basement and a hidden subbasement. Dark and drafty. Ominous. 2. Atmosphere of Mystery. It's a multiple murder mystery, with cryptic notes, hidden passageways, wind, lightning, and everyone a suspect. Ancient Prophecy. There is the Musgrave Ritual. Obscure, compelling, ancient. 4. Omens and portents. The crow at the tavern, the intrusive lightning strike, the taunting notes from the butler. 5. Supernatural or inexplicable events. How the victims died. The lightning seems to strike at just the right time. 6. Overwrought emotion. The female lead screams and panics a bit. 7. Women in distress and 8. Women threatened by a male. Toned down here, but the murderer had designs on the heroine. 9. The wind blows, signs bang into the wall, lightning. In addition to the standard gothic machinery above, many gothic novels contain elements of romance as well. Elements of romance include these: 1.

Powerful love. Heart stirring, often sudden, emotions create a life or death commitment. Many times this love is the first the character has felt with this overwhelming power. 2. Uncertainty of reciprocation. What is the beloved thinking? Is the lover's love returned or not? 3. Unreturned love. Someone loves in vain (at least temporarily). Later, the love may be returned. 4. Tension between true love and father's control, disapproval, or choice. Most often, the father of the woman disapproves of the man she loves. 5. Lovers parted. Some obstacle arises and separates the lovers, geographically or in some other way. One of the lovers is banished, arrested, forced to flee, locked in a dungeon, or sometimes, disappears without explanation. Or, an explanation may be given (by the person opposing the lovers' being together) that later turns out to be false. 6. Illicit love or lust threatens the virtuous one. The young woman becomes a target of some evil man's desires and schemes. 7. Rival lovers or multiple suitors. One of the lovers (or even both) can have more than one person vying for affection.

Coleridge and his Gothic Style of Writing

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772- 25 July 1834) was a poet, literary critic, theologian and philosopher who coined the theme of “suspension of disbelief” and immensely influenced the American ‘transcendentalism’. Coleridge, however, did not lead an easy life- throughout his life he suffered from crippling bouts of anxiety, depression, rheumatic fever and other childhood illness; it has also been speculated that he might have had bi-polar disorder (undefined during his time). He developed opium addiction as a direct side effect of having been treated with laudanum for these illnesses.

His physical condition and perpetual illness which made his life hard and miserable might have fostered the development of his “gothic writing style”. Gothic style of writing essentially means a style of writing characterized by elements of fear, horror, gloom and death, as well as romantic elements, such as nature, individualism and very high emotion- which can include fear and suspense.

When we talk about the elements of “gloom”, “death” and “nature” then his poem *Dejection: An Ode* can be used as an apt example of how his mental and physical health was heavily compromised to the point where when he was

amongst nature he could only “see them all so excellently fair, (I) see, not feel, how beautiful they are!” Throughout the poem he talks about how even nature has failed to entice any emotion, stir anything at all in him and he feels dejected- rejected by the quintessential inclusive structure, i.e., nature. He digresses from praising the nature, which would’ve been in line with what Romantic poets did, and talks about his depression and despondency. This poem is a direct address to Sara Hutchinson, a lady he was in love with; he says that ‘joy’ is only given to those who are born in the purest hour and those who are pure of heart. In the poem he says that the happiness, joy and positivity which enlivens you and gives you hope has to come from within, we have to draw it from the fountain of life within us but somehow, he seems to have lost touch with himself. In conclusion, he describes his spiritual and moral loss, and the loss of creative imagination. At the time of birth, nature gave him great creative and imaginative powers, but his Nature gave constant unhappiness destroyed those powers.

When we talk about the elements of “suspense”, “fear”, “supernatural”, “horror” and “ambiguity” then his most extensively studied poem *Christabel* comes into focus- apart from having lesbian and feminist undertones the poem also has strong and constant reference to something demonic or supernatural. The character of Geraldine incites in the reader a sense of fear and confusion as the poet hints that something is amiss but doesn’t offer closure or a grand reveal; she can almost be considered a mirror image of Christabel- physically- but is way more complex than her- both morally and sexually. In Coleridge’s gothic works the characters often find themselves somewhere other, different, mysterious- it is often threatening or violent, sometimes sexually enticing, often prisons or old buildings. In *Christabel*, the lead character is first in the woods and then after she finds Geraldine they return to her home (- a medieval castle-), it has a touch of seductiveness and fear to it because of Geraldine’s presence. Fear because the readers aren’t sure who, or what, she is and what kind of threat she might pose to Christabel. Gothic Literature is also full of homosexual desires, perversions and sexual violence- so after possibly initiating a sexual relationship with Christabel, Geraldine not only forbids her from speaking but also casts a spell on her which deprives her of any memory of the night they had spent together. This topic altogether seems very scandalous, considering the times during which it was written and published.

As John Bowen writes, “Gothicism is a world of doubt, particularly doubt about the supernatural and the spiritual. It seeks to create in our minds the possibility that there are things beyond human power, reason and knowledge.” He also argues that the intent of Gothic Literature is to “shock us out of the limits of our

everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanation.” In *Christabel* the readers find themselves asking whether Geraldine herself is evil or is consumed by an evil force; if she has intentions of harming Christabel; how did she come about that sort of power; it is explicitly mentioned that she casts spells on people but whether or not she is witch or some other entity with supernatural powers remains a mystery.

Gothic works also use a lot of scary elements such as noises in the night, in *Christabel*, the lead hears moans in the woods before discovering Geraldine- this is both unsettling and mysterious, lending to the already established ambiguity throughout the course of the poem. In conclusion, Coleridge’s *Christabel* is a perfect example of his gothic style of writing and how he used the elements of fear, horror, ambiguity and sensuality to create drama that totally captures the attention of the reader- with no resolution.

The Way of the World is a play written by British playwright William Congreve. It premiered in 1700 in the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London. It is widely regarded as being one of the best Restoration comedies written and is still performed sporadically to this day.

Characters

The play is based around the two lovers Mirabell and Millamant (originally famously played by John Verbruggen and Anne Bracegirdle). In order for the two to get married and receive Millamant's full dowry, Mirabell must receive the blessing of Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort. Unfortunately, she is a bitter lady who hates Mirabell and wants her own nephew, Sir Wilful, to marry Millamant.

Other characters include Fainall who is having a secret affair with Mrs. Marwood, a friend of Mrs. Fainall's, who in turn once had an affair with Mirabell.

Waitwell is Mirabell's servant and is married to Foible, Lady Wishfort's servant. Waitwell pretends to be Sir Rowland and, on Mirabell's command, tries to trick Lady Wishfort into a false engagement.

Plot

Act 1 is set in a chocolate house where Mirabell and Fainall have just finished playing cards. A footman comes and tells Mirabell that Waitwell (Mirabell's male servant) and Foible (Lady Wishfort's female servant) were married that morning. Mirabell tells Fainall about his love of Millamant and is encouraged to marry her. Witwoud and Petulant appear and Mirabell is informed that should Lady Wishfort marry, he will lose £6000 of Millamant's inheritance. He will only get this money if he can make Lady Wishfort consent to his and Millamant's marriage.

Act 2 is set in St. James' Park. Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are discussing their hatred of men. Fainall appears and accuses Mrs. Marwood (with whom he is having an affair) of loving Mirabell. Meanwhile, Mrs. Fainall tells Mirabell that she hates her husband, and they begin to plot about tricking Lady Wishfort to give her consent to the marriage. Millamant appears in the park, and angry about the previous night (where Mirabell was confronted by Lady Wishfort) she lets him know her displeasure in Mirabell's plan, which she only has a vague idea about. After she leaves, the newly wed servants appear and Mirabell reminds them of their roles in the plan.

Acts 3, 4 and 5 are all set in the home of Lady Wishfort. We are introduced to Lady Wishfort who is encouraged to marry 'Sir Rowland' – Mirabell's supposed uncle – by Foible so that Mirabell will lose his inheritance. Sir Rowland is however Waitwell in disguise, the plan being to arrange a marriage with Lady Wishfort, which cannot go ahead because it would be bigamy, and Mirabell will offer to help her out of the embarrassing situation if she consents to his marriage. Later, Mrs. Fainall discusses this plan with Foible, but this is overheard by Mrs. Marwood. She later tells the plan to Fainall, who decides that he will take his wife's money and go away with Mrs. Marwood.

Mirabell and Millamant, equally strong-willed, discuss in detail the conditions under which they would accept each other in marriage. Mirabell finally proposes to Millamant and, with Mrs. Fainall's encouragement, Millamant accepts. Mirabell leaves as Lady Wishfort arrives, and she lets it be known that she wants Millamant to marry her nephew, Sir Wilful, who has just arrived from the countryside. Lady Wishfort later gets a letter telling her about the Sir Rowland plot. Sir Rowland takes the letter and blames Mirabell of trying to sabotage their wedding. Lady Wishfort agrees to let Sir Rowland bring a marriage contract that night.

By Act 5, Lady Wishfort has found out the plot, and Fainall has had Waitwell arrested. Mrs. Fainall tells Foible that her previous affair with Mirabell is now public knowledge. Lady Wishfort appears with Mrs. Marwood, whom she's thanking for unveiling the plot. Fainall then appears and uses the information of Mrs. Fainall's previous affair with Mirabell and Millamant's contract to marry him to blackmail Lady Wishfort, telling that she should never marry and that she is to transfer all the money over to him. Lady Wishfort tells Mirabell that she will offer consent to the marriage if he can save her fortune and honour. Mirabell calls on

Waitwell who brings a contract from the time before the marriage of the Fainalls in which Mrs. Fainall gives all her property to Mirabell. This neutralises the blackmail attempts, after which Mirabell restores Mrs. Fainall's property to her possession and then is free to marry Millamant with the full £6000 inheritance.

