Porphyria's Lover

POEM TEXT

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!

SUMMARY

It started raining early tonight. The wind began to howl, breaking the tops of the elm-trees just for fun and disturbing the waters of the lake. I was listening to the storm, thinking my heart was about to break, when Porphyria came in. Right away, she shut the windows to keep out the cold and the wind. She knelt down and lit a blazing fire in the fireplace, making my cottage warm. When she was done with that, she took off her wet cloak and shawl, put down her dirty gloves, untied her hat to let her damp hair fall loose, and, finally, came and sat down next to me and spoke to me. I didn't say anything back, so she put my arm around her waist. Then she brushed her blonde hair off her smooth, white shoulder and laid my cheek on it. Then she spread her hair over my face and her shoulder, whispering that she loved me. Despite how much she wanted to be with me, pride (and other, even sillier, feelings) stood in the way, stopping her from indulging in her desires and letting me possess her forever. But her desire would sometimes get the best of her. And even though she had been at a happy, raucous party earlier in the evening, she couldn't help thinking about me—picturing me wanting to be with her so badly that it made me weak and pale, and all for nothing. So she came in the storm to see me. Don't doubt it: I looked up at her happy, proud eyes, and in that moment I was finally sure of it: Porphyria loved me

completely. Suddenly realizing how much she loved me filled my heart with happiness and pride, and it just kept getting fuller as I tried to figure out what to do next. In that moment she belonged to me, and only me, and she was beautiful, virtuous, and noble. I finally figured out what to do: I gathered her hair into one blonde rope and twisted it around her thin neck three times in order to strangle her. She didn't feel any pain. I'm totally sure she didn't feel any pain. Her eyes were like a flower with its petals closed up around a bee. I cautiously opened up her lids and saw her blue eyes again, looking happy and perfect. I loosened the hair from around her neck. Her cheek was rosy beneath my passionate kiss again. I propped up her head—this time it rested on *my* shoulder. Her little smiling pink face is still there, resting on my shoulder. She's so happy she finally got what she wanted, that all the things she struggled with are gone and that she has won my love instead. She never guessed how I would interpret her single, sweet desire. So we're sitting together and we haven't moved all night. And God hasn't said anything about it!

THEMES

LOVE, VIOLENCE, AND CONTROL

The violent climax of "Porphyria's Lover" comes as a shock: right in the middle of a tender moment, the speaker suddenly decides to strangle Porphyria, the woman he loves. Many scholars have argued that the speaker is mad—in fact, in 1842 the poem was published alongside another of Browning's poems and collectively titled "Madhouse Cells"—but his violence might not be all that random. Instead, it seems he kills Porphyria for a certain set of perverse reasons: he wants to fulfill (what he thinks is) Porphyria's "one wish" to fully surrender herself to him, and to make this loving moment last forever. Told entirely from the vantage point of its twisted speaker, the poem positions love as a form of total submission, and violence as a means of control.

When Porphyria first appears, she is presented as a strong-willed woman—especially for the stodgy Victorian time period in which the poem was written. As soon as she enters the cottage, she shuts out the storm and starts a fire, reshaping the environment in which the speaker exists. And while the speaker is "so pale," she casts off her rain-soaked clothes as though the bad weather doesn't trouble her at all. She even supports the speaker on her shoulder, physically propping him up.

Moreover, her decision to come to the cottage in the first place reflects an independent streak. Though she's been at a "gay feast," she decides to go out in a storm to be with the person she loves. For the speaker this marks a kind of internal triumph: though she's been struggling to balance what her "heart" desires" with her "pride," she has chosen to give into passion, to throw caution to the wind. In other words, she has chosen her own desires over the social punishment that might arise from indulging in them. Especially for a woman in 19th century England—a period in which women's sexuality and ability to engage in public life was tightly controlled—Porphyria is presented as a willful woman with genuine agency.

Once Porphyria gives into her passion, however, her status changes. She stops being an independent person. The speaker describes her as "mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good." The repetition of the word "mine" emphasizes that Porphyria has become a possession, an object—something the speaker owns. And by strangling her, the speaker can keep her in that "pure and good" state.

After Porphyria is dead, she ceases to have the control and agency she displayed earlier in the poem. Instead of opening her eyes, the speaker opens them for her. Instead of supporting the speaker's head on her shoulder, he supports her on *his* shoulder. As a result, she cannot remove herself from his embrace: she is permanently under his control, permanently "mine, mine." By killing Porphyria, the speaker establishes control over her, takes away her agency, and turns her from an active subject into a passive object. And in his twisted mind, he's done the right thing—granted his lover's "one wish" to be with him forever.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-60

SEXUALITY, MORALITY, AND HYPOCRISY

As "Porphyria's Lover" ends, Porphyria (now dead) and the speaker sit all night in their strange embrace. The speaker's power over Porphyria has become absolute and unbending. Yet despite the speaker's violent and disturbing crime, he appears to go unpunished: as he announces triumphantly in the poem's final line, "And yet God has not said a word!"

For the speaker, it seems this silence means that God approves of his decision to murder Porphyria, since doing so forever keeps her "perfectly pure and good." And given the strong sexual undertones of the poem, with its mention of bare shoulders and burning kisses, the speaker is probably thinking specifically of *sexual* purity here. Essentially, the speaker thinks that by murdering Porphyria he prevents her from sinning; by killing Porphyria, the speaker prevents her from straying into sexual acts that might endanger her soul's status with God.

