

Porphyria's Lover

'Porphyria's Lover', by Robert Browning, is a poem in which the speaker's personality is gradually revealed. The poem is about a character who has a difficult relationship with the woman he loves because she is unable to love him fully. When he realises she really does love him his reaction is surprising, disturbing and bizarrely understandable. Throughout the poem aspects of the character gradually emerge through the content and language used.

At the start of the poem we get the impression that the character is angry and vengeful. One way this is created is through the word choice in the first five lines which combine to create an effect of pathetic fallacy. The word 'sullen' suggests a dark and frustrated mood; when someone is described as sullen it often means they are holding a grudge or feeling mutinous which becomes clear in this character as the poem progresses.

Another word which gives the reader an idea of the writer's personality initially is the word 'tore'. This action has connotations of violence and shows how angry and impassioned the character is.

Later in the poem we get a clearer idea of the direction of the character's anger and the reasons for this negative feeling. In line 21 he describes Porphyria as 'too weak' and is very critical of her, indicating his underlying anger. The word 'weak' suggest he is dissatisfied with her and thinks her pathetic. He also describes her love for him as 'struggling' which implies it is not strong or constant but is barely surviving - revealing the issues which are evident in their relationship. In addition to this the word 'murmuring' is effectively used to show her declaration of love for him is spoken without earnest or conviction showing he feels his love for her is futile and he is desperate, hence the anger and disappointment seen in his personality at the start of the poem.

The poet then goes on to create the complexity of the character's personality through a clear change in his tone. The character begins to talk about Porphyria very lovingly, describing his feelings as he looks at her as 'happy and proud'. This is a complete turn-about in his mood and the word 'happy' directly contrasts with words such as 'sullen' that have previously described his personality. 'Proud' suggests he feels in some way to credit for the merits of her personality or looks and is quite possessive - a character trait which becomes clear later in the poem through the repetition in 'mine, mine' which shows his controlling nature. Porphyria's lover also describes her as 'perfectly pure and good', this shows that now she has completely given herself to him she is no longer flawed in his eyes. He now appreciates her love and is contentedly happy. The reader can tell that Porphyria's arrival to the cottage is the cause of this shift of the character's personality by the way her entrance is described. The word 'glided' suggest a calm and almost ethereal elegance, describing a graceful and smooth movement very different from words such as 'tore' in the third paragraph. The character also says Porphyria's presence 'made the cottage warm', showing that not only did she shut out the cold weather and make the environment physically more comfortable but her being there brings about a positive change in his mood and reveals another level to his character.

Good analysis. Maybe give a bit more context? (How it's the wind).

Again great - but it might be useful to first quote the line/phrase it's in (to give context), then analyse specifically.

Great.

?

rep?

Great job comparing/contrasting.

✓ The character's final act and his attitude to what he has done reveals a shocking and disturbing side to his personality. When he achieves his heart's desire, instead of being content in his happy moment, his mind is calculating. He sat and 'debated what to do', the fact that he feels he needs to do anything shows he thinks very differently from other people. The word 'debated' indicates a two-sided argument; perhaps suggesting he has multiple opinions or voices in his head. The response he decides upon is shocking to us. However the big reveal, 'And strangled her', does not even get a separate line in the poem indicating it is not a big thing to the character. He does not seem to look on death as an end to something or as a tragedy but more of a solution to a problem, showing his psychosis. ✓ Yes!

After Porphyria's death the character tries to maintain his moment of perfection further. He 'propp'd her head up as before', ~~this hints~~ ^{at} his controlling nature. He feels a power over her now - he wants to feel like he is supporting her. His attitude is almost like nothing has changed and everything is 'as before', further degrading the importance of his act. His strange thought processes and psychosis are hinted at earlier in the poem when he says of himself 'no voice replied', giving him a kind of detachment from the moment like he is not all there. This gives us an idea of his strange and slightly creepy personality which is revealed more and more as the poem progresses. Finally he says 'God has not said a word!'. This shows he feels justified in his actions and not guilty for killing someone he loved, adding to his complex and disturbing character which the poet creates. ✓

Great. These help keep things tightly task-related.