Jimena Ramírez Martín del Campo

Love, money and gallantry in “The Way of the World”

Context

In the year 1660 the Stuart Dynasty was restored to the throne of England. The return of Charles II, after a long exile in France, brought significant changes to every aspect of British life; theatre was not an exception. After eighteenth years of oblivion, theatres reopened. The French influence under which the new monarch had been raised was especially perceived in this fine art: two theatres gained the permission of exhibiting plays, the Court was turned into an important cultural center where several tragedies and comedies were performed, and women were finally allowed to become actresses. But perhaps the most meaningful change was the fact that theatre also became a mirror of the extravagant society which emerged after the restoration of the monarchy: wit and cynicism worked as new directions for the writing of plays, substituting the moral aims that had previously characterized tragedy and comedy, the plots were now focused on intrigues regarding the upper classes, most of them related with the achievement of wealth and love. The goal of Restoration Drama (although nowadays considered banal or unrealistic) was simple: to overshadow the last remainders of Cromwell's Puritanism and portray all the gallantry and promiscuity that surrounded the English aristocracy. These features were more successfully shown in comedy: “A new style of

comedy was improvised, which, for lack of a better term, we may agree to call the comedy of **Gallantry**, and which Etherege, and Shadwell, and Davenant, and Crowne, and Whycherley, and divers others, labored painstakingly to perfect”.¹

Born ten years after the apogee of Restoration Comedy, William Congreve proved to be a worthy heir of the previous generation. Although he never deviated from the formula used by his predecessors, he managed to perfect their method and find a proper style which gained him the recognition of both the audience and his peers. His plays echo the opulence and cynicism of the seventeenth century society in which he lived, without ever criticizing its brutality or banality: (...) his was not the type of mind which goes against the current of the age in which it lives; but on the whole he softened rather than intensified its tendency”.² As some critics have pointed out, the world in which his characters move is called the “Utopia of Gallantry”³: a universe, belonging to the upper classes, that is completely disconnected from reality and where the only quest worth portraying is the pursuit of love and wealth. Instead of becoming a fervent critic of his times, Congreve became another amused spectator of their elegance and absurd customs.

Although the artificial world depicted by Congreve lost its influence some centuries ago, his works are still considered valuable thanks to the **witty** dialogues and characters that appear on them. **Wit**; commonly defined as “ingenuity in literary invention and especially for the ability to develop brilliant, surprising, and paradoxical figures of speech”⁴; was seen as the ultimate goal in both English society and English literature; he managed to accomplish a refined witticism that, even nowadays, maintains its literary validity.

Few plays expose the witty aims and vanity of the period with more accuracy than “The way of the World”; the last play ever written by Congreve which also marked his departure from the literary scene. A commercial failure when it was first performed in 1700 -due to its

elaborated plot and complicated intrigues- "The Way of the World" is nowadays considered William Congreve's masterpiece and one of the best Restoration comedies. The recreation of a world that was beginning to lose its splendor (Charles's II libertine reign had been replaced by the far more conservative and strict government of William of Orange when the play was premiered), as well as the presence of exceptional characters that embody the outrageous values of this period, make "The way of the World" a literary piece that deserves our attention.

The power of love and money

Love and money become the main ambition of most of the characters in the play, although they also threaten with turning against them at any moment. As the play unfolds, we witness the different ways in which the central characters are stimulated by wealth and romance. Mirabell, the hero of the comedy, is determined to obtain the love of Millamant, a young heiress who happens to be the niece of the wealthy Lady Wishfort. Half of Millamant's fortune is administrated by her aunt and will only be delivered to her if she marries a suitor approved by the old widow. Unfortunately, Mirabell's position is disadvantageous: his flattering behavior has recently offended Lady Wishfort, making him the last man she would accept for her niece. In order to gain the hand of Millamant, as well as the other half of her fortune, Mirabell is forced to design an intricate plan that will return him the favor of Lady Wishfort. Mirabell creates a bond between love and money that will prevail throughout the play; his intention of achieving both of them mirrors the mentality of Congreve's own society: economic and sentimental stability are equally important for the realization of every man. Wealth must be a priority, as long as it followed by the promise of romance.

We could say that Mirabell's actions rationalize love, making it as cynical and practical as his own personality. This rationalization reaches its highest point in the "Proviso Scene" of Act IV, where Mirabell and Millamant discuss the terms under which they will become husband and wife. Although deeply in love with each other -at the end of this scene Millamant admits: (...) I find I love him violently" (IV)-, the lovers lead this deliberation with extreme civility and lack of emotion, a convention that would have been expected during their times. This scene owes its comicality precisely to this artificial behavior, as well as to the refined language used by the characters and their absurd petitions:

Mirabell: I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mold my boy's head like sugar loaf; and instead of a man-child, make me father to a crooked billet. Lastly, to the dominion of the tea table I submit...

(IV)

Considered one of the finest scenes in Restoration Comedy, the "Proviso Scene" can also be interpreted as a parody of marriage contracts. A "battle of the sexes" where the impossible is accomplished: both contenders achieve victory in the end. Male pride and female coyness reach a convenient agreement. Mirabell and Millamant prove that love can be based on mutual affection, respect and, of course, worldly concessions. This scene also allows us to take a deeper look into Millamant's determined and witty personality. The appreciation she feels for her liberty makes us realize that her attitudes resemble more to those of a modern woman who is willing to take the situation under her control. Millamant demonstrates that women are as capable of creating love strategies as men; her arrogant and self-confident behavior towards Mirabell proves to be an effective device for which he loves her even more: "Well I won't have you, Mirabell-I'm resolved-I think-you may go- ha, ha, ha. What would you give that you could help loving me?"

Character types: the portrayal of an era

Another reason that makes Congreve's "The Way of the World" one of the key plays of the Restoration Era is the particularity with which he defined each of his characters. Every one of them personifies a specific value of the era, as well as the qualities and faults that were found among the members of the upper classes. Some of their names also reveal the predominating attitudes that distinguish them: Fainall, the main villain, stands for the one who *feigns*; Wishfort can be interpreted as *wish for it*; the coveted Millamant becomes the lady with a thousand lovers (from the French *mille amants*); while the cruel Mrs. Marwood is related to someone who *would mar* (injure) her lovers. Although every character may be considered "universal", some of them differ significantly from the character types usually found in the Restoration Comedies.

Mirabell is the "rake" par excellence; even though, a "rake" that will be reformed in the end, get married and perform more than one heroic action (thanks to him Mrs. Fainall's honour is saved and Lady Wishfort allows her niece to marry him). Not even his cynic actions detach him from our sympathy; on the contrary, the self-control he shows as the plot thickens makes us want to stay on his side. Mirabell pulls the strings of every aspect in the play with an exquisiteness that we cannot help to praise. Congreve is also careful of pointing out the goodness of his nature, something even Fainall, his antagonist, is willing to admit: "You are a gallant man, Mirabell; and though you have many cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity not to be tender of her honor." (I) The wit and gallantry of this period finds his greater exponent in Mirabell.

His counterpart and, at the same time, worthy partner is none other than Millamant. Although she is meant to represent the role of the "beautiful and virtuous lady", we immediately realize that her undeniable wit and taste for intellect distinguishes her from other Restoration

heroines, and places her in a different category. Her cynicism and self-control is only matched by Mirabell's personality, another important reason that makes both of them perfect for each other.

If Millamant represents the source of love, then Lady Wishfort symbolizes the source of wealth and power, two of the most ambited prizes in the play. Her character type is usually known as "the rich widow", a vain woman who can easily become a prey for flattery and romance. But despite her bitter nature and the fact that she represents the materialistic side of human kind, Lady Wishfort is mainly driven by her passions: the hate she feels towards Mirabell and her fantasies about a second marriage with the fake Sir Rowland become crucial factors for the outcome of the story. The old widow proves that, although love has been rationalized in many senses, sentiment is still a dominant force. This attitude is also present in the character of Mrs. Marwood, "the villain" who lacks both money and love, and will be guided by her jealous nature throughout the play.

Greed and lust for power are features present in Fainall, the other "villain". His marriage with Mrs. Fainall, as well as the scheme he devises to gain full control of his wife's fortune are only some examples. He mirrors Mirabell in many ways; he can be as cynical and rakish as the protagonist, but lacks his charm and good luck.

Mrs. Fainall is the only character who transcends both quests (of love and money) she settles with the role of "the friend" and is even willing to make sacrifices for the sake of her acquaintances.

In the end, the two characters that make "The Way of the World" a memorable work of literature are Mirabell and Millamant. Their character types break with the pre-established forms and forge a peculiar relation. They are both cynical about their love; in fact, their love grows stronger thanks to the faults they find in each other: (...) I like her with all her faults,

nay, like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her..." (I) They are the only characters who achieve a full victory, for they are able to find a middle ground between love and money; becoming, thus, the greatest exponents of an era that, above all, valued the pleasure that wealth and romance could give.

Comedy of Manners

A *Comedy of Manners* is a play concerned with satirizing society's manners. A manner is the method in which everyday duties are performed, conditions of society, or a way of speaking. It implies a polite and well-bred behaviour.

Comedy of Manners is known as high comedy because it involves a sophisticated wit and talent in the writing of the script. In this sense it is both intellectual and very much the opposite of slapstick, which requires little skill with the script and is largely a physical form of comedy. In a Comedy of Manners however, there is often minimal physical action and the play may involve heavy use of dialogue.

