

What Victorian qualities are found in "My Last Duchess"?

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Robert Browning's (1812-1889) poem *My Last Duchess* shows many Victorian qualities. The Duke speaks with a man about his dead wife. Through his words, we learn how people thought during the Victorian period. The poem shows pride, male control, love for wealth, and emotional repression.

Pride in Noble Birth: The Duke is proud of his noble family. He says he gave the Duchess his "nine-hundred-year-old name." This shows that he values family status a lot. In Victorian society, people respected old and rich families. The Duke thinks his name is more important than love.

Male Power and Control Over Women: The Duke also wants full control over his wife. He feels angry because she smiled at other people. She enjoyed simple things like cherries and sunsets. But the Duke did not like this. He wanted her to smile only at him. This shows the Victorian idea that men ruled over women. The Duke believed he had power over her life. As he says:

"I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together."

This proves that the Duke is a cruel murderer. He thinks women are objects to possess and dominate.

Love for Art and Possessions: The Duke is also very materialistic. He shows the guest the portrait of his wife. He talks more about the painting than her real life. He also shows off a statue of Neptune. These artworks show his love for expensive things. Victorians often cared a lot about money, art, and property.

Repression of Emotion: The Duke never shared his feelings with the Duchess. He did not talk to her about his problems. He kept everything inside and gave secret “commands.” After that, her smiles “stopped,” which means she likely died. This shows the Victorian habit of hiding emotions. People were strict and did not express feelings openly.

In short, the poem reflects key Victorian values. These include pride in family name, male dominance, materialism, and emotional control. Through the Duke’s voice, Browning shows the dark side of power in Victorian society.