EXAM STASH

POWER & CONFLICT POETRY

MY LAST DUCHESS

ROBERT BROWNING

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE



CONTROL | JEALOUSY | STATUS

WHAT HAPPENS?

A Duke displays a portrait while revealing a disturbing need for control.

THE BIG IDEA

The Duke's attempt to control a woman's image exposes his own possessiveness.

POEM BREAKDOWN

Three stages, in one poem

1. Showing the portrait – the Duke controls access and sets the tone.
2. Recalling her conduct – he explains her behaviour as an offence.
3. Commands and next marriage – he reveals her silencing and turns to a new arrangement.

4 KEY QUOTATIONS

'That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,'	**Method:** Possessive determiner	**Key word:** 'my' **Effect:** The introduction presents a relationship through ownership.
'My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name'	**Method:** Status imagery	**Key word:** 'nine-hundred-years-old' **Effect:** Inherited rank becomes his measure of personal value.
'I gave commands;'	**Method:** Euphemistic statement	**Key word:** 'commands' **Effect:** He withholds details while implying devastating authority.
'Taming a sea-horse,'	**Method:** Symbolic artwork	**Key word:** 'sea-horse' **Effect:** The closing sculpture echoes his wish to dominate living beings.

FORM & STRUCTURE

- A dramatic monologue in rhyming pentameter couplets creates a polished, controlled voice, reflecting the Duke's power.
- **Enjambment** carries his speech forward, making his control feel smooth and believable, while also hinting at the tension beneath the surface.

CONTEXT

- Browning places the speaker in Renaissance Ferrara.
- Aristocratic marriage, inheritance and patronage shape the negotiation.

COMPARE IT WITH...

- **Ozymandias:** pride and power.
- **Checking Out Me History:** control over a person's story.

STORY DEVELOPMENT



THE STAGES

- Showing the portrait
- Recalling her conduct
- Commands and next marriage

THE PACE

Measured and controlled, with smooth, confiding flow.

THE SPEAKER

The Duke, a powerful aristocrat speaking directly to a visitor during a marriage negotiation.

THE TONES

Polished and proprietorial; jealous and self-justifying; menacingly casual.

CHANGE IN FEELINGS

From confident display, to defensive jealousy, to chilling control as he moves on to another marriage.

RECALL QUESTION: *What does the Duke reveal that he may not intend to reveal?*