

Porphyria's Lover

BY ROBERT BROWNING

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

YOU MUST PUT YOUR ANSWERS ON ANOTHER SHEET OF PAPER.

Answer the following questions as you read the poem. These questions are designed to walk you through the poem as we would do in class.

1. This poem opens like a typical “romantic” poem with nature running wild. How is nature shown in the beginning of the poem?
2. The poem is a dramatic monologue. Name three features of this type of poetry.
3. What mood is the speaker in at the start of the poem? How do we know?
4. What selfless act does Porphyria perform before taking off her wet clothes?
5. Porphyria is the speaker's lover. What effect does she have on the atmosphere of the cottage when she enters it?
6. We know how the Victorian society view extramarital sexual relationships. What evidence in the poem suggests this is a sexual relationship?
7. Why do you think that the speaker doesn't actually converse with Porphyria and how does this affect your opinion of him?
8. Is there anything that suggests that Porphyria has overcome society's prejudices to be with him?
9. What does the speaker decide that Porphyria feels for him at that moment?
10. What do you think that the speaker might fear will happen in the future? Is there evidence to support this in the poem?
11. What does he decide to do?
12. What is the most grotesque part of the murder, in your opinion?
13. How does he try to deflect criticism for what he has done?
14. What is the simile that he uses to describe the moment of strangulation? How effective is the simile?
15. Critics are divided about why the speaker decides to murder Porphyria. Which suggestion below do you believe is correct? Find evidence to support your choice.
 - a. The speaker in the poem murders his lover in an attempt to preserve the perfect moment.
 - b. He kills her because they are from different classes and he cannot bear to be apart from her.
 - c. She is suffering from an incurable disease and the speaker kills her out of kindness so that she doesn't have to suffer anymore.
16. What two things does he do with the body once she is dead?
17. Find two descriptions of Porphyria after death which are ironic.
18. What does the speaker suggest was Porphyria's darling wish all along?
19. What guilt if any does the speaker feel for what he has done?

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Task One: Consider the following sequence of events. Then answer the questions that follow.

- A man thinks that because his lover is of a higher class, she would never commit to him. Her family would frown upon him, and their relationship, because of his background.
- On a stormy night, the woman visits the man.
- The man's cottage is cold, so she makes a fire to warm it and goes over to sit by her lover.
- She tells him she loves him and moves closer to him.
 1. Who do you think has the power in this relationship?
 2. How do you know he/she has the power?
 3. What does it mean to have power in any relationship?
 4. Is having power in any relationship a good or a bad thing?

Task Two: Look at the words in italics below. For each number- explain how this excerpt from the poem links to the idea of power.

<p>#5 — she Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour, To set its struggling passion free From pride, and vainer ties dissever, And give herself to me for ever.</p>	<p>#6 The rain set early in to-night, The sullen wind was soon awake, It tore the elm-tops down for spite, And did its worst to vex the lake: I listened with heart fit to break.</p>
<p>#7 She shut the cold out and the storm, And kneeled and made the cheerless grate Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;</p>	<p>#8 She put my arm about her waist, And made her smooth white shoulder bare, And all her yellow hair displaced, And, stooping, made my cheek lie there, And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, Murmuring how she loved me</p>

Task Three: Consider the following sequence of events. Then answer the questions that follow.

- The man looks adoringly at the woman; she seems to worship him.
- The man is surprised at this. Now that he thinks she belongs to him completely, against his expectations, he decides to keep her forever.
- The man uses her long hair to strangle her. He doesn't think it hurt her.
- He moves her dead body back into its propped position against his shoulder and takes pride and pleasure that both her apparent desire and his has been fulfilled.
 9. Who do you think has the power in this relationship now?
 10. How do you know that they have the power?
 11. What does it mean to have power in THIS relationship?
 12. Is having power in this relationship a good or a bad thing?

Task Four: Look at the words in italics below. For each number- explain how this excerpt from the poem links to the idea of power.

<p>#13. Be sure I looked up at her eyes Happy and proud; at last I knew Porphyria worshipped me;</p>	<p>#14 surprise Made my heart swell, and still it grew While I debated what to do. That moment she was mine, mine,</p>
<p>#15 I found A thing to do, and all her hair In one long yellow string I wound Three times her little throat around, And strangled her. No pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain.</p>	<p>#16 I propped her head up as before, Only, this time my shoulder bore Her head, which droops upon it still: The smiling rosy little head, So glad it has its utmost will, That all it scorned at once is fled, And I, its love, am gained instead!</p>