

Porphyria's Lover

Context	Quotation	Analysis
<p>The poem begins with an isolated cabin in the middle of a storm. Browning's word choice describes the weather in detail for the reader.</p> <p>The speaker sits alone in the cold and dark of the cabin. He awaits the arrival of Porphyria and nothing else. This suggests his obsessive feelings towards her.</p>	<p>Words such as, "sullen," "tore," "spite," and "vex," ...</p> <p>"I listened with heart fit to break."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Browning uses pathetic fallacy, using the storm to represent the speaker's inner turmoil and temper. ♥ The words used all have negative, violent connotations, clearly suggesting the speaker's emotional unrest and his propensity for violence.
<p>When Porphyria enters she has a profound effect on the mood of the speaker. His emotions are again expressed through the light and the warmth Porphyria has created in the room.</p>	<p>"And kneeled and made the cheerless grate / Blaze up"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The desperation the speaker feels to see Porphyria is clear here. He seems restless and anxious as he awaits her return and can do nothing but sit and wait for her. This suggests his obsessive feelings for Porphyria as his life completely revolves around her.
<p>Having come to the cabin through a storm, Porphyria proceeds to remove her cold and wet clothes. The speaker watches her every move and becomes displeased when he feels that she is ignoring him.</p>	<p>"And, last, she sat down by my side / And called me"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Browning's word choice clearly demonstrates the change in mood Porphyria brings to the speaker, changing his stormy and cold demeanour to warmer feelings. ♥ The phrase, "Blaze up," is symbolic of their passionate relationship and the personification of the "cheerless grate" clearly reveals how unhappy he is when she is not there. ♥ However, this positive change in the speaker's mood once again highlights his obsession for Porphyria as he is only happy when he is with her.
<p>Having come to the cabin through a storm, Porphyria proceeds to remove her cold and wet clothes. The speaker watches her every move and becomes displeased when he feels that she is ignoring him.</p>	<p>"And, last, she sat down by my side / And called me"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The repetitive structure of the list of things Porphyria does when she enters the cabin culminates in her going to the speaker. ♥ However, the separation of the word "last" suggests that the speaker feels she has deliberately been ignoring him and he is her last priority. ♥ He does not respond to her call and it appears that she begins to take control by physically manoeuvring him and suggestively baring her shoulder. However, he is exerting power over her, making her come to him by being silent and moody.

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<p>The dramatic monologue form of the poem allows the reader insight into the thoughts, feelings and insecurities of the speaker. As Porphyria continues to try to engage the speaker, the word choice used suggests that he doubts her commitment to the relationship.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"Murmuring how she loved me"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The word "murmuring" suggests that the speaker feels she is not as committed to him as he is to her. "Murmuring," suggests that she mumbled or did not say it clearly suggesting to the speaker that she does not fully mean what she is saying. ♥ However, the dramatic monologue form of the poem makes the meaning of the word ambiguous. Her actions so far - probably sneaking away from her other engagement, coming through a storm to meet him, and offering herself sexually to him - all suggest she is fully committed. Therefore the word takes on a more sinister meaning as his obsession for her is growing into something more.
<p>The speaker debates Porphyria's commitment to him, concluding that her perception how she appears in society is keeping them from being together. His obsession for her is becoming a need to possess her.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"And give herself to me forever"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Browning's word choice clearly indicates the subtle change in the attitude of the speaker, from his obsession and desire to be with her to the much more sinister need to possess her. ♥ The use of the phrase "give herself" subtly highlights the speaker's feelings of inadequacy and emasculation. He lacks control in the relationship as Porphyria is from a higher social class than he is. By surrendering herself to him, he feels he would be able to secure the power in the relationship and control her. ♥ The finality of the word "forever" is a startling suggestion to the violent ends the speaker will go to in order to possess Porphyria.
<p>The speaker looks into Porphyria's eyes and believes he sees a look of pure and unrestrained love; exactly what he has wished for all along. However, the form of the poem and the positioning of the characters suggest he may be seeing what he wants to see.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"At last I knew / Porphyria worshiped me"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Again, the dramatic monologue form makes these lines ambiguous, as it is only the speaker's opinion the reader hears. However, our knowledge of the relationship suggests that it would be the speaker that would 'worship' Porphyria, and not the other way around. ♥ This is further supported by the position of the characters and the speaker's attitude to Porphyria. Throughout the poem his obsession for her has been clear and at this moment, he is 'looking up' at the angelic figure of Porphyria, a clear image of worship. ♥ It appears that the speaker's desire to possess Porphyria is taking over, and this impression of being "worshipped" motivates him to act.