This is clearly a twisted interpretation of morality, but it could be the poem's way of critiquing those who would prioritize restrictive ideas about virtue above actual human life. The speaker assumes that God values purity above all else—so much so that he's willing to allow murder. God's silence suggests to the speaker that he has not only gotten away with murder, but that

he was *justified* in killing in the first place.

Taken in context, the poem might be suggesting the hypocrisy of the early-Victorian society in which Browning lived—a very religious world that seemed to outwardly condemn any inkling of moral deviance, and in which female sexuality was particularly restricted and controlled. Perhaps the poem is saying that an obsession with being "good" has come at the expense of *actually being good*—that is, of appreciating and valuing other people.

On the one hand, the early readers of the poem would likely have condemned Porphyria for embracing her own sexuality. On the other hand, they would have been titillated by the poem's violence and sensationalism. Browning manages to give them what they want: a very sexual, very titillating poem—that also punishes sexual freedom. The speaker's violence thus not only preserves Porphyria's sexual purity, it also preserves the reader's: since the poem punishes her for her sexuality, it gives the reader a kind of plausible deniability. In this way, the Victorian reader is just as hypocritical as the speaker, defending violence because it preserves a narrow notion of sexual purity.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-60

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-5

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.

The first five lines of "Porphyria's Lover" establish the poem's mood and setting. The speaker is in an isolated, rural place. It's rainy and windy, violently so. The wind is churning up big waves on the lake and breaking the tops of the elm trees—and it seems to be doing so on purpose, personified as acting out of "spite," or bitter anger. Note the consonance of the /t/ sounds in line 3: "It tore the elm-tops down for spite." The /t/ sound is harsh and percussive, and it echoes the violence of the wind: one can almost hear the trees cracking. The speaker doesn't seem to be in a good mental place, as he describes himself listening to the wind "with heart fit to break." This all sets the tone for the poem, which will be as violent and disturbing as the storm outside.

The poem's form is also established right up top. It is written in iambic tetrameter, meaning there are four iambs (unstressed-stressed) in each line:

The rain set early in to-night,

The poem's meter starts off strong and regular, and it stays that way. There are relatively few metrical substitutions in the poem—so when they do appear, they are striking and surprising. There's something a little strange about the poem's metrical perfection, and it will become clear soon enough that it reflects the speaker's obsession with control.

The poem follows a rather unusual rhyme scheme, ABABB (it is actually sometimes printed in a series of five-line stanzas to better display this rhyme scheme). Its first few lines look like a common ABAB quatrain, but then there's this extra line tacked on. Once again, it feels like there's something a little off here, something obsessive, in the poem's form: the speaker can't quite let go and move onto the next rhyme. This obsessive, controlling energy is also evident, at least initially, in the poem's use of end-stop: each of the poem's first five lines are end-stopped. (When Porphyria enters in line 6 she disrupts this contained, controlled poetic world.)

LINES 6-9

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;

In line 6, Porphyria suddenly enters the poem—more specifically, she *glides* in, suggesting a certain delicacy to her movement. She has a very unusual name, to say the least. Browning seems to have named her after a disease; "porphyria" causes weakness and fever, and, perhaps most importantly for the poem, delusions and madness. The suggestion seems to be that the speaker himself is suffering from the disease; the poem works through his madness and the violent decisions it leads him to take.

Once Porphyria enters the speaker's "cottage" she goes about warming up the place by closing the windows and making a fire in the hearth. As she enters the poem, Porphyria thus seems a model of femininity as Victorian readers would've understood. She is an "angel in the house"—dedicating herself to making the house a cozy and welcoming place for the men who occupy it. She does not—yet—threaten the ideas about gender that Browning's early readers would've likely held.

Porphyria may make the speaker's cottage more hospitable, but the speaker seems to experience this as a disruption, rather than a welcome kindness. At least, that's one way to interpret the shift in the poem's form that happens in line 6, when Porphyria enters the cottage. The poem follows the same rhyme scheme (ABABB) established in its first five lines. And it keeps up its iambic tetrameter with obsessive regularity. But something important shifts here: the speaker uses enjambment for the first time: in line 6, and then again in line 8. Until line 6, every line in the poem has been end-stopped.

The reader might not notice this at first: the poem moves along pretty smoothly across the end-stops. But when that first

enjambment happens in line 6, it feels disruptive, disorienting. The poem has been so contained and controlled so far, but Porphyria upsets that control. This gives the reader an important hint about her personality: she is powerful and willful. She doesn't accept things the way they are; she transforms them. And as the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the speaker is deeply uncomfortable with this character trait.

LINES 10-15

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.

After Porphyria closes the windows and lights a fire, she takes off her wet clothes. She was out in the storm, either walking or riding a horse to reach the speaker's cottage. But she doesn't seem particularly phased by the violent weather: she is energetic and active despite the cold and her wet clothes. When she's done, she sits down next to the speaker and addresses him; apparently, they don't talk until she's finished with her household chores.

These lines are seemingly straightforward. (Though they do include some neat poetic tricks, like the assonance in line 13: "Her hat and let the damp hair fall." The /a/ sound that runs through the line feels like the water that's dripped through Porphyria's hat and onto her hair). But there are little hints in the lines that something more serious is brewing. Note, for instance, the word "soiled" in line 12. Literally, it just means that Porphyria's gloves are dirty. But it also has a moral sense: it means that someone is sinful or immoral—especially sexually. Using the word, the speaker suggests, intentionally or not, that he has some suspicions about Porphyria. Her gloves become a symbol for her moral state—or, at least, the speaker's interpretation of it. Similarly, the word "fall" in line 13 calls to mind the Biblical Fall, where Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge—and, in doing so, bring sin and death into the world.

