

## Elements of Crime: My Last Duchess (1842) Robert Browning

As part of your A Level English Literature course you will need to analyse elements of crime that are presented in the work of three poets and how meanings are created. This is very similar to the analytical work you have already completed in the GCSE Power and Conflict anthology, where you studied a range of poems and wrote about ways power and conflict were presented.

One of the A'Level set texts from Robert Browning should be very familiar to you! There is a blank copy of MLD to use if you prefer, or, feel free to use your already annotated text from the Power and Conflict anthology. However, if you are using your pre-annotated copy, please note that you are now reading this with a focus on elements of crime.

In crime texts, a significant crime drives the narrative. All our poems in this anthology contain narratives which focus on transgressions (violations) against established order and the specific breaking of either national, social, religious or moral laws. Your task is to reread the poem from a 'crime' perspective and consider these transgressions:

1. Reread the poem
2. Create a crime factfile: what crime has been committed, who was the victim, who was the criminal, what was the motive? (be careful with the criminal, the Duke didn't actually do the dirty work himself ... remember "I gave commands"!)
3. Now focus on the Duke himself. Although he did not carry out the crime with his own hands, he is still the criminal here, and his motive is very much bound up with his ego. What 5 words would you use to describe the Duke?
4. The Duke's use of the pronouns "me/my" is rather revealing. Find at least 3 places in the poem where the pronoun is particularly significant. Explain your choices and what they reveal about the Duke and his ego.
5. Like many characters in crime texts, there is a huge ego at work here. Sometimes it is the detective with the ego, sometimes the criminal, and sometimes both criminal and detective which can lead to an interesting battle of wits. In this text, however, the Duke gets away with his crime because of his power and status, but Browning makes it very clear that the Duke is vain. Can you find examples of his vanity in the poem? (Clue: the type of poem really helps here – remember it is a dramatic **monologue**, 2<sup>nd</sup> clue: artwork)
6. Browning really gets us thinking about the Duke's abuse of power and how he can (quite literally) get away with murder. He is a high-status character who comes from a long line of aristocrats, so his wealth and privilege afford him some kind of immunity against punishment. How does this make you feel? What do you think Browning's intentions were on this point? What lessons are learned (if any)? How has society been affected by the crime?
7. Last thinking point ... and this is really open to debate! Some critics have said that the Duke could be described as 'monstrous yet charming'. Do you think there is anything that is wickedly attractive about this character? Write a list of for/against points on this idea and see where your ideas take you ... you might be surprised!

If you need a bit of help to get you back into reading literary texts/criticism, there is an interesting analysis here:

<https://acasestudy.com/character-analysis-of-the-duke-in-my-last-duchess/>