A Comedy of Manners usually employs an equal amount of both satire and farce resulting in a hilarious send-up of a particular social group. Most plays of the genre were carefully constructed to satirize the very people watching them. This was usually the middle to upper classes in society, who were normally the only people wealthy enough in the first place to afford going to the theatre to see a comedy of manners. The playwrights knew this in advance and fully intended to create characters that were sending up the daily customs of those in the audience watching the play. The satire tended to focus on their materialistic nature, never-ending desire to gossip and hypocritical existence.

Comedy of Manners has spread itself over several periods in theatre history. A theatrical genre can begin in a certain era but span many periods if the works of later playwrights successfully revive it. The most valuable material of this genre occurred during the Restoration. English theatres were officially closed between 1642 and 1660 when Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans ruled England and there was no aristocracy. In 1660 King Charles II restored the English throne and one of his first actions was to grant

several key theatrical figures licenses to produce plays and breathe life into the theatre once more.

Technically, the Restoration period ended with the death of Charles II in 1685, but theatre historians usually extend the period to about 1700. Along with this revival was a type of performance that became known as Comedy of Manners. Major contributors to the genre in England at the time were William Wycherley with his play *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve with *The Way of the World* (1700).

During this period in France, Molière was also writing comedy of manners plays. Two of his most famous works include *Le Misanthrope* (1666) and *The School for Wives* (1662), where he satirized aspects of 17th Century French society.

A hundred years later (in the late 18th century), Irish playwright Richard Sheridan and Englishman Oliver Goldsmith revived the Comedy of Manners genre. The best examples of their work include Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

Again, a little over a century from this period, Comedy of Manner plays were being perfected in England by the (in)famous Irish playwright Oscar Wilde with wonderful works like *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892).

last ride together as a dramatic monologue

The Last Ride Together is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. It was published in 1855 in *Men and Women*. Eighty years later it was again published and included in *Dramatic Romances*. Although it is a love poem but it expresses great philosophy of Browning. Perhaps its theme is to show a lover's expression of his joy born of the fulfillment of his last wish. The lover is rejected by his beloved but he does not murmur and grumble against his beloved. He requests her to grant his two wishes. First, that she should remember his love forever, and secondly, that she should come with him for a last ride together. When the beloved agrees, the lover considers he the happiest man on earth. He consoles himself by saying that it is not only he who is suffering because of the indifference and ingratitude of his beloved but there are others also who have met with the same fate in their lives with their own sweet hearts. Through this poem Browning represented very good though that nobody succeeds to win everything he wishes to win in life. To prove this point Browning gives the examples of statesmen, labor, soldiers, poet and sculptors, who aim at an ideal and attempt to reach sublimity. They do not succeed. He says about those persons. "Ten lines, a statesman's life in each The Flag stuck on a heap of bones A soldier's doing! What atones? They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones. The lover's ride is better, he is sure. Through this poem Browning represents his optimistic view that even failure can bring some good or the other. Even in disappointment and frustration, there is hope. He says very well lines: The petty Done, the undone vast and that is the theme of the

poem. A Grammarian's Funeral is one of the best poems of Browning. It was first published in the volume of poems called *Men and Women*, 1855. Later on, the poem was included in *Dramatic Romances*, 1868. Perhaps through this poem Browning wanted to show the spirit of the Renaissance Scholars, who had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and dedicated their lives to attain it. De Vane (*A Browning Hand Book*) writes: "The poem is a most successful attempt to catch the spirit of the scholars who hungered and thirsted after knowledge in the early Renaissance". The theme of this poem is only to highlight the spirit of Grammarian who had the thirst for knowledge and because of this reason he neglected his health and died prematurely. He melted like a candle in the pursuit of knowledge. During Browning's age, the word Grammarian meant a scholar, generally Browning does not mention the name of Grammarian. But it is suggested that he was a German Scholar of the 15th century. Perhaps Grammarian is the symbol of the Renaissance scholar. The Grammarian was dead and the member of the Funeral party talking about the character of Grammarian. Their talk shows that the Grammarian was idealized because he was a sincere lover of knowledge and died in its pursuit. His disciple is conducting his funeral and taking his coffin for burial on the top of a lofty mountain, regarding it as the appropriate place of grave for an elevated man that he was regarded to be in life. As they carry the body, one of the pall-bearing disciples tells his story and dilates on the praise of the departed scholar. As they bear him up the rocky heights, they step together to a tune with heads erect, proud of their noble burden. This is the theme of the poem.

Rabbi Ben Ezra was first published in the volume of Browning's poems entitled *Dramatic Personae*, 1864. The speaker in this dramatic monologue is an old Jew called Rabbi Ben Ezra. Rabbi in the Hebrew tongue means one learned, in theology and religious philosophy. Ben ('Ben' is a corruption of the Arabic word

'Ibn' meaning 'son'). Ezra was such a Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages. He was born in Spain in 1092 and died in Rome in 1167. He left behind a number of manuscripts on religious philosophy and also a number of religious poems. But Rabbi Ben Ezra represents Browning's own philosophy. The theme of the poem is to tell us the fact that one should not be afraid of the old age because old age has got its charms- "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made". Browning says that we are born to become old and pass away from this world. We should welcome each problem in our life. Body is a gift of God, which could be used for noble purposes. We should not complain our Maker because what He has made us, is better than a number of things, rather we should be thankful to God that at least we are the human beings and superior to a brute. Browning further explores the fact through the Sixteenth Stanza of this poem that we should reckon of our deeds everything before going to the bed. This way the proper evaluation of life or self-realization is possible. We should have full contentment in our life. We should not feel alone at the old age because we have a lot of knowledge and wisdom to face our life. He completely rejects the philosophy of Omar Khayyam that we should 'eat, drink and be merry'. For Browning the present is important but cannot be over emphasized, in view of the past and future. He presents the image of the Potter's wheel for the God and his creation- "Ay, note that Potter's wheel, That metaphor! And Fell". The utmost faith of Browning in God The utmost faith of Browning in God is very much clear from the first stanza of the poem. He says that we should have trust in God and must not bother our life and its problems. God benign and cares for everyone in this world- Who saith "A whole I planned, Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid" Andrea Del Sarto was included in the volume entitled Men and Women published in 1855. It was written in Italy- the most creative

and happy period in Browning's life. The poem is a dramatic monologue. According to Berdoo, the speaker Sarto was a great painter of the sixteenth century. He was a famous artist of the Florentine School of painters. He was a tailor, Sarto means a tailor. He was born in Florence in 1486. He was nicknamed "The Tailor Andrew". Owing to his technical mastery, he was known as "Perfect" or "Faultless" painter. He had no great ambitions. He falls in love with Lucrezia del Fede, wife of a hatter. After the hatter's death, he married her in 1512. She was very beautiful and he painted many a picture of Madonna after her. His disciple Vasari speaks of her as being faithless, jealous and overbearing. By 1516 he sent a Pieta and a Madonna to the French court and the French king Francis I invited him to Paris and commissioned him to decorate his place of Fontainebleau. But Lucrezia felt tired of the French court and insisted on their return to Florence, where Andrew betrayed the king's confidence by building a house for Lucrezia with the money he had been given for the purchase of pictures. Lucrezia admired Andrea's art for its commercial value, but was indifferent to his love. Browning here exposes the distortion of human relationship in a materialistic world. As Lucrezia was a faithless wife, she finally left Andrea. In poverty and disgrace, he died of Plague. Porphyria's Lover was first published in 1836 under the signature 'Z'. After words it was grouped with another poem (Johannes Agricola) under the combined title Madhouse Cells, but ultimately it achieved its independent status as Porphyria's Lover. It is a dramatic monologue of a pale lover, who is loved by Porphyria. She could not marry him because of the false family pride and social distinctions and barriers. One night when it was raining heavily and fierce wind was blowing, she left the feasting at her castle and visited her lover. The lover's heart swelled with pride and joy when she made him believe of her sincerity in love. In order to immortalize that moment of happiness, he strangled her with

the tresses of her long golden hair. He kissed her rosy cheeks and raised her head, but as it was lifeless, it fell on his shoulder. He and his beloved remained seated in the same position throughout the night. At this time he feels : "The moment she was mine, mine, fair, perfectly pure and good ..." Perhaps through this poem Browning made a satire against social conventions and barrier which stand in the way of sincere lovers. The poem also represents the abnormal psychology of a lover. De Vane (A Browning Hand Book) remarks : "This poem has the distinction of being the first of Browning's studies in abnormal Psychology" Abt Vogler was first published in Dramatic Personae in 1864. De Vane (A Browning Hand Book) suggests the probable date of the poem with the reasoning, "The spiritual fervor of the poem, and its profound seriousness and beauty, leads one to think it was written after Mrs Browning's death". This is a highly philosophical poem. It may be said that the poem shows Browning's aesthetic philosophy. There was a historical person in the poem known as Abbe Vogler or Abet Vogler. He was an organist and a composer. He developed his musical talents and at the age of ten he could play the organ and the violin well. He invented a musical organ called Orchestra. His opera plays did not succeed on the stage. He opened a few schools of music in different places and at different times. He was impressed by the beauty and completeness of the performance which evoked wonderful imagery. He wants it to be permanent. But what he created has vanished. He compares it to a place built of sweet sounds, such a structure as angels or demons might have reared for Solomon, a magic building where into lodge some loved princes, a place more beautiful than anything which human architect could plan or power of man construct. The music structure took shape in his mind and it might be as lasting as all good, beautiful and perfect things. But an extemporizer cannot give Permanence to his performance. In a state of ecstasy, he finds the spiritual