These moments foreshadow the violence that eventually erupts in the poem. They are small moments; the tone of the lines is otherwise tender and domestic, even unremarkable. However, there is one more sign that things are a little off, which shows up in the poem's form. The poem maintains its rhyme scheme (ABABB) and its meter, iambic tetrameter, without issue in these lines. But there's a telling and surprising enjambment in line 10. The enjambment crosses between two groups of rhymes, the rhymes in lines 5-10 and the rhymes in lines 11-15.

This breaks a pattern the speaker established before Porphyria entered the poem. At the end of the poem's first group of rhymes, in line 5, the speaker was careful to use an end-stop. This emphasized the order and control he exerted: carefully separating one group of rhymes from the next. But he seems to have lost that control by line 10; the sentence spills from one group of rhymes into the next. The enjambment in line 10 thus suggests that Porphyria continues to be a disruptive presence in his world; she makes it harder for him to control his own poem.

LINES 15-18

When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,

After Porphyria is finished warming up the cottage and taking off her wet clothes, she addresses the speaker. But he doesn't say anything back! There's a caesura in the middle of line 15 instead. It's a powerful caesura: the reader hears, in the pause, the awkward silence as Porphyria waits for a reply—a reply that never comes. Porphyria seems to take this rebuff in stride, though. She sits down next to the speaker, puts his arm around her waist, and tosses her hair aside to reveal her bare shoulder—a series of decidedly bold and provocative moves at the time the poem was written.

The speaker spends a lot of time documenting the mundane details of Porphyria's actions (what she does with her hair for instance). It's not clear, yet, why he's so interested in them. But as the poem progresses, it gradually becomes apparent that he's paying close attention to the power dynamics of their interaction: measuring each movement of her body for signs of her own power and agency in their relationship. He's interested in hair for the same reasons: women's hair is a traditional symbol in love poetry for the seductive power of women's bodies, a power that male poets often both cherish and fear. This supplies another important hint about the poem: it's playing with the traditions of love poetry (and it will continue to do so in strange and disturbing ways as it progresses).

LINES 19-21

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me

In lines 19-21, the speaker continues to meticulously document everything Porphyria does. Now that she's sitting next to him, with his arm around her waist and her shoulder bare, she lays his head on her shoulder and drops her hair over him. Note that *she* makes *him* lie his head on her (exposed!) shoulder, just as *she* put *his* arm around her waist; she is again displaying a sense of agency and control, being a willing participant in these physical flirtations. This would have been rather scandalous at the time!

All the while, she murmurs that she "love[s]" the speaker—an

important and powerful admission, which will shape the speaker's actions in the rest of the poem. In the next several lines, he details how difficult it was for Porphyria to get to this point. However, in these lines the speaker's attention is still on the mundane details of their interaction: the fact that *his* head is on *her* shoulder. And again, he is very interested in her "yellow hair." Indeed, describing it, he repeats himself almost word for word—a parallel construction that underscores his strange (and soon, troubling) obsession with her hair.

These lines continue the poem's formal pattern: they are written in iambic tetrameter, with almost no metrical substitutions, a kind of obsessive regularity.

LINES 21-25

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.

In lines 21, Porphyria admits that she "love[s]" the speaker. In the next several lines, the speaker describes the internal struggles this love has causes. Her "heart" struggles to set its "passion free"; she wants to "give herself to [the speaker] for ever." The enjambments that run through lines 22-24 emphasize the force of this desire, which refuses to hold itself in check, to respect the boundaries society sets for it.

The speaker uses a couple of metaphors to describe this conflict: describing Porphyria's desire as her "heart" and the conflict as a "struggle." Porphyria seems to be physically fighting to break free. And in that sense the metaphor foreshadows the violence to come later in the poem. But she is held back, constrained by "pride, and vainer ties." In other words, she passionately desires the speaker, wants to be with him—but she's held back by the fear that she will be punished socially for giving in to her sexual desires.

These lines give the reader some key context about the relationship between Porphyria and the speaker. They've known each other for a while, and Porphyria has been struggling to decide whether she wants to be with the speaker—a struggle that the speaker understands as a conflict between sexual desire and social norms. Whether Porphyria understands their relationship in these terms is impossible to say: because the poem is a dramatic monologue, the reader only hears the speaker's point of view.

And the speaker evidently likes this version of Porphyria: a version of Porphyria who wants to "give herself" to the speaker "for ever." Note, for instance, a subtle change in the way the poem uses end-stop. Line 25, the line where the speaker imagines Porphyria "giv[ing] herself … for ever" ends with an end-stop that reflects the finality of Porphyria giving herself to the speaker—and letting the speaker gain control over her. From here forward, the speaker will almost always close the poem's rhymes with an end-stopped line, reflecting this obsessive control.

The poem's form thus subtly suggests what the speaker really wants out of his relationship with Porphyria. The independence and agency she displays early in the poem makes him uncomfortable; in her presence, he loses a little bit of control over his poem. He wants to fully possess Porphyria, to control her, to prevent her from upsetting his poem and his world.

LINES 26-30

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.

In lines 21-25, the speaker describes Porphyria's internal conflict: she loves and desires the speaker, but she fears being punished, socially, for her desires. But, as the speaker notes in line 26, sometimes her desire—he calls it "passion"—wins out over her fear. That's what happens on the night of the poem. Although Porphyria was at a "gay feast"—a raucous, happy party—she couldn't help thinking of the speaker, pining for her love. So she came to see him, despite the nasty weather.

