**Some notes on ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842) by Robert Browning:**

**stylistic features and devices**

A reading of the poem by Tom O’ Bedlam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZxq3r7TlHo>

* Extreme foregrounding of the personal deictical elements
* Impression of an addressee towards whom the voice is projected
* Locative phrases/adverbs (e.g. on the wall, above), verbs of placing and verbs of movement
* Verbs of motion and locations (stand 2x, turn 2x, sit, rise, go down, draw/meet [change of position]), with the effect of generating a written text that enacts the speech gestures of a person. The Duke and the count’s emissary are interacting dynamically, rather than being statically described
* Time: now, the dramatic ‘now’ of a wife-murdering Duke (adverb that encapsulates the effects of previous actions, the results of some past plot)
* Juxtaposition of time: present/past and possible threat to the future wife - Last: previous
* High density of personal pronouns: I (19 times), you (to the messenger or a generalized you), we (the duke and the messenger), she (the late wife) – sensation of a face-to-face discourse between persons
* Dramatic tone: speech acts, neutrality of statements and narrative report
* Use of questions and exclamations
* The Duke’s acts of speech/power expressed by verb phrases: I call / I said / I repeat / I gave commands
* Vocal gestures (deviant from a written text) dramatize the Duke’s character: authoritarian, tyrannical and self-centred

A Dramatic monologue:

* three elements: an occasion, a speaker, and a hearer
* all words are intended to be heard (by an implied auditor)
* we hear one (male) voice

Rather than ‘narrative’, the poem is closer to the body of a verse drama (e.g. Shakespeare) thanks to scansion and diction:

* voice/persona in the poem
* two types of verse: lyric and drama
* the poem talks about/describes a woman but never actually quotes the woman
* psychograph: a text which reveals the inner workings of a single character’s psychology, values, tastes, and motivations

The title

* might suggest a comparative rather an exclusive designation, as would ‘late’
* reflects that the woman was ultimately more a ‘public’ Duchess than a ‘private’ wife

The portrait and art

* the Duke has ‘commodified’ the Duchess into a painting made by a certified master to which the Duke himself controls the access
* the statue of Neptune might reveal the projection of the Duke as dominating what is beautiful, delicate, feminine and natural
* ‘cast in bronze’ this would be unnecessary in real conversation and so it might refer to the artificial and textual nature of this one-sided dialogue

‘I call’ …

* A parody of the opening of Genesis (naming)
* The Duke implies that he likes more objects of art than he does the rights of the others
* The Duke plays the role of the aristocratic patron in Renaissance Italy (schema)