asserting itself over the material. The soul is raised to heaven and heaven brings it to earth. In the words of Milton, he had become- "All ear, and took in strains that might create a soul under the ribs of death". He further says that the other arts are inferior to music since they are more human and more material. This leads the poet to reflect on the permanence of the good, on the nature of evil and an impermanent. In heaven we are to find 'the perfect round'. Hence on earth we have only 'the broken arc'. This leads him to speak of a home of pure ideals. The aspirations after the beautiful and true are preserved in God failure is like pause in music, like the discords. It is a revelation and, therefore, he can come back to the earth. "The musician feels for the common chord, descends the mount, gliding by semitones, glancing back at the heights he is leaving, till at last, finding his true resting place in C major of this life, soothed and sweetly lulled by the heavenly harmonies, he falls asleep". Fra Lippo Lippi is one of the most popular monologues of Browning. It was first published in 'Men and Women'. The theme of this poem is to show the Man's acute consciousness of the flesh and blood. The main character of the poem, Fra Lippo Lippi is quite conscious of the bodily sex and attraction. Through this poem Browning's faith in love is illustrated and Renaissance urge of physicality also. The poem comes in the form of monologue in which the hero frankly tells that he was painting when he heard the voice of ladies who were laughing in the street. He himself could not resist the attraction of flesh and blood and very soon reached nearby them. The essence of this poem is that 'enjoyment of life should know no inhibitions'. The painter Fra Lippo Lippi has no feeling of repent of what he has been doing even if he is caught in his act of enjoyment. The painter was given to the reality of life and under the impact of Renaissance individualism he would draw pictures of actuality which smelled of flesh. Browning preached Lippi that body is a

perishable play and it should not be given importance. He suggested Lippi to paint the souls of man. Very beautifully he described in the poem- 'Rub all out, try at it a second time'. The hero of the poem cannot believe that body can be ignored, that the possible without the proper delineation of the body. One point which is important in this poem is that Browning is not idealistic that he should believe that only soul is important. His sense of relativity lets him feel body and soul in their proper significance and this is the very opinion that Lippi expresses. The impression that Browning leave upon the reader is twofold: he makes us feel the greatness of his mind and the intensity and breadth of his sympathies. It is a vast world of thought to which Browning introduces his reader. He claims from his absolute attention. In the world of Browning thought there is much that is strange, much that is new, much that is grotesque. There is no problem of life that he does not attempt to solve, no mystery of life that he is not ready to explain or reconcile. He insists that we take him seriously, for he himself is profoundly serious and earnest. He is not a singer, but a seer. In every line that he has written there is the vigorous movement of a strong and eager intellect. He demands our faith in him as a master-teacher; he will work no miracle for him who has no belief. Sometimes this sense of the power of mind in Browning is almost oppressive. We long for a little rest in the arduous novitiate he imposes on us. We feel that the vehicle he uses for the exposition of his thought is unequal to the vast strain he imposes on it.

Summary and Analysis of The Last Ride Together by Robert Browning

“The Last Ride Together” by Robert Browning is a monologue of a rejected lover exploring the end of a love affair. The title suggests the last ride that the lover has spent with his love. However, the poet wants to convey through the narrator that

rather than feeling sad about the end, he should be happy for the love that he underwent and which remains in his memory.

Summary:

Stanza 1:

“The Last Ride Together” by Robert Browning begins with a lover getting finally rejected by his lady-love after he waited for her for a long time. As the lover is sincere in his love, he does not have any ill-will for his lady-love. On the contrary, he tells his beloved that the uncertainty is no longer present as he knows that he would not get her love. The speaker says, his beloved’s love was the most meaningful thing in his life and after he has lost her love, his life has lost all its meaning and significance. Despite of the failure, neither the lover has any anger towards her beloved nor does he blame her for anything. He believes in the fate and that his failure was ordained by God. He has accepted that rejection and suffering was destined to him and therefore he has no one to put the blame on. In fact, he feels proud that he had the opportunity to love her and enjoy her company for a long time. He is grateful towards her for the beautiful and blissful moments they had together. For this he asks God to bless her. Though he has no hopes of ever getting her love back in his life, he requests her for two wishes. First, he should be allowed to cherish the memories of his love and the memories of the happiness during the courting period. Secondly, if she considers nothing indecent in this request, he wants to go on a last ride with her.

Stanza 2:

The lady is in a dilemma, not able to decide whether she should accept the request or reject it. For a moment she bows down her head as if she was deeply thinking about it. Her eyes reflected pride as well as pity. Her virgin pride is in conflict with her pity for her lover. She hesitates for a moment and these brief moments seem like torture to the lover. It is a matter of life and death for him. If she accepts his request for having a last ride with him, it would mean life for him but if she refuses then it would mean death for him.

Finally, the lady accepts his request. The lover is extremely happy, it seemed like the circulation of blood in his body has been regenerated. When the lady stood confused, deciding whether or not to accept his request, the lover felt lifeless. Presently, his life and activity has been restored to normal by her favourable reply. The lover is at peace as he is going to enjoy bliss and his lover’s company for another day. He hopes for the world to end that very night so that his moment of bliss becomes eternal. In that way, he would be with her always and there would be no need of despair at being rejected by his lad-love.

Stanza 3:

The third stanza is about the description of the heavenly bliss which the lover experiences when his beloved lies on his bosom. He compares his experience with nature’s joy and healing power. He feels like a man, who sees an evening cloud, swelling up like the sea-wave, illuminated and made beautiful by the light of the setting Sun, the Moon and the Stars. The man looks at the cloud, he is passionately drawn towards it and it seemed like the cloud was coming closer to him. In such a moment, he feels he has been transported to heaven and his body has lost its physicality. But he is afraid at the same time. He is afraid that his lover would leave him anytime and that this moment of bliss would end forever.

Stanza 4:

The last ride begins. This blissful experience gives the lover soul a terrific experience. The poet compares the lover's soul to that of a crumpled paper which has been kept like that for a long time. When exposed to wind, this paper opens up, the wrinkles get smoothed and it starts fluttering in the wind like a bird. In the same way, the lover's soul has grown wrinkled due to the grief of his failure in love. But after encountering the last ride with his beloved, his soul experiences tremendous joy and feels rejuvenated.

The lover says that his hopes of getting her love are a matter of the past. He feels that regret for the past is of no use. The lover thinks that it is now of no use to act in a different manner or express his love in different words for getting her love. This could lead her to hate him instead of loving him. At least now she does not hate him but is indifferent to his love. At least, now he has the pleasure of having the last ride with her.

Stanza 5: The lover as he is riding by his beloved's side thinks about the sorry state of humanity of the world. He consoles himself that he is not the single person to fail and suffer in life. Not all men succeed in their efforts. The landscape seems to him to have a different look. The fields and the cities through which they are passing seem to him more beautiful than before. He feels as if his own joy has illuminated the entire region on both sides.

The lover realizes that all human beings work hard to achieve their goals but only a few succeed. Like others, he too had failed but still he has his last wish fulfilled by riding with his beloved. The lover does not want to complain about his failures but enjoy the ride to the fullest in the company of his beloved.

Stanza 6: The lover as he rides with his beloved continues to think about the world. He says that brain and hand cannot go together hand in hand. Conception and execution can never be paired together. Man is not able to make pace with his actions to match with his ambitions. He plans a lot but achieves a little. The lover feels that he has at least achieved a little success by being able to ride with his beloved. He compares himself with a statesman and a soldier. A statesman works hard all his life but all his efforts are merely published in a book or as an obituary in newspapers. Similarly a soldier dies fighting for his country and is buried in the Westminster Abbey, which is his only reward after death. Sometimes an epitaph is raised in his memory but that is all.

Stanza 7: The lover then compares his lot with that of a poet. He believes that a poet's reward is too small compared with his skills. He composed sweet lyrics, thoughts of emotions of others, views that men should achieve beautiful things in life. But the reward he gets in return is very little and he dies in poverty in the prime of his life. Ordinary men cannot compose such poems. Compared to the poet, the lover considers himself luckier as he has at least achieved the consolation of riding with his lover for the last time.

Stanza 8:

In this stanza, the lover considers himself superior than the sculptor and the musician. A sculptor devotes long years to art and creates a beautiful statue of Venus, the Greek goddess of youth and beauty. Through his art, he expresses his ideas of beauty and grace. But the reward for his hard work is all too less. People admire his work, praise it but the moment they see a real girl, they turn away from it. The real girl may have ordinary beauty but still when the people see her, they turn away from the statue. This shows that life is greater than art. Therefore, the speaker says that in this case he is more successful than a sculptor because he can ride with

his beloved and the sculptor cannot have this happiness.

The lover then talks about a musician. He considers the musician as unsuccessful as the sculptor. A musician devotes his best years to composing sweet music. But the only praise he receives is by his friends and his music is used in operas which proved to be popular. But at the same time, tunes which once popular are soon forgotten. The lover considers himself happier and more successful than the musician. He has the pleasure of enjoying the last ride with her beloved. The musician can never enjoy this happiness.

Stanza 9:

In the ninth stanza, the lover states his point that none succeeds in this world, despite the best efforts, the lover goes on to say that it is not easy to know what is good for man. Since the lover is Browning's mouthpiece, he expresses the view of the poet: success in this life means failure in the life to come.

If the lover is destined to enjoy the supreme bliss in this world by getting the desired love of his beloved, he would have nothing left to hope for in the near future. He feels that he has reached his destination in this world and has achieved the garland of victory by winning the love of his beloved. He may have failed in his love but it means success in the other world. Now, when he will die he will think of reuniting with his lover after death. If a man gets perfect happiness in this world, heaven would not be attracted towards him. The lover believes that he would have the highest bliss in heaven where he will meet his beloved.