Through the poem the reader gradually becomes aware of aspects of the narrator's character which build up a bigger picture of an interesting and unusual personality. At first we see an angry and passionate person who is not content with his lover. However a very different aspect of the narrator's personality is revealed to the reader where we see a loving and tender man who is deeply happy and surprised to have earned Porphyria's love. With the character's response to achieving his moment of perfection we finally see his true nature which is almost inhuman in its disregard for the value of life and startlingly understandable in its logic and reasoning. This complex personality is effectively created by Browning in the language techniques and content throughout. ✓

Exactly 1000 words =)

This is freakin' good!

You're focused on the question/task throughout, and you're analysing your evidence relevantly.

Choose a poem that is written in a particular poetic form or which has a particularly effective structure. Discuss how the poet's use of form or structure contributes to the impact of the poem's central concern(s)

Porphyria's Lover

A very effective use of poetic form can be found in Robert Browning's poem 'Porphyria's Lover'. Porphyria's Lover is a dramatic monologue; in a dramatic monologue there is a speaker who is speaking directly to an audience/person who is not the reader. As a dramatic monologue goes on the speaker slowly reveals flaws in his personality, the speaker does not realise they are giving away dark aspects to the personality and the reader becomes increasingly shocked/concerned. Browning's poem fits into the form of a dramatic monologue as there is a speaker who is not speaking to the reader and as the story goes on the speaker begins to reveal darkness to his personality without realising it.

The rain set early in tonight,
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.

This is the first stanza of the poem, for the rest of the poem each stanza follows the same rhyme scheme where each line goes ABABB. This rhyme scheme doesn't follow the conventional rhyming standards where it would go ABAB, or AABB where each two lines are in couplets. The rhyme scheme Browning has used in Porphyria's Lover is very unique however this uniqueness adds to how odd the poem sounds when read out. This could be to emphasise the speaker's persona because as the poem progresses we discover he himself is very odd. The poem is written in iambic tetrameter, which means there are 8 syllables in each line, and there is emphasis on every second word. However in the last line in the first stanza this pattern is broken as there is emphasis on the word heart when it should not be and there is also emphasis on the word break. This could be to bring our attention to the fact that the speaker is unwell and he is soon going to break, whether this will be emotional or physical it is unclear.

The weather is described as awaking, vexing and spiteful. The personification of the weather leads us to believe it is a metaphor for how the speaker is feeling. The speaker is sitting by himself in a cold dark cottage we assume to be in the woods (as there is mention of trees and a lake) when Porphyria "glides" in and lights the fire. The word glides gives the reader the image of something that is elegant and majestic. Porphyria entering the cottage and lighting the fire is a symbolic act for how she brings warmth and light into the speaker's life. We can also tell that Porphyria is an established woman as not only her name is posh but also we are told she is wearing a cloak and a shawl. This could be to show the reader that Porphyria may be a higher class than the speaker. After she lights the fire she walks to the speaker and puts his hand about her waist and places his head on her shoulder. "And stooping made my cheek lie there" the use of the word stooping shows us that she is taller than him as she has to bend her head

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Comment [1]: This is good but should be introduced, even if it just says 'The opens with a description of the storm!'

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Comment [2]: This is ideal, try to put it in all poetry essays. Here you have explained a lot of the 'structure' of the poem. You have analysed the rhyme scheme and the meter (or rhythm) of the poem. This candidate also has not just shown knowledge of the text, but related that knowledge effectively to the Question. Because they have stated clearly that a flawed character is central to this poetic form, every time they show how the Speaker is flawed they are answering the question.

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Comment [3]: Should be in quote marks.

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Comment [4]: Could go on to explain that it is based on the Latin for Purple, a colour with Royal connotations.

down to reach his. This adds to the image of her being a higher class than he is as it gives an image of her being above him. As he is lying on her shoulder the speaker says that she is struggling to set her passions free which we take to mean that she wishes to be with him but she can't as something is holding her back. At this point we are unsure what that is. "From pride, and vainer ties dissever". "Vainer ties" could be a reference to a marriage, as there is a phrase that when you are married you are tied together.