The alliteration in these lines emphasize the force of Porphyria's desire. Note the /p/ sound in line 26:

> But passion sometimes would prevail

The alliteration links together the two words, "passion" and prevail—emphasizing the force of Porphyria's desire. The /p/ sound reappears two lines later:

> A sudden thought of one so pale

"Pale" is two lines away from "prevail." But, the two words rhyme, so the reader probably hears the alliteration. This links Porphyria's passion to a particular person. Her passion is directed toward someone specific: the speaker. At this point in the poem, alliteration echoes and reinforces the dynamics of Porphyria's desire. Later in the poem, it will take on different and more sinister functions.

These lines also use two important symbols. First, the "gay feast" is both literal and symbolic: Porphyria probably really was at a party the night the poem takes place. But that party also symbolizes the rich and happy life that Porphyria leads when she is away from the speaker—a life she gives up to be with him. Second, the speaker describes himself as "one so pale." In other words, he is physically ill, drained—and his illness comes from his "love for her." This is a traditional symbol in love poetry; male speakers often use illness and weakness as symbols for their own erotic desires. This is another place where the poem plays with the traditional language of love

poetry.

After the initial disturbance that Porphyria caused in the poem formally, the poem seems to have settled into a more even, regular pattern. These lines are again rhymed ABABB. They alternate between enjambment and end-stop, with enjambments in lines 27 and 28. When the rhymes come to an end in line 30, they end with a firm, definite end-stop. They are written in a smooth, regular iambic tetrameter, obsessively so. The speaker seems to have recovered the control and poise he momentarily lost when Porphyria entered the poem.

LINES 31-35

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.

In lines 31-35, the speaker and Porphyria remain sitting together, embracing. The speaker looks up into Porphyria's eyes; he is happy, proud, and a little surprised to have won her love. It's a very tender moment—a moment of intimacy and closeness between people who love each other, who've finally decided, after doubt and conflict, to act on their feelings. But there are signs in the words the speaker uses that trouble is brewing. For example, he uses the word "worshipped" to describe Porphyria's feelings about him—"Porphyria worshipped me." Whether this is how Porphyria really feels, it tells the reader something important about the speaker: he wants Porphyria to "worship" him. He wants her to treat him as a god, a figure of absolute power and authority. He wants to have that kind of power over her.

The lines end with the speaker debating what to do, now that Porphyria loves him and they are alone together in his cottage. This is the poem's pivot point—the last moment when it feels like a tender, traditional love poem, before it spills over into violence. But if the force of that brewing violence affects the speaker, the poem's form doesn't show it. Indeed, as the poem remains as controlled as ever. It is rhymed ABABB with an end-stop in line 35 closing off this group of rhymes. Its meter remains obsessively controlled and regular. In a first read, there's nothing particularly troubling about this. But on a second read—when one knows what happens next—it seems deeply disturbing that the speaker seems so unperturbed as he prepares to do something so awful.

LINES 36-41

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.

For its first 35 lines, "Porphyria's Lover" seems like a love poem. Sure, there are subtle signs that things are a little off—but they're easy to ignore or miss. But, in lines 36-41, the poem changes dramatically and becomes something much more disturbing and strange. In these lines, the speaker finally figures out what he wants to do with Porphyria now that he's won her love: he decides to strangle her. And he does it in a particularly disturbing way: he takes her own hair and wraps it around her throat three times. This throws a disturbing light on his earlier interest in her hair, in lines 18 and 20; indeed, he uses almost exactly the same language here that he did there, describing it as "one long yellow string." This creates a kind of deferred parallelism, which echoes in the reader's mind and transforms the poem's earlier tenderness into something dark and frightening.

The speaker's decision to strangle Porphyria is sudden and surprising—so much so that many readers have assumed that the speaker is simply crazy (or suffering from the disease, porphyria). The speaker may be mad, but he has definite (albeit warped) reasons for turning to violence. He lays those reasons out in lines 36-37: Porphyria is "mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good." The implication is clear: he kills her in order to keep her that way. He wants to make sure that she remains "pure," and he feels like his violence is justified because it stops her from sinning—at least, that's one reason.

Tellingly, he also wants to make sure that she remains "mine." The repetition of the word—an instance of diacope—suggests to the reader what the speaker *really* cares about. He wants to have ownership and control over Porphyria forever. And the assonant /i/ sound in lines 36-37 emphasizes this desire:

> That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
> Perfectly pure and good: I found

The repeated /i/ sound gives him away: his true focus here is himself, his power—not Porphyria's purity or morals.

In addition to this telling assonance, these lines also contain significant moments of alliteration and consonance, like the alliterative /p/ sound in line 37: "Perfectly pure and good." This the same sound the speaker used in line 26 to mark the power of Porphyria's sexual desire. Here it does just the opposite: it insists that she is untainted by sexuality. The alliteration no longer tells the reader about Porphyria's erotic desire. Instead, it suggests what the speaker thinks about Porphyria's sexuality.

Then, in lines 38-41, the speaker uses a consonant /l/ sound as he describes strangling Porphyria.

> ... and all her hair
> In one long yellow string I wound
> Three times her little throat around,
> And strangled her

The /l/ sound runs across the lines like a snaky rope of sound. The /l/ sounds almost represent Porphyria's hair: the reader feels the hair wrapping around and around, tightening as it does so.

As the speaker describes this shocking and disturbing act of violence, the poem's form remains mostly unaffected. It continues to be rhymed ABBAB and written in obsessively regular iambic tetrameter. But the group of rhymes that ends in line 40 concludes with an ambiguous line: it's technically an end-stop, but it probably feels to most readers like an enjambment, their eyes speeding across the line break to discover what the speaker did to Porphyria. The speaker comes close here to losing control of the poem—but not so close that the poem's form significantly shifts.