Stanza 10:

During the ride, the lover was lost in his own thoughts while his beloved did not speak a single word. But it did not make any difference to him as her company is a heavenly bliss for him. Man has always looked upwards and imagined that heaven lies somewhere in the sky. This heaven is symbolical of the best that man can imagine. Similarly, the lady is his heaven and he enjoys the same happiness which others hope to enjoy in heaven.

The lover thinks that it would be a heaven on earth for him if he continues to ride with his beloved forever. He wishes that the moment should become everlasting so that they could continue to ride together forever and ever. That would indeed be heavenly bliss for him.

Analysis:

Form: "The Last Ride Together" by Robert Browning is a dramatic monologue. In a dramatic monologue, a single person not the poet; speaks out a speech that makes up the whole of the poem. The first-person speaker in the poem is the mouthpiece of the poet, Robert Browning but not the poet himself. This is evident from the phrases like I said, I know, my whole heart I claim, my mistress, my last thought, I miss, I alone, I hoped, I gave my youth and I sign'd.

Structure: The poem comprises of ten stanzas, each consisting of eleven lines each. The poem follows the rhyming pattern aabbcddeec.

Poetical Devices:

The poet has used a number of poetical devices in his poem "The Last Ride Together", they are as follows:

Rhetorical Questions: A Rhetorical question is one which answers itself. Some of the rhetorical in the poem are as follows,

*What need to strive with a life awry?

Here, the lover says there is no point in grieving over a life which has been a failure.

* Might she loved me?

The lover wants to say that the hope of getting her love has become a matter of the past.

Metaphor:

Example of metaphor in "The Last Ride Together" by Robert Browning is-

"...My soul/ Smooth'd itself out, a long-cramp'd scroll

Freshening and fluttering in the wind."

Personification:

"When pity would be softening though" is an example of personification in the poem, 'The Last Ride Together.'

Enjambment:

Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause. Examples of enjambment in the poem are as follows,-

*Take back the hope you gave,- I claim

Only a memory of the same,

*Hush! If you saw some western cloud

All billowy-bosom'd, over-bow'd

By many benedictions-sun's

And moon's and evening star's at once.

Robert Browning's poetry is regarded as the finest love poetry. His poems deal with the emotions of love. His philosophy of love is an important part of his philosophy of life.

Theme and Central Idea of 'The Last Ride Together' by Robert Browning

Robert Browning's poetry is regarded as the finest love poetry. His poems deal with the emotions of love. His philosophy of love is an important part of his philosophy of life.

"The Last Ride Together" by Robert Browning begins with a lover getting finally rejected by his lady-love after he waited for her for a long time. As the lover is sincere in his love, he does not have any ill-will for his lady-love. On the contrary, he tells his beloved that the uncertainty is no longer present as he knows that he would not get her love. The speaker says, his beloved's love was the most meaningful thing in his life and after he has lost her love, his life has lost all its meaning and significance. In fact, he feels proud that he had the opportunity to love her and enjoy her company for a long time. He is grateful towards her for the beautiful and blissful moments they had together. For this he asks God to bless her.

Though he has no hopes of ever getting her love back in his life, he requests her for two wishes. First, he should be allowed to cherish the memories of his love and the memories of the happiness during the courting period. Secondly, if she considers nothing indecent in this request, he wants to go on a last ride with her. The lady is in a dilemma, not able to decide whether she should accept the request or reject it. Finally, the lady accepts his request. The lover is extremely happy, it seemed like the circulation of blood in his body has been regenerated. The lover is at peace as he is going to enjoy bliss and his lover's company for another day. He hopes for the world to end that very night so that his moment of bliss becomes eternal. In that way, he would be with her always and there would be no need of despair at being rejected by his lady-love.

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The lover as he rides with his beloved continues to think about the world. He says that brain and hand cannot go together hand in hand. Conception and execution can never be paired together. Man is not able to make pace with his actions to match with his ambitions. He plans a lot but achieves a little. The lover feels that he has at least achieved a little success by being able to ride with his beloved. He compares himself with a statesman and a soldier. A statesman works hard all his life but all his efforts are merely published in a book or as an obituary in newspapers. Similarly a soldier dies fighting for his country and is buried in the Westminster Abbey, which is his only reward after death. Sometimes an epitaph is raised in his memory but that is all. The lover then compares his lot with that of a poet. He believes that a poet's reward is too small compared with his skills. He composed sweet lyrics, thoughts of emotions of others, views that men should achieve beautiful things in life. But the reward he gets in return is very little and he dies in poverty in the prime of his life. Ordinary men cannot compose such poems. Compared to the poet, the lover considers himself luckier as he has at least achieved the consolation of riding with his lover for the last time. During the ride, the lover was lost in his own thoughts while his beloved did not speak a single word. But it did not make any difference to him as her company is a heavenly bliss for him. The lover thinks that it would be a heaven on earth for him if he continues to ride with his beloved forever. He wishes that the moment should become everlasting so that they could continue to ride together forever and ever. That would indeed be heavenly bliss for him.

The poem is full of romantic overtones. It describes the romantic feelings of the lover towards his lady love. Therefore, 'The Last Ride Together' can be aptly described as a love poem.

To what extent is a Feminist criticism helpful in opening up potential meanings in 'My Last Duchess'?

Feminist readings of texts allow the text to explore the relationship between sex and power; the stereotypical representations of women in literature and how literature shapes society amongst other things. In Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' potential meanings are opened up as a result of this type of reading of the poem. However it could be argued that other meanings that a Marxist criticism may perhaps draw out are neglected.

The title of the poem indicates a power struggle between the characters. In 'My Last Duchess' the title shows the male dominance over the female through the possessive pronoun of "My". This sense of ownership is highlighted by the "Last Duchess" not being an attributed name, only a title, which dehumanises and objectifies her character. Therefore in 'My Last Duchess' the female has a denigrated status and the male an empowered one. The power struggle between the sexes is won by the male Duke through his murdering of the female Duchess; he 'gave commands' to have his 'last Duchess' murdered so consequently the male appears to be the dominant sex. A feminist reading of the title is somewhat restricted however; it could be argued by a psychoanalytical critic that the Duchess is in fact dominating here over the Duke as he became so obsessed by her that she constantly is on his mind, so much so that he has a painting that he calls a 'wonder' of her on his wall. Although, the feminist reading is a far more widely accepted interpretation of the title.

The Duke asserts what the Duchess may feel or think as though he knows it is true assuming he is right not considering at all that he may be wrong; by doing this Browning emphasizes the sense of complete male domination. The Duke believes the Duchess was "Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er/ She looked on, and her looks went everywhere" and he also believes that she did not appreciate his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name". This may be interpreted as promiscuity by many as women in literature are stereotypically portrayed as 'immoral and dangerous seductresses' (H. Bertens) which may be shown in her being 'too easily impressed'. However, this comprehension is one of a male dominated society and many feminist critics would argue that the Duchess is just a happy, harmless person. The one-sided opinion the reader receives of the late Duchess' characteristics from the Duke highlights how she is now merely an objectified painting the Duke has complete and utter control over. Browning creates an overwhelming feeling of the attempt of the male to control the female which was strong in Victorian society. This is quite a close-minded view of the situation as it could be the perception that this is the Duke asserting his authority over someone who was born into a lower class to him which is what a Marxist critic may argue. Although, similarly to the previous paragraph the Feminist reading here would be what I would personally be more inclined to agree with.

A sadistic control is exercised over the Duchess who becomes a victim of the Duke's desire to dominate her female sexuality. The ultimate form of control for the Duke is murder. He can reveal or hide the Duchess with "the curtain" whenever he wishes, and effectively can decide when "that spot of joy" appears rather than the Duchess being flattered by any other men. It is clear the Duke felt jealousy over the Duchess granting him "much the same smile" as everyone else and fiercely desired to restrict her affection to only him. The respect that the Duchess within the poem shows for other people with her 'approving speech' is what the Duke feels rightfully belongs to him exclusively. For Victorian men, control over their women was very important and perhaps Browning – whose Father would have installed in him a repulsion for slavery – was making a comment on the treatment of women in Victorian society and also their portrayal within literature.

Even though the sadistic murder of the Duchess in poem appears to be the result of abnormal psychological state of the crazed Duke, one could argue she played a part in her own death which is only hinted at by Browning, "'twas not/Her husband's presence only, called that spot/Of joy into the duchess' cheek". Here the inference is perhaps that the Duchess was having an affair with Fra Pandolf. Thus there is an implication the Duchess could have behaved in a more suitable manner, instead of 'flirting' with other men. However if one delves deeper into the quotation, the use of the word 'only' hints at the fact that the Duke was jealous of any attention that the Duchess didn't direct at him and as the poem is from the Duke's perspective, I would probably agree more strongly with this suggestion. The position of women in the poem's historical setting of the 16th Century in 'My Last Duchess' meant the marriage choice of the late Duchess would have defined her social status. A feminist critique would comment on the 'choice of marriage partner' which would 'determine her happiness and fulfilment in life, or her lack of these' and consider the opinion that although the Duchess married into wealth, she clearly wasn't happy because of the domineering nature of the Duke and so even if she was having an affair with the artist, it would be perfectly justified because the Duke's domineering personality has driven her to do so.

A feminist reading of 'My Last Duchess' enables one to explore many meanings surrounding the treatment and attitude of the Duke towards the Duchess and possibly her successor. And while other criticisms may offer different possible interpretations, personally I consider a Feminist reading of the poem to be the most insightful as it allows you to comment on the main themes of the text.

