

***Porphyria's lover* by Robert Browning**

Overview:

- This poem, told in the form of a **dramatic monologue**, introduces a powerful male voice. It tells the fate of Porphyria, a young woman from the upper classes who isn't prepared to cut ties with her rich family (for the sake of her lower-class lover). This angers the speaker, whose name is never revealed, until he realises that Porphyria worships him (in reality she is trying to stop him from sulking and get him to have sexual intercourse with her) and he can get her to do anything he wants. He exploits this by strangling Porphyria with her own hair and then sitting with her dead body throughout the night.

Structure/Form:

- Written as one long monologue - **no stanzas**. This mimics speech and gives the impression that the speaker does not, and will not, stop talking.
- Lots of **enjambment** also mimics speech and helps the poem to flow.
- **ABABB rhyme scheme** is erratic, which may be used to show the speaker's madness. This is also unusual because Victorians like everything to be **ordered** and "neat" - breaks poetic conventions of the time.
- The speaker's madness is also hinted at in the name *Porphyria*, which is a **rare genetic disease**. One of its symptoms is mental disturbances.
- The use of hyphens and caesura also create a **conversational rhythm** (ironically...).

Context:

- The affair between Porphyria and her lover would have been **forbidden** in the Victorian times. This is because marriages in the upper classes would typically be **arranged** with a man who was of similar status and income.
- The poem implies that Porphyria has been at a party or feast, which were commonly laid on by richer families to help their daughters find a suitor.
- It appears that perhaps Porphyria is teasing her lover by **"practicing"** with him before she enters into an official relationship. This was common amongst high status men but **unheard of** amongst women - this highlights Porphyria's strangeness.
- Additionally it was highly frowned upon for unmarried women to walk around alone (and probably at night, too) without a **chaperone**. This would've been quite shocking in the Victorian times, as well as portraying Porphyria's risk-taking, **unconventional attitude**.
- It is suggested that the speaker is perhaps a **farm-hand, gardener or servant** who lives in an **outbuilding** on Porphyria's family estate.

Language analysis: