

Sample 1

Suzie Sample

Mrs. Douglas

AP Literature

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Destructive Love

Love's connotation widely involves the feelings of happiness and elation. However, literature can show that love has a dual nature. When it is engaged in a healthy way, love can bring about the wonderful sensations that are commonly associated with it. When abused, it is capable of causing cruel and ruinous behavior. Throughout the works "My Last Duchess," *The Great Gatsby*, and *Wuthering Heights*, the idea of love as a solely positive sentiment is challenged, instead being presented as a destructive force that can ruin the lives of those who experience it. Negative love can manifest itself in several different forms in the lives of the characters who mishandle it. They can open themselves up to manipulation, become obsessive, or begin to lash out at the other people in their lives. Through this process, they learn that love can have consequences if not approached with careful consideration.

In Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess," the murderous Duke sees love as an excuse for total possession and a method of convincing others of his self-proclaimed worth. The Duke takes advantage of the women he has access to, seeing their love as an adequate reason to exercise full control over them. If he is incapable of doing so, or, in his eyes, they don't love him enough to submit to his will, he feels fully justified in doing whatever necessary to make them completely pliable to his commands. The Duke's propensity towards violence as a means to achieve full possession is displayed in the implied murder of his first wife, when he says "I gave commands;/ Then all smiles stopped together." (Browning 1105) Once dead, the only remaining

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Comment [LWD2]: together (Browning 1105).
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Sample 2

fragment of the Last Duchess is her painting, which the Duke is able to possess fully and manipulate through the ways he presents and explains the painting. (Dupras 7) In portrait form, hidden behind a curtain, the Duchess is more worthy of his affections because he is able to enjoy her beauty, exploit her flaws, and control who she is exposed to simultaneously. (8) He explains the painting in a way which presents himself as the victim of a philandering wife. The Duchess has been reduced to a painting, so she has no ability to influence how her story is told or defend herself. Even her backstory is owned by the Duke. (Starzyk 697) The theme of wanting to possess the women who are expected to love him is perpetuated when he expresses his intent to marry the Count's daughter, saying "Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed/ At starting, is my object." (Browning 1106) There is an implication that his goal is not just to marry the daughter, but to make her his "object" in a way which he failed to do with the first Duchess when she was alive. (Starzyk 697)

The Duke's view of women as possessions also leads him to treat them and their love as currency and markers of his own value. He makes sure to mention the name of the artist who painted the Last Duchess, Frá Pandolf, when exposing the portrait to the Envoy. In order to impress his own wealth, style, and influence upon his guests, the Duke mentions an artist who he believes to be well-known and prestigious. (Dupras 8) He also stresses the beauty of the painting, describing "The depth and passion of its earnest glance." (Browning 1105) As he later goes on to criticize his late wife, it becomes clear that he sees the painting of the Duchess as more valuable than she was in life. (Dupras 6) By having Frá Pandolf portray the Duchess, who the Duke saw as flawed in life, in a physically perfect way, the Duke now has a painting which indicates his wealth to his guests and elevates his status by displaying the type of beauty he attracted.

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Comment [LWD5]: Is she?

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Sample 3

When the Duchess was alive, however, he believed that he deserved all her love and affection in exchange for the prestige he bestowed upon her by marrying her. He says “She thanked men—good! but thanked/ Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked/ My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name/ With anybody’s gift.” (Browning 1105) He truly sees an immaterial name alone as equal to, or even above, love. She has to dedicate all her emotions to being loving and grateful towards him because of this “gift.” He, however, feels as if he has bypassed the obligation to show her reciprocal care and affection because of the almost physical worth he feels his family name has. (Starzyk 697) By simplifying himself to a noteworthy family name, it becomes easier to understand how the Duke views his own worth and why he feels the need to amass people and objects to add value to his identity.

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