"My Last Duchess"

Summary

This poem is loosely based on historical events involving Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara, who lived in the 16th century. The Duke is the speaker of the poem, and tells us he is entertaining an emissary who has come to negotiate the Duke's marriage (he has recently been widowed) to the daughter of another powerful family. As he shows the visitor through his palace, he stops before a portrait of the late Duchess, apparently a young and lovely girl. The Duke begins reminiscing about the portrait sessions, then about the Duchess herself. His musings give way to a diatribe on her disgraceful behavior: he claims she flirted with everyone and did not

appreciate his “gift of a nine-hundred-years- old name.” As his monologue continues, the reader realizes with ever-more chilling certainty that the Duke in fact caused the Duchess’s early demise: when her behavior escalated, “[he] gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together.” Having made this disclosure, the Duke returns to the business at hand: arranging for another marriage, with another young girl. As the Duke and the emissary walk leave the painting behind, the Duke points out other notable artworks in his collection.

Form

“My Last Duchess” comprises rhyming pentameter lines. The lines do not employ end-stops; rather, they use *enjambment*—that is, sentences and other grammatical units do not necessarily conclude at the end of lines. Consequently, the rhymes do not create a sense of closure when they come, but rather remain a subtle driving force behind the Duke’s compulsive revelations. The Duke is quite a performer: he mimics others’ voices, creates hypothetical situations, and uses the force of his personality to make horrifying information seem merely colorful. Indeed, the poem provides a classic example of a dramatic monologue: the speaker is clearly distinct from the poet; an audience is suggested but never appears in the poem; and the revelation of the Duke’s character is the poem’s primary aim.

Commentary

But Browning has more in mind than simply creating a colorful character and placing him in a picturesque historical scene. Rather, the specific historical setting of the poem harbors much significance: the Italian Renaissance held a particular fascination for Browning and his contemporaries, for it represented the flowering of the aesthetic and the human alongside, or in some cases in the place of, the religious and the moral. Thus the temporal setting allows Browning to again explore sex, violence, and aesthetics as all entangled, complicating and confusing each other: the lushness of the language belies the fact that the Duchess was

punished for her natural sexuality. The Duke's ravings suggest that most of the supposed transgressions took place only in his mind. Like some of Browning's fellow Victorians, the Duke sees sin lurking in every corner. The reason the speaker here gives for killing the Duchess ostensibly differs from that given by the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" for murdering Porphyria; however, both women are nevertheless victims of a male desire to inscribe and fix female sexuality. The desperate need to do this mirrors the efforts of Victorian society to mold the behavior—sexual and otherwise—of individuals. For people confronted with an increasingly complex and anonymous modern world, this impulse comes naturally: to control would seem to be to conserve and stabilize. The Renaissance was a time when morally dissolute men like the Duke exercised absolute power, and as such it is a fascinating study for the Victorians: works like this imply that, surely, a time that produced magnificent art like the Duchess's portrait couldn't have been entirely evil in its allocation of societal control—even though it put men like the Duke in power.

A poem like "My Last Duchess" calculatedly engages its readers on a psychological level. Because we hear only the Duke's musings, we must piece the story together ourselves. Browning forces his reader to become involved in the poem in order to understand it, and this adds to the fun of reading his work. It also forces the reader to question his or her own response to the subject portrayed and the method of its portrayal. We are forced to consider, Which aspect of the poem dominates: the horror of the Duchess's fate, or the beauty of the language and the powerful dramatic development? Thus by posing this question the poem firstly tests the Victorian reader's response to the modern world—it asks, Has everyday life made you numb yet?—and secondly asks a question that must be asked of all art—it queries, Does art have a moral component, or is it merely an aesthetic exercise? In these latter considerations Browning prefigures writers like Charles Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde.

Robert Browning: Poems Summary and Analysis of "My Last Duchess"

Summary

"My Last Duchess" is narrated by the duke of Ferrara to an envoy (representative) of another nobleman, whose daughter the duke is soon to marry. These details are revealed throughout the poem, but understanding them from the opening helps to illustrate the irony that Browning employs.

At the poem's opening, the duke has just pulled back a curtain to reveal to the envoy a portrait of his previous duchess. The portrait was painted by Fra Pandolf, a monk and painter whom the duke believes captured the singularity of the duchess's glance. However, the duke insists to the envoy that his former wife's deep, passionate glance was not reserved solely for her husband. As he puts it, she was "too easily impressed" into sharing her affable nature.

His tone grows harsh as he recollects how both human and nature could impress her, which insulted him since she did not give special favor to the "gift" of his "nine-hundred-years-old" family name and lineage. Refusing to deign to "lesson" her on her unacceptable love of everything, he instead "gave commands" to have her killed.

The duke then ends his story and asks the envoy to rise and accompany him back to the count, the father of the duke's impending bride and the envoy's employer. He mentions that he expects a high dowry, though he is happy enough with the daughter herself. He insists that the envoy walk with him "together" – a lapse of the usual social expectation, where the higher ranked person would walk separately – and on their descent he points out a bronze bust of the god Neptune in his collection.

Analysis

"My Last Duchess," published in 1842, is arguably Browning's most famous dramatic monologue, with good reason. It engages the reader on a number of levels – historical, psychological, ironic, theatrical, and more.

The most engaging element of the poem is probably the speaker himself, the duke. Objectively, it's easy to identify him as a monster, since he had his wife murdered for what comes across as fairly innocuous crimes. And yet he is impressively charming, both in his use of language and his affable address. The ironic disconnect that colors most of Browning's monologues is particularly strong here. A remarkably amoral man nevertheless has a lovely sense of beauty and of how to engage his listener.

In fact, the duke's excessive demand for control ultimately comes across as his most defining characteristic. The obvious manifestation of this is the murder of his wife. Her crime is barely presented as sexual; even though he does admit that other men could draw her "blush," he also mentions several natural phenomena that inspired her favor. And yet he was driven to murder by her refusal to save her happy glances solely for him. This demand for control is also reflected in his relationship with the envoy. The entire poem has a precisely controlled theatrical flair, from the unveiling of the curtain that is implied to precede the opening, to the way he slowly reveals the details of his tale, to his assuming of the envoy's interest in the tale ("strangers like you... would ask me, if they durst, How such a glance came there"), to his

final shift in subject back to the issue of the impending marriage. He pretends to denigrate his speaking ability – "even had you skill in speech – (which I have not)," later revealing that he believes the opposite to be true, even at one point explicitly acknowledging how controlled his story is when he admits he "said 'Fra Pandolf' by design" to peak the envoy's interest. [The envoy](#) is his audience much as we are Browning's, and the duke exerts a similar control over his story that Browning uses in crafting the ironic disconnect. In terms of meter, Browning represents the duke's incessant control of story by using a regular meter but also enjambment (where the phrases do not end at the close of a line). The enjambment works against the otherwise orderly meter to remind us that the duke will control his world, including the rhyme scheme of his monologue.

To some extent, the duke's amorality can be understood in terms of aristocracy. The poem was originally published with a companion poem under the title "Italy and France," and both attempted to explore the ironies of aristocratic honor. In this poem, loosely inspired by real events set in Renaissance Italy, the duke reveals himself not only as a model of culture but also as a monster of morality. His inability to see his moral ugliness could be attributed to having been ruined by worship of a "nine-hundred-years-old name." He is so entitled that when his wife upset him by too loosely bestowing her favor to others, he refused to speak to her about it. Such a move is out of the question – "who'd stoop to blame this kind of trifling?" He will not "stoop" to such ordinary domestic tasks as compromise or discussion. Instead, when she transgresses his sense of entitlement, he gives commands and she is dead.

Another element of the aristocratic life that Browning approaches in the poem is that of repetition. The duke's life seems to be made of repeated gestures. The most obvious is his marriage – the use of the word "last" in the title implies that there are several others, perhaps with curtain-covered paintings along the same hallway where this one stands. In the same way that the age of his name gives it credence, so does he seem fit with a life of repeated gestures, one of which he is ready to make again with the count's daughter.

And indeed, the question of money is revealed at the end in a way that colors the entire poem. The duke almost employs his own sense of irony when he brings up a "dowry" to the envoy. This final stanza suggests that his story of murder is meant to give proactive warning to the woman he is soon to marry, but to give it through a backdoor channel, through the envoy who would pass it along to the count who might then pass it to the girl. After all, the duke has no interest in talking to her himself, as we have learned! His irony goes even further when he reminds the envoy that he truly wants only the woman herself, even as he is clearly stressing the importance of a large dowry tinged with a threat of his vindictive side.

But the lens of aristocracy undercuts the wonderful psychological nature of the poem, which is overall more concerned with human contradictions than with social or economic criticism. The first contradiction to consider is how charming the duke actually is. It would be tempting to suggest Browning wants to paint him as a weasel, but knowing the poet's love of language, it's clear that he wants us to admire a character who can manipulate language so masterfully. Further, the duke shows an interesting complication in his attitudes on class when he suggests to the envoy that they "go Together down," an action not expected in such a hierarchical society. By no means can we justify the idea that the duke is willing to transcend class, but at the same time he does allow a transgression of the very hierarchy that had previously led him to have his wife murdered rather than discuss his problems with her.

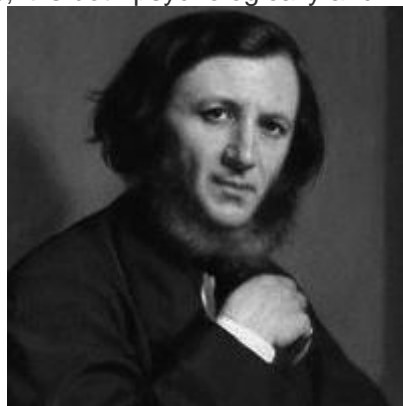
Also at play psychologically is the human ability to rationalize our hang-ups. The duke seems controlled by certain forces: his own aristocratic bearing; his relationship to women; and lastly, this particular duchess who confounded him. One can argue that the duke, who was in love with his "last duchess," is himself controlled by his social expectations, and that his inability to bear perceived insult to his aristocratic name makes him a victim of the same social forces that he represents. Likewise, what he expects of his wives, particularly of this woman whose portrait continues to provide him with fodder for performance, suggests a deeper psychology than one meant solely for criticism.