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<p>The speaker, believing that Porphyria now worships him, begins to see her as a possession. Browning uses word choice and repetition to express the speaker's delusion about their situation.</p>	<p>"That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The repetition of "mine, mine" emphasises how important it is to the speaker for him to feel like Porphyria belongs to him. He has felt throughout that he lacks control in the relationship due to his inferior social status but has now convinced himself that he possesses Porphyria. ♥ The choice of words like, "fair," "Perfectly pure," and "good" all have connotations reverence, further suggesting the speaker's worship of her. However, they also strengthen the idea that the speaker is deluded, as these are not the words Victorian society would use to describe an adulteress such as Porphyria.
<p>The speaker finally has what he has wanted all along - to be loved unreservedly by Porphyria. He feels he must preserve this feeling and the only way he is able to do it is to kill her. Browning uses a number of devices to ensure that murder is a shocking development for the reader.</p>	<p>"In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around / And strangled her."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The repetitive rhyme and meter of the poem lulls the reader into a false sense of security. The playful rhyme here is in stark contrast to the sinister and brutal action taking place. ♥ Browning uses inversion powerfully to delay the realisation for the reader of what is going on. The fact that Porphyria's throat - the object the speaker is wrapping her hair around - is put at the end of the sentence powerfully shocks the reader with something unexpected. ♥ The use of enjambment, putting "And strangled her" onto the next line delivers the final shocking blow to the unsuspecting reader. The way this heinous act is so simply stated by the speaker confirms for the reader that he has been driven to insanity by his obsessive love for Porphyria.
<p>After committing the murder, the speaker begins to justify his actions and, in his warped view of events, believe that he has set Porphyria free from the restrictions of society that kept her from being with him.</p>	<p>"No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The speaker first justifies his actions by deluding himself into believing that he did not cause her any pain. The repetition of the phrase "no pain" justifies the act for the speaker; as if he has caused no pain he has done nothing wrong. His insanity continues to grow even after he has killed Porphyria. ♥ In addition, he goes on to convince himself that he has done the right thing, describing her physical reactions when he loosens her hair from around her neck. He mistakenly reads these reactions as signs of life, suggesting he feels he has given her new life, freeing her from the strict rules of Victorian society.

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<p>As the poem nears its conclusion, a reversal of roles from earlier in the poem is clearly seen. At this point, the speaker moves Porphyria's body into position just as she had earlier. In this way, the speaker asserts the power and control over Porphyria he desired from the start.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"Only, this time my shoulder bore / Her head"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ This is an exact reversal of the image created earlier in the poem where Porphyria put the speaker's head on her shoulder. He viewed that earlier act as one of power and control by Porphyria which highlighted his insecurities about his role in the relationship. ♥ However, in his eyes, he has become the dominant member of the relationship and places her head on his shoulder, physically expressing the social image of the dominant male figure in the relationship. ♥ In addition, it is a further sign of the speaker's need to control and possess Porphyria.
<p>The way the speaker views Porphyria changes late in the poem, confirming to the reader his insanity as he refers to her purely as an object, something to be possessed.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"That all it scorned at once is fled / And I, its love, am gained instead!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Porphyria has become a mere object in the eyes of the speaker. He refers to her head alone, as if it is something separate from her body. ♥ The use of the pronoun "it" to describe Porphyria is extremely impersonal and is further proof of the speaker objectifying Porphyria. She is no longer the subject of his obsession or worship; instead that obsession led him to want to possess her forever. ♥ Furthermore, this is another example of the change in roles for the characters. At the beginning of the poem the speaker referred to himself only through his relationship to Porphyria. The differing use of pronouns clearly shows that she is now defined through him.
<p>The poem ends with an emphatic statement by the speaker challenging God to judge him for his actions. In the twisted eyes of the speaker, the fact that God has not judged him is further evidence that he has done nothing wrong.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"And yet God has not said a word!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ The use of the exclamation mark here to finish the poem demonstrates the total and unwavering belief of the speaker that he has done the right thing. He views the fact that he has not been judged yet by God as the final justification for his actions. ♥ There is a defiant tone to this final statement, the speaker clearly challenging the reader about their beliefs of right and wrong. ♥ Browning wanted to challenge his Victorian reader to judge who was more in the wrong – the upper-class adulteress or her insane lover who murders her. The ambiguity of the poems closing line is clearly designed to challenge the reader to make that decision.

You will of course have more notes on your annotated copy of the poem and your own analysis of these quotations. You should use all of these resources to build a complete understanding of the poem.