



Gender Expectations and Power Constellations in Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*

Regina Mannle

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Essay from the year 2006 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Linguistics, grade: 1,0, University of Freiburg (Englisches Seminar), course: Proseminar, language: English, abstract: The situation does not seem to be particularly exciting at all: A wealthy and civilised Renaissance duke chatting harmlessly with the envoy of a count whose daughter he is planning to marry. Before the two men start to discuss the financial details of the marriage, the duke tries to show his best side and presents himself as an art-loving and generous nobleman. But the story takes a chilling turn: While the host and his guest look at the portrait of the last duchess, the duke makes some remarks that suggest he may have murdered his wife. On the surface, "My Last Duchess" seems to be a startling and entertaining mystery story, but considering the society and the environment that shaped the author, one cannot shake off the feeling that this poem is more than a story about a long-deceased Renaissance nobleman and his recalcitrant and disobedient wife. The poem touches some issues that were prevailing in the Victorian era and were of high interest to Browning's contemporaries: morality, gender expectations and power relations.

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