At the end of the stanza he says "and give herself to me forever" from this sentence we begin to see the flaws in the speaker as he is talking about this woman as if she were his possession, as if her sole purpose was for the benefit of him. Another example of this happening is when he looks up into her eyes and says, "Porphyria worshipped me" which again shows he does not care for her as a person but only cares about what she does for him. The word "worshipped" is a word often used when speaking about a religion, people worshipping a higher power. When people worship a god they don't expect the god to love them back in the same way. The use of this word by the speaker shows us he doesn't think of Porphyria as an equal lover, he thinks of her as someone who needs him and would do anything for him. The speaker does not mean to reveal this flaws to us, as he does not know he has any - this fits in to the conventions of a dramatic monologue. Then he takes her hair and strangles her. "And strangled her. No pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain" The second line breaks the rhythm scheme again. This mostly only happens when the speaker is talking about himself. The breaking of the rhyme scheme only when he speaks about himself could be a metaphor for how he is mentally broken and ill.

When Porphyria first entered the cottage she was doing all the actions such as putting his hand on her and when she spoke he did not reply. Now as we've come to discover how mental the guy is he is the one doing all the actions. He strangles her with her own hair, opens her eyes up once she's dead, kisses her on the cheek and then sets her head to be laying on his shoulder. "Burning kiss". Cattle used to be fire branded where a piece of metal would be put in the fire and then put onto the cattle so they would have a permanent mark on them. The speaker gives Porphyria a burning kiss, which could symbolise him branding her as his. The fact that he is now doing actions shows us that he has calmed down and become more comfortable now that he has killed Porphyria. He thinks that he has done her a favour, as her "utmost will" was to be with him. There is a huge gap between what the speaker thinks he is telling us and what we are actually hearing. The perspectives are so different as he still thinks he is in the right and has done her a huge favour yet we only see him as a mentally ill murderer.

An ambiguity is something that has the quality to being open to more than one interpretation. At the end of the poem one Porphyria is dead and her dead head is resting on the speakers shoulder with her open eyes he says "And all night long we have not stirred, And yet God has not said a word!"

This meaning in the last line is ambiguous in the way that we are not sure what he means. Whether he is surprised that god has not yet said a word as he thinks he should be congratulated for killing her and giving her what she always

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Comment [5]: This is a great piece of analysis, the candidate goes beyond just explaining what the quotes show (which is an important part of an essay) but hit's the deeper idea that is key to what makes a Dramatic Monologue work is the divergence between what the Speaker thinks they are telling us and what we hear. This gets to the crux of the question and shows real understanding of the text.

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Comment [6]: Bit informal and could be expressed better. Hint: your going to need a lot of ways of saying the Speaker is crazy (<http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/crazy?s-t>)

wanted – to be with him forever or if he means that he is surprised that he has not been told off from god as he a just murdered a human being. The form of Robert Browning's poem is mostly consistent with the form of a dramatic monologue. The only inconsistency is that the reader is not one hundred per cent certain on whom the speaker is taking to. At the end we come to realise that he has been sitting in the cottage with her laying on him while she's been dead for at least a few hours. This leads us to believe that he may be speaking to himself as there is no one else there that we know of. If this is the case then it only adds to our proof that he is mentally insane. The form of the poem is very effective as it correlates to the content of the story as it leaves the reader horrified and the speaker oblivious.

Overall:

This is very good it clearly knows the poem. It analyses a lot of different techniques (Rhyme scheme, meter, word choice, symbolism, imagery, ambiguity) which proves a breadth of knowledge. The only thing it could maybe improve is a little more about the sound (alliteration, sibilance, assonance, use of plosives etc). It has a understanding of the key aspect of a Dramatic Monologue – that the Speaker does not realise he is giving away his faults, and indeed that the reader is building up an completely different concept than he is trying to create. Also, and importantly, because it spends some time defining what a the 'Poetic Form' is in the introduction, it answers the question very well.

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Comment [7]: Excellent, remember that when you state something is ambiguous, you always need to give at least two explanations as to what it might mean.