LINES 41-45

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.

In lines 41-45, the speaker reflects on his actions and inspects Porphyria's body to see if he's done any damage to her (apart from, you know, murdering her). Between these two moments there is a caesura, right at the heart of line 41. This is a heart-breaking pause: one hears Porphyria's silence in it, her inability to respond.

Then the speaker insists that strangling Porphyria didn't cause her any pain. This is obviously wrong: of course Porphyria felt pain—she was strangled to death with her own hair! Even the speaker seems insecure about this claim: he repeats it twice, using a parallel sentence construction, as if trying to convince himself. Within his parallel construction, however, he uses a chiasmus. In line 41, he uses the words "pain," "felt," and "she" in an *abc* pattern; in line 42, all of those words return, but their order flips, making a *cba* pattern. Once again, this suggests an underlying uncertainty: he is turning over the idea in his head, looking at it from all sides.

After making this claim, the speaker opens up Porphyria's eye. He does so cautiously. He's afraid that what he will find will injure him: using a simile, he compares Porphyria's eye to a bee concealed inside a flower. He's worried her eye will sting him. And more broadly, he's worried that his violence has changed Porphyria permanently. This is a strange concern—after all, he killed Porphyria to take control over her. He wants to have it both ways: to control Porphyria and to preserve her exactly as she was before he killed her. To his relief, he finds in line 44-5, that her eyes are unchanged, they still "laughed … without a stain." The metaphor suggests that the speaker thinks her eyes are just as joyful and lovely as they were before. "Stain" also carries with it connotations of sin, suggesting that in death Porphyria will indeed remain pure.

These lines continue to maintain the poem's form, rhymed ABABB in tight iambic tetrameter; the group of rhymes ends with a firm, definite end-stop in line 45. If the murder has upset or unsettled the speaker, the poem's form shows no hint of that uncertainty.

LINES 46-51

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:

After the speaker opens Porphyria's eye, he unwraps the hair from around her neck and kisses her on the cheek. He notes that her cheek "blushed" under his "burning kiss." (The speaker is being metaphorical: he means that his kiss is full of desire.) Then he props her head on his shoulder and leaves it there.

Like the earlier parts of the poem, these lines are almost mundane—or they would be, if they weren't describing the aftermath of a murder. The speaker is obsessed with little details, small gestures, the position of Porphyria's body and the position of his own. And like the earlier moments in the poem, he attends so closely to these moments because of the power dynamics they contain and reveal. It is striking and significant, for instance, that Porphyria's head ends up resting on the speaker's shoulder. This is an exact reversal of the moment earlier in the poem when Porphyria took the speaker's head on *her* shoulder. Now the speaker is the strong one; now he's in control.

Further, as he lists these details, the speaker calls to mind a tradition of love poetry: the blazon. In a blazon, a poet praises each part of his lover's body, separately: her eyes are like gems, her teeth like pearls, etc. The speaker similarly breaks up Porphyria's body, paying attention to her eyes, her neck, her cheek, and her head. In this case, though, the blazon is not flattering or sexy: instead, it's deeply disturbing. He seems to cut her up into individual parts, to deprive her of being a full individual. (In this sense, the speaker's blazon echoes some of the underlying dynamics of traditional, flattering blazons—which many readers and poets find disturbing for just these reasons. Take a look at Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 for an example of another poem that critiques and plays with the traditions of the blazon.) Once again, the poem both takes up and criticizes the dynamics of traditional love poems.

LINES 52-56

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:

After he strangles Porphyria, the speaker spends much of the rest of the poem describing her body: her eyes, her neck, her cheeks. In lines 52-55, he focuses on one part of her body in greater detail: her head. He describes it as "smiling" and "rosy," suggesting that Porphyria looks happy and content—even though she's just been strangled. Indeed, the speaker argues that she is happy precisely *because* she's been strangled: she's gotten her "utmost will," her highest wish: she has her "love," the speaker. And all the things she struggled with, like "pride" are "fled": she doesn't have to worry about them. The speaker seems to think that, by strangling Porphyria, he's managed to preserve their love forever.

There are some hints in these lines that things are not quite as happy as the speaker suggests. For instance, the speaker consistently refers to Porphyria as "it" in these lines. The antecedent to the word "it," the thing it refers to, is Porphyria's head. Her head has taken on a life of its own, independent of the rest of her body—it now has the "will" or wish that Porphyria had before she died. In other words, Porphyria has become an object, rather than a person. Despite the speaker's desire to preserve Porphyria and their love, his own word choice suggests that his violence has fundamentally and permanently changed her.

In the start of line 56, he corrects himself, saying "Porphyria's love"—as though he recognizes that his word choice turns Porphyria into an object. The repetition of the word "love"—an instance of diacope—thus calls attention to the shift between the two ways of talking about her, "it" and "Porphyria."

LINES 56-60

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!

In the final five lines of "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker offers a kind of summary of the poem. Porphyria wanted to love the speaker, but he interpreted her desire in a shocking and violent way. Indeed, he seems to take a certain pleasure in the fact that he surprised her, that his interpretation of her desire was so far from what she had in mind. As a result the two of them sit together all night, the dead Porphyria resting on his shoulder. He has a kind of ultimate power and authority over her, the power and authority he has sought from the very start of the poem.

The poem then ends with a surprising and revealing assertion: the speaker notes that, despite his violence, "God has not said a word!" The line is ambiguous, but it seems to suggest that the speaker thinks God himself approves of his murder. Because it keeps Porphyria "perfectly pure," the speaker's murder is justified. In other words, the speaker thinks that God prioritizes controlling Porphyria's sexuality over her life itself.