The last thing to point out in the duke's language is his use of euphemism. The way he explains that he had the duchess killed – "I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together" – shows a facility for avoiding the truth through choice of language. What this could suggest is that the duchess was in fact guilty of greater transgression than he claims, that instead of flirtation, she might have physically or sexually betrayed him. There's certainly no explicit evidence of this, but at the same time, it's plausible that a man as arrogant as the duke, especially one so equipped with the power of euphemism, would avoid spelling out his disgrace to a lowly envoy and instead would speak around the issue.

Finally, one can also understand this poem as a commentary on art. The duke remains enamored with the woman he has had killed, though his affection now rests on a representation of her. In other words, he has chosen to love the ideal image of her rather than the reality, similar to how the narrator of "[Porphyria's Lover](#)" chose a static, dead love than one destined to change in the throes of life. In many ways, this is the artist's dilemma, which Browning explores in all of his work. As poet, he attempts to capture contradiction and movement, psychological complexity that cannot be pinned down into one object, and yet in the end all he can create is a collection of static lines. The duke attempts to be an artist in his life, turning a walk down the hallway into a performance, but he is always hampered by the fact that the ideal that inspires his performance cannot change.

My Last Duchess by Robert Browning: Analysis

My Last Duchess has been admired for its theme as well as style. Browning's purpose in creating the Duke is to make a statement about the comparative values of sophistication and naturalness. The whole poem is but the visible part of the iceberg, but the submerged invisible part is not a matter of vague suggestiveness; it is both psychologically and historically defined.



Robert Browning (1812-1889)

The real character of the duke is gradually 'unmasked' in the process of his talk. He is a murderer who had killed his innocent young wife out of jealousy. He boasts about his great name and status in a mean manner. He is a Philistine (one who pretends to be a lover or expert of art). The irony lies not only in that he is not what he thinks he is, but more in that he doesn't realize how he is unwittingly telling the truth. He reveals all the truths about his devilish character when he is trying to prove himself a great man. Browning takes up a moment and makes the character speak of something that reveals so much behind what is being said. The duke here pulls the mask off his own face.

The poem is unique for its technique of dramatic revelation of character. The colloquial language, the rough rhythms like that of the ordinary language of conversation, the very ordinary situation and many such features make the poem realistic and memorable. The poem is rather compressed, elliptical (full of gaps) and difficult at first sight, and it needs a critical mind to explore the reality behind the story the Duke tells. The historical background is not essential, but adds to our understanding of the poem.

The features that make the poem a 'dramatic monologue' are: a character who speaks to someone specific (addressee) and in the manner of a dramatic speech, physical setting like that of a drama, the monologue or the speech of one character only, actions (though they are limited to sitting and standing and moving around) that are implied by the speech, and the plot or a set of developing action suggested by the monologue.

The poem opens with the reference, by the Duke of Ferrara to the portrait of his last Duchess. The Duke says that the figure in the portrait has the very look of life. This cannot be mistaken as a hint of lament. Browning's use of irony exposes the Duke to us: the Duke himself could not know the natural liveliness of the Duchess and remained a stranger to his own wife because of his obsession with himself. The aggressive individualism of the Duke and his tyranny of possession already indicated in "my" of the first line are reinforced in his pride of being the only person to draw the curtain away from the portrait. The sense of superiority of aristocratic isolation is also indicated here in the hint that others dare not ask the Duke any questions. The Duke may be a lover of art, but is "essentially a savage, however he may appear superficially" (Ralph Randal: The Poetry of Robert Browning).

The possessiveness and the jealousy of the Duke as husband is revealed when he tells the listener that the smiles of the Duchess were not reserved only for her husband. How vigilant, he was under the provocation of jealousy, is proved by the example that he gives. The word "perhaps" indicates that he is not even certain about what he says and proves Emilia's statement that the jealous persons are jealous because they are jealous and not due to any other reason. He imagines that probably the monk-painter hinted at the gown excessively covering the wrist of the

Duchess or that the artist remarked that his art could never recapture the delicate beauty of the Duchess and the Duchess thought that she must respond with cheerful courtesy. Herein may be read also the implicit hint by Browning that life is greater than art. The generosity and spontaneity of the humanitarian Duchess were quite unacceptable to the Duke, who here becomes the Victorian conventionalist.

From the smiles and courtesy of the Duchess the Duke now passes on to consider, or rather just tells about himself and fails to understand, the "heart" of the Duchess. This is Browning's chance to reveal through the dramatic contrast the heartlessness of the Duke. The Duke says that language fails him to communicate to others the quality of the heart of the Duchess. He then refers to the Duchess as pliant, receptive, generous and alive to the world around her by saying that happiness and the impressions of things came naturally to her. He then proceeds to refer to the sense of equanimity in the acutely sensitive Duchess. He notes with the sense of conventional Victorian shock that she, through the blush or through the words, weighed the trifles (for the Duke) like the sunset scene on the Western horizon, the cherries brought to her by some intruder (in the Duke's sole property rights over the Duchess), or the mule that she rode on equally with his 'significant' embracement—it must be noted here that the Duke embraces only the body but the Duchess embraces natural and universal humanity.

The excellence of the poem lies in the dramatic irony of the Duke's witlessness. The Duke is, in fact, neither dull nor shrewd to perfection. Browning's important point is to show the false pride and personal vanity of the Duke. The words "such a one" indicate how insignificant the Duchess is to the conventional and obstinately ego-centered Duke. The Duke, like the stale Victorian husband, thinks that by bringing the Duchess into his establishment like any other commodity, he had secured a monopoly over her into the bargain. He liked her smiles only for himself, but would stifle her humanity if directed towards others. The Narcissus complex of the Duke and the resultant jealousy could not go hand in hand with the humanitarian values of the Duchess and the conflict raised to the climax must bring the tragedy.

The bronze statue of Neptune provides the final symbolic statement of the meaning of the poem; Neptune tames the sea-horse, just as the Duke had "tamed" his wife. It may be suggested that the Duke failed to "tame" the last Duchess unless murder be called taming. Undoubtedly the Duke sees himself in the image of Neptune and the last word "me" in the context indicates his tyranny of possession. It is not just being Machiavellian; rather the Duke emerges ultimately as the symbol of Victorian husband, who in a man-oriented society thinks of himself as master and of woman as dehumanized creature, a domesticated animal. Hence the whole social background of Browning's contemporary world lurks through the poem and it does not remain just a study of the Italian Renaissance which is traditionally associated with the poem.

The Duke is simultaneously the Renaissance Machiavellian figure and the Victorian man with his vanity; materialism, lack of spirituality, and lack of awareness of human values. The Duchess is also a symbol, that of natural humanity. The murder of the Duchess under the commands of the Duke shows the ultimate human depravity resulting from suppression of human values in the Renaissance world and the Victorian world.

My Last Duchess - By Robert Browning

This poem is set in 1564 and is based on the real-life Duke Alfonso II who ruled Ferrara, Italy in the latter half of the 16th century. In the poem, he's talking about his first wife Lucrezia de' Medici, 3 years after she died under suspicious circumstances shortly after marrying the Duke.

Summary

This poem is set in 1564 and is based on the real-life Duke Alfonso II who ruled Ferrara, Italy in the latter half of the 16th century. In the poem, he's talking about his first wife Lucrezia de' Medici, who died under suspicious circumstances shortly after marrying the Duke.

In the poem the Duke is speaking to an emissary who is negotiating the Duke's next marriage to the daughter of another powerful family. He is showing his visitor around his palace and stops in front of a painting of his late wife.

The Duke then begins to reminisce about his late wife's portrait sessions with the painter, and then about the Duchess herself. His reminiscing soon turns into a verbal onslaught of his late wife's behaviour, where he abjectly accuses her of being overly flirtatious with everyone, and not appreciating his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name". As his speech continues, the reader realises with ever more terrifying certainty that the Duke was responsible for the Duchess's early demise, due to her worsening behaviour: "I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together". After making this declaration, the Duke returns back to the discussion of arranging his next marriage. As the Duke and emissary leave to return to the other guests, the Duke calls attention to his bronze statue of Neptune taming a seahorse.

Structure and Language

- This poem is a *dramatic monologue* which means it's one person speaking through the whole poem. It's written in *iambic pentameter* (same rhythm as much of Shakespeare's work) and *rhyming couplets*. This means each pair of lines ends with rhyming words, for example: "That's my last Duchess painted on the **wall**,/Looking as if she were alive. I **call**"
- Because it's a dramatic monologue, this poem is structured as a long speech, which is evident in its use of varied punctuation. All of the colons (:), dashes (-), commas (,) and full stops (.) are used to create the feeling of regular speech.
- This poem is loaded with rhyme because of the rhyming couplets. However, it is also loaded with *enjambment* which can often mask the rhymes. *Enjambment* is when a line of poetry ends in the middle of a thought without any punctuation. When you read the poem, you generally read straight through to the next line and so you would not pause to emphasise the rhyming words at the ends of the lines. For example, "My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name/With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame" you would read straight through name to finish the thought which ends at the full stop in the next line: "nine-hundred-years-old name with anybody's gift." Thus the rhyme of "name" and "blame" is masked.
- The imagery in this poem is rather limited, reflecting the Duke's admission that he is not "skilled in speech". There is a lot of imagery about possessing objects, as well as an abundance of personal pronouns. This suggests the Duke's selfish and self-important character.
- Themes of this poem reflect on wealth, status, and pride. The Duke, though a wealthy and proud character, is not seen in a good light. Despite thinking very highly of himself, the Duke comes across to the readers as arrogant and unlikable. The reader also sees that money cannot buy happiness; although the Duke is wealthy, he is insecure and paranoid about his late wife's behavior.

Overall, the author wittily shows that sometimes a person's commentary on a subject tells you more about the person than the

subject. In this case, the Duke's repugnant personality is revealed through his commentary on his wife.

Analysis of the Robert Browning Poem 'My Last Duchess'

[Robert Browning](#) was a prolific poet and at times his poetry drew a stark contrast to that of his famous wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. A perfect example is his dramatic monologue, "My Last Duchess," which is dark and a daring portrait of a domineering man.

Though written in 1842, "My Last Duchess" is set in the 16th-century. And yet, it speaks volumes of the treatment of women in the Victorian time of the Brownings.

The misogynistic character of the poem is also a severe contrast to Browning himself who was a master of 'negative capability.' Browning would often write poetry of men like the duke who dominated (and barely loved) his wife while penning endearing love poems to his own Elizabeth.

"[My Last Duchess](#)" is a poem that engages conversation and it is a perfect study for any student of classic literature.

The Contrast of the Brownings' Poetry

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's most famous sonnet asks, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways?" Sounds lovely, does it not? On the other hand, "Porphyria's Lover," an infamous poem that was written by Elizabeth's husband, would count the ways in a very disturbing and unexpected manner.

- Step 1) Welcome the beautiful girl into your secret meeting place.
- Step 2) Listen while she declares her undying love for you.
- Step 3) Tenderly wrap her long, golden hair around her throat.

- Step 4) Strangle her.
- Step 5) Sit happily next to her dead body.

The above list is a disgustingly violent scenario, the sort one might expect to find in a grizzly episode of some CSI knock-off or straight-to-video slasher flick. Or maybe it's even darker than that, due to the last nihilistic lines of the poem:

And all night long we have not stirred,

And yet God has not said a word! (lines 59-60)

If it were read aloud in a creative writing classroom today, the students would probably shift uncomfortably in their seats, and the unsettled English teacher might very well recommend counseling for the poet. Yet, far from modern, "Porphyria's

Lover" is a product of England's prim and oh-so-proper Victorian society of the mid-1800s, and the poet was an adoring husband in favor of equality for women.

So why then does Browning delve into the mindset of a misogynistic sociopath, not just with "Porphyria's Lover," but also with the deviously cruel poem "My Last Duchess"?

Browning exercises what [John Keats](#) referred to as negative capability: an artist's capacity to lose himself in his characters, revealing nothing of his own personality, political views, or philosophies. In order to critique the oppressive, male-dominated society of his age, Browning gave voice to villainous characters, each representing the antithesis of his worldview.

Browning does not eliminate his personal virtues from all of his poetry. This dedicated husband also wrote sincere and tender poems to his wife; these [romantic works](#), such as "Summum Bonum," unveil the true and benevolent nature of Robert Browning.

The Theme of "My Last Duchess"

Even if readers give "My Last Duchess" a mere passing glance, they should be able to detect at least one element: arrogance.

The speaker of the poem exhibits an arrogance rooted in an audacious sense of male superiority. In simpler terms: he is stuck on himself. But to understand the deadliness of the Duke's powerhouse combo of narcissism and misogyny, the reader must delve deeply into this dramatic monologue, paying close attention to both what is said as well as unsaid.

It is evident that the speaker's name is Ferrara (as suggested by the character heading at the beginning of the speech). Most scholars agree that Browning derived his character from a 16th-century duke of the same title: Alfonso II d'Este, a renowned patron of the arts who was also rumored to have poisoned his first wife.

Understanding the Dramatic Monologue

What sets this poem apart from many others is that it is a dramatic monologue, a type of poem in which a character distinctly different from that of the poet is speaking to someone else.

Actually, some dramatic monologues feature speakers who talk to themselves, but the monologues with "silent characters" display more artistry, more theatrics in storytelling because they are not merely confessional tirades (as with "Porphyria's Lover"). Instead, readers can imagine a specific setting and detect action and reaction based on the hints given within the verse.

In "My Last Duchess," the duke is speaking to a courtier of a wealthy count. Before the poem even begins, the courtier has been escorted through the Duke's palace - probably through an art gallery filled with paintings and sculptures. The courtier has

seen a curtain which conceals a painting, and the duke decides to treat his guest to a viewing of a very special portrait of his late wife.

The courtier is impressed, perhaps even mesmerized by the smile of the woman in the painting and he asks what produced such an expression. And that's when the dramatic monologue begins:

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? (lines 1-5)

The Duke behaves cordially enough, asking his guest if he would like to gaze at the painting. We are witnessing the speaker's public persona.

Notice how he keeps the painting behind a curtain until he feels like showing it to others. He has control over who views the painting, mastery over the painted smile of his deceased wife.

As the monologue continues, the Duke brags about the fame of the painter: Fra Pandolf (a quick tangent: "fra" is a shortened version of friar, a holy member of the church. Note how the Duke uses a holy member of the church as part of his plan to capture and control his wife's image).

It pleases the Duke that his wife's smile has been preserved within the artwork.

The Character of the Late Duchess

During the Duchess' life, the Duke explains, his wife would offer that beautiful smile to everyone, instead of reserving her look of joy exclusively for her husband. She appreciated nature, the kindness of others, animals, and the simple pleasures of everyday life. And this disgusts the duke.

It seems the duchess cared about her husband and often showed him that look of joy and love, but he feels that the duchess "ranked / [his] gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift" (lines 32 - 34). He might not reveal his explosive emotions to the courtier as they sit and look at the painting, but the reader can deduce that the duchess' lack of worshipfulness infuriated her husband.

He wanted to be the only person, the only object of her affection. The duke self-righteously continues his explanation of events, rationalizing that despite his disappointment it would have been beneath him to talk openly with his wife about his feelings of jealousy.

He does not request, nor even demand, that she alter her behavior because "E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose / Never to stoop" (lines 42 - 43).

He feels that communication with his own wife is beneath his class. Instead, he gives commands and "all smiles stopped together" (line 46). Keep in mind, he does not

give commands to his wife; as the duke indicates, instruction would be "stooping." Rather, he delivers orders to his minions who then execute this poor, innocent woman.

Is the Duchess So Innocent?

Some readers believe that the Duchess isn't so innocent, that her "smiles" are really a code word for promiscuous behavior. Their theory is that whoever she smiles at (a servant for example) is someone she engages in a sexual relationship.

However, if she were sleeping around with everything she smiled at (the setting sun, a branch from a cherry tree, a mule), then we would have a duchess who is not only a sexual deviant but must possess the physical prowess similar to a Greek goddess. How else could she have sex with the sun?

Although the Duke is not the most reliable of narrators, he keeps most of his conversation on a literal, not a symbolic, level. He may be an untrustworthy character, yet the reader should trust that when he says a smile, he means a smile.

If the duke executed a lustful, adulterous wife, that would still make him a bad guy, but a different sort of bad guy: a vengeful cuckold. However, if the duke executed a faithful, kind-hearted wife who failed to revere her husband above all others, then we are witnessing a monologue performed by a monster. That is exactly the experience which Browning means for his audience.

Women in the Victorian Age

Certainly, women were oppressed during the 1500s, the era in which "My Last Duchess" takes place. Yet, the poem is less a critique of the feudalistic ways of medieval Europe and more of an attack on the biased, overbearing views expressed during Browning's day.

How uptight was England's Victorian society of the 1800s? A historical article titled "Sexuality and Modernity" explains that "The Victorian bourgeois may have covered their piano legs out of modesty." That's right, those pent-up Victorians were turned on by the sensuous curve of a piano's leg!

Literature of the era, in circles both journalistic and literary, portrayed women as fragile creatures in need of a husband. For a Victorian woman to be morally good, she must embody "sensitivity, self-sacrifice, innate purity" (Salisbury and Kersten). All of these traits are exhibited by the Duchess if we assume that allowing herself to be married to a creep in order to please her family is an act of self-sacrifice.

While many Victorian husbands desired a pure, virginal bride, they also desired physical, mental, and sexual conquest.

If a man was not satisfied with his wife, a woman who was his legal subordinate in the eyes of the law, he might not kill her off as the Duke so cavalierly does in Browning's poem. However, the husband might very well patronize one of London's

many prostitutes, thereby obliterating the sanctity of the marriage and endangering his innocent wife with a frightening variety of incurable diseases.

Robert and Elizabeth Browning

Fortunately, Browning was not transposing his own personality into "My Last Duchess." He was far from the typical Victorian and married a woman who was both older and socially his superior.

He adored his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning so much that together they defied her father's wishes and eloped. Over the years, they raised a family, supported each other's writing careers, and loved each other as equals.

Clearly, Browning used what Keats called negative capability to invent a character that was strikingly unlike his own: a vicious, controlling duke whose morals and beliefs contrasted with those of the poet. Yet, perhaps Browning was observing fellow members of Victorian society when he crafted the devious lines of Duke Ferrera.

Barrett's father, although not a murderous lord from the 16th-century, he was a controlling patriarch who demanded that his daughters stay faithful to him, that they never move out of the home, not even to marry. Like the duke who coveted his precious artwork, Barrett's father wanted to keep hold of his children as if they were inanimate figures in a gallery.

When she defied her father's demands and married Robert Browning, she became dead to her father and he never saw her again... unless, of course, he kept a picture of Elizabeth on his wall.