The line is also intended to shock—and criticize—Victorian readers of the poem, who would likely have taken a certain amount of satisfaction in seeing a sexually transgressive woman punished for her transgressions. The line suggests that such readers are really no better than the speaker himself.

The poem closes following the same formal pattern it has throughout. The final lines are rhymed ABABB and written in iambic tetrameter. However, where most of the poem is obsessively metrically regular, there's a telling metrical substitution in the poem's final line:

And yet | God has | not said | a word!

The line is metrically regular, except for the word "God," which introduces a disruptive and unexpected trochee into the middle of the line. Just saying the word "God" seems to upset the speaker's confidence. Perhaps he isn't actually so confident as he pretends to be about whether God approves of his crime. The poem thus ends with a burst of confidence, mixed with a moment of telling self-doubt.

SYMBOLS

THE CHEERLESS GRATE

As soon as Porphyria arrives at the speaker's cottage, she starts sprucing the place up, closing the windows and lighting a fire in the fireplace, which the speaker calls "the cheerless grate." This is partially a literal action: Porphyria really does light a fire and make the cottage warm. But it's also symbolic: the fireplace or the hearth represents warmth, cheer, and comfort. It's the heart of the home, the place where people gather on cold nights like the one the speaker describes to be together. And in the context of Victorian gender roles, it's a part of the house associated with women—with their responsibilities to take care of the home and make it a warm, welcoming place for their husbands and sons. In a sense, then, Porphyria goes right where she's supposed to go, or at least right where Victorian readers would expect her to go—to the symbolic heart of the home.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "the cheerless grate"

SOILED GLOVES

After Porphyria closes the windows and lights the fire, she starts taking off her wet clothes, her "dripping cloak and shawl." Among the items she takes off are a pair of "soiled gloves." These are primarily literal—as literal as her cloak or her shawl. But the word "soiled' suggests that they

also carry some symbolic weight. The word literally means that they're dirty and wet. But it also has a moral sense: it can mean that something (or someone) is morally compromised. And it's especially associated with sexuality.

By using the word, the speaker suggests that Porphyria already has committed some kind of sexual transgression. The gloves then symbolize her moral state—or, at least, the speaker's interpretation of that moral state. They suggest that, even before Porphyria gives herself fully to the speaker, he already regards her as sexually compromised—and they call into question his confident assertion later in the poem that she is "perfectly pure." He seems to have some doubt, some jealousy, that he hasn't fully acknowledged.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "soiled gloves"

YELLOW HAIR

The speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" seems obsessed with Porphyria's hair: he brings it up repeatedly, precisely describing what she does with it. And then, of course, he uses that hair to strangle her. While Porphyria does literally have blond hair, her hair also serves as a symbol of female beauty, power, and danger for the speaker.

This is a traditional symbol with a long history in English poetry. In love poetry, women's hair is often treated as something both seductive and dangerous. In Spenser's Amoretti XXXVII, for example, the speaker describes his mistress's hair as a "net of gold": it seduces him but it also traps him. "Porphyria's Lover" plays on this tradition. The speaker clearly finds Porphyria's hair very attractive and seductive—he can't shut up about it. But he refuses to be trapped or constrained by her hair, as Spenser's speaker was. Instead, he turns it against Porphyria, making it into a weapon. If Porphyria's hair is a traditional symbol of the seductive power of women's bodies, then the speaker is eager to rob that symbol of its power—or, more precisely, to take that power for himself.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 18:** "yellow hair"
- **Line 20:** "yellow hair"
- **Lines 38-39:** "all her hair / In one long yellow string"

GAY FEAST

Porphyria makes a big sacrifice to come visit the speaker: she leaves a "gay feast"—a raucous, happy party. And she trades that happy party for a gloomy, cold cottage, with a lover so weak that he can't even answer her questions. This seems to be literally true: Porphyria *was* at a feast on the night the poem takes place. But it also has some symbolic resonance. The "gay feast" symbolizes the richness and pleasure of Porphyria's life. She has a busy social calendar; she lives in a happy, bright world full of parties and people. And she gives that up, simply because she loves the poem's speaker. That makes her fate all the more tragic: she could've been happy if she had just stayed in the happy, safe life she already enjoyed.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 27:** "gay feast"

PALE

In lines 28-29, the speaker describes himself as "one so pale / for love." In other words, he's so in love with Porphyria that the color has drained from his skin. Because he loves her—and because that love is unsatisfied—he looks ill, weak, under-nourished. This may be literally true: the speaker does seem physically weak at the start of the poem. But paleness is also a traditional symbol in love poetry: it represents intense erotic desire.

Indeed, love poems often represent desire itself as a sickness or illness, an illness that drains the lover of their natural energy and vitality. In describing himself as "one so pale," then, the speaker doesn't simply offer a description of his own physical condition. He also positions himself as someone who fulfills the traditional role of the lover. He looks like someone passionately in love. The symbol makes him seem like a recognizable, normal figure in a love poem. And in this way it tricks the reader into feeling calm and assured—unsuspecting of the violence about to break loose.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 28:** "pale"

BLUSH

After the speaker strangles Porphyria, he slowly loosens the knots around her neck. As he does so, her "cheek once more / Blushed bright." He's describing a literal phenomenon here with some scientific backing: after strangulation, blood returns to the face, making it look the victim is blushing. However, the speaker isn't really worried about what's literally happening to Porphyria. He's much more concerned with what her "bright" cheeks symbolize.

This is, of course, a matter of interpretation. The speaker interprets it as a sign that Porphyria's beauty and vitality have not been compromised by his violent act, that she remains essentially unchanged, even after being strangled. And in this way, it releases him from any guilt or responsibility he might

otherwise feel for what he's done. Since she remains as beautiful and lively as ever, he thinks that he hasn't really harmed her.

Interpreted differently, the fact that her cheeks now blush in death could suggest a sense of demureness; now that the speaker is sure he has preserved Porphyria's purity for good, he imagines her bashfully blushing in response to her kiss (a far cry from the bold woman presented earlier in the poem).

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 48:** "Blushed bright"

POETIC DEVICES

END-STOPPED LINE

"Porphyria's Lover" is a poem about control—and the lengths to which the speaker is willing to go to achieve it. The poem's enjambments and end-stops often reflect that desire for control. For example, line 41-42 are both end-stopped:

> No pain felt she;
> I am quite sure she felt no pain.

In these lines, the end-stops are definite and strong. They suggest that the speaker is unwilling to even imagine an alternative, to allow any doubt about his account of things. In this sense, the underline how he has taken control over Porphyria and excluded her personal experience from the poem.

Yet the poem's use of end-stops also registers the way that Porphyria's presence upsets his control. The poem begins with five end-stops in a row. Only when Porphyria enters the poem in line 6 does the poem use enjambment for the first time. It then switches back and forth between enjambment and end-stop, almost as though the speaker and Porphyria are battling for control over the poem, the speaker trying to constrain the poem's sentences and Porphyria, with her dynamism and energy pushing them past the boundaries of the line breaks.

One can see this struggle if one takes a closer look at the relationship between the poem's rhyme scheme and its enjambments and end-stops. Poets often try to close a group of rhymes with an end-stop: doing so helps give the poem an internal structure. And "Porphyria's Lover" starts out that way: when the speaker reaches the end of the first group of ABABB rhymes, in line 5, he also uses an end-stop: "I listened with heart fit to break." Porphyria's entrance into the poem upsets that pattern: the next group of rhymes ends in line 10, but line 10 is enjambed—"...and from her form / Withdrew..."

Only in line 25, when the speaker fantasizes that Porphyria might "give herself to me forever," does the speaker manage to end a group of rhymes with an end-stop. It is as though Porphyria's independence, her energy and dynamism, upsets the control that the speaker wishes to assert over his own poem. But once the speaker gets Porphyria where he wants her, he reestablishes this control. After line 25, there's only one moment where the end of a group of rhymes doesn't coincide with an end-stop: in line 50, where he lays her head on his shoulder. (Line 40 is technically end-stopped, but it may feel more like an enjambment because of the way the sentence continues in the next line—the speaker seems to almost lose control in that moment). In this moment, the speaker's own passion and excitement seem to overcome his desire for control—ironically, right at the moment he *achieves* that control.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "to-night,"
- **Line 2:** "awake,"
- **Line 3:** "spite,"
- **Line 4:** "lake:"
- **Line 5:** "break."
- **Line 7:** "storm,"
- **Line 9:** "warm;"
- **Line 11:** "shawl,"
- **Line 13:** "fall,"
- **Line 16:** "waist,"
- **Line 17:** "bare,"
- **Line 18:** "displaced,"
- **Line 19:** "there,"
- **Line 20:** "hair,"
- **Line 24:** "dissever,"
- **Line 25:** "ever."
- **Line 26:** "prevail,"
- **Line 29:** "vain:"
- **Line 30:** "rain."
- **Line 35:** "do."
- **Line 36:** "fair,"
- **Line 40:** "around,"
- **Line 41:** "she;"
- **Line 42:** "pain."
- **Line 45:** "stain."
- **Line 48:** "kiss:"
- **Line 51:** "still:"
- **Line 52:** "head,"
- **Line 53:** "will,"
- **Line 54:** "fled,"
- **Line 55:** "instead!"
- **Line 57:** "heard."
- **Line 58:** "now,"
- **Line 59:** "stirred,"
- **Line 60:** "word!"

ENJAMBMENT

At the heart of "Porphyria's Lover" is a tense and violent

struggle between Porphyria and the speaker—a struggle about who controls Porphyria's body, her agency, and her capacity to act. That struggle is reflected in the poem's use of enjambment and end-stop. Indeed, Porphyria seems to introduce enjambment into the poem: the poem doesn't use enjambment at all until she arrives in line 6. And, in the early part of the poem, the use of enjambment often echoes her own energy and passion. For example, lines 21-23 are all enjambed (recall that it is best not to tie enjambment exclusively to punctuation, especially when dealing with poetry that was originally written out by hand; lines with commas can indeed be enjambed, as they are a few times in this poem):

> Murmuring how she loved me — she
> Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
> To set its struggling passion free

As the sentence runs across these lines, it echoes Porphyria's own passion—which wants to set itself free from the constraints that society has placed on it. She exhibits this energy and passion most notably in the way she upsets the relationship between the poem's rhyme scheme and its end-stops. In lines 6-24, when she's most active and most engaged, the rhyme scheme (ABABB) gets out of sync with the poem's enjambments. Instead of ending each five-line group of rhymes with an end-stop (that is, the second B rhyme being an end-stopped line)—as the poem usually does—they end with an enjambment. Porphyria's presence upsets a kind of balance and control the speaker otherwise works hard to maintain.

The bitter irony of the poem, though, is that when Porphyria does set her passion free, she ends up right where the speaker wants her: under his control. And once the speaker does take control of Porphyria, the poem's enjambments start to feel different: they register *his* passion and excitement, rather than hers. For example, take a look at the enjambments in line 46-48:

> And I untightened next the tress
> About her neck; her cheek once more
> Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

In line 46, the enjambment creates a feeling of release, something coming loose—which echoes the loosening of Porphyria's hair that the line describes. And in line 47, it echoes the speaker's "burning" desire, so urgent that it rushes past the boundaries of the line. The poem's use of enjambment thus tracks the power struggle between Porphyria and the speaker: as the balance of power between them shifts, so does the meaning of its enjambments.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 6-7:** "straight / She"
- **Lines 8-9:** "grate / Blaze"
- **Lines 10-11:** "form / Withdrew"
- **Lines 12-13:** "untied / Her"
- **Lines 14-15:** "side / And"
- **Lines 15-16:** "replied, / She"
- **Lines 21-22:** "she / Too"
- **Lines 22-23:** "endeavour, / To"
- **Lines 23-24:** "free / From"
- **Lines 27-28:** "restrain / A"
- **Lines 28-29:** "pale / For"
- **Lines 31-32:** "eyes / Happy"
- **Lines 32-33:** "knew / Porphyria"
- **Lines 33-34:** "surprise / Made"
- **Lines 34-35:** "grew / While"
- **Lines 37-38:** "ound / A"
- **Lines 38-39:** "hair / In"
- **Lines 39-40:** "wound / Three"
- **Lines 43-44:** "bee, / I"
- **Lines 44-45:** "again / Laughed"
- **Lines 46-47:** "tress / About"
- **Lines 47-48:** "more / Blushed"
- **Lines 50-51:** "bore / Her"
- **Lines 56-57:** "how / Her"

CAESURA

"Porphyria's Lover" contains some dramatic and surprising caesuras—caesuras that underline the speaker's violence and unpredictability. Note the caesura in line 15, for example:

> And called me. When no voice replied,

Here the caesura marks the speaker's silence, his unwillingness to engage with Porphyria. The full stop in the middle of the line helps the reader hear the awkward pause while Porphyria waits to hear a response—from a man she walked through a wild storm just to see. It suggests how weak and withdrawn the speaker is—and how unwilling he is to engage with Porphyria on her own terms.

But the speaker is nothing if not unstable and unpredictable, and his reticence early in the poem transforms to violence by its end. As the speaker's mood changes, so too does the function of the caesuras in the poem. Take a look at the caesura in line 41:

> And strangled her. No pain felt she;

The speaker—so weak and indecisive early in the poem—becomes suddenly decisive and violent. The caesura marks that transformation: it underlines how abrupt, unexpected, and definitive his act really is. And instead of hearing the *speaker's* silence, in this caesura the reader hears

Porphyria's silence, her inability to respond. In this way, the caesuras track the speaker's unpredictable moods and actions, changing with him to underline his violence.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "; "
- **Line 9:** ", "
- **Line 10:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 12:** ", "
- **Line 14:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 15:** ". "
- **Line 19:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 20:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 21:** " — "
- **Line 22:** ", "
- **Line 24:** ", "
- **Line 29:** ", "
- **Line 30:** ", "
- **Line 32:** "; "
- **Line 33:** "; "
- **Line 34:** ", "
- **Line 36:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 37:** ": "
- **Line 38:** ", "
- **Line 41:** ". "
- **Line 44:** ": "
- **Line 47:** "; "
- **Line 50:** ", "
- **Line 51:** ", "
- **Line 55:** ", ", ", "
- **Line 56:** ": "

SIMILE

"Porphyria's Lover" contains a single simile, which appears in lines 43-44. After the speaker strangles Porphyria, he opens her eye. He does so with some trepidation: he's afraid of what he will find. He compares her eyelid to "a shut bud"—that is, the bud of a flower. And he compares her eye to "a bee" waiting inside the flower. To the speaker, Porphyria's eye seems like something dangerous, something that might sting him. He therefore opens her eye "warily"—that is cautiously, carefully.

The simile does a couple of different things at once. It testifies the speaker's anxiety—he is worried that, by strangling Porphyria, he has transformed her into something dangerous. And at the same time, his simile *does* transform her: it dehumanizes her. By comparing her eye to a "bee," an insect, and her eyelid to a flower "bud," the speaker takes away some of her humanity.

In this way, the speaker's simile continues his violence; the simile takes away Porphyria's personhood. And don't forget what the speaker's actually doing—he's opening Porphyria's eye *for* her. In other words, he's taking over her body, making it move and act without her consent or even her participation.

That makes the next few lines all the more creepy: "... again / Laughed the blue eyes without a stain." Once the speaker has Porphyria's eyes open, he feels confident that he's gotten what he wanted: she is unchanged, unmarked by his own violence against her.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 43-44:** "As a shut bud that holds a bee, / I warily oped her lids"

METAPHOR

"Porphyria's Lover" contains a few metaphors sprinkled throughout. For instance, in lines 21-24, the speaker describes how Porphyria has been wrestling with her own desire, trying to break free from "pride" and give into "passion." The speaker uses two metaphors to describe this conflict.

First, he describes Porphyria's desire as "her heart's endeavor" (that is, her heart's goal/aim/attempts). (The speaker uses a similar metaphor in lines 5 and 34 to describe his own feelings.) Second, the speaker describes her "passion" as "struggling." The "struggle" could be entirely literal, but it does have a metaphorical flavor—particularly in light of the violence that comes soon after. It makes it sound like Porphyria's struggle is physical, rather than entirely emotional. Since this description comes from the speaker, the metaphor—if it is a metaphor—foreshadows the violence about to come.

After the speaker murders Porphyria, he turns to metaphor a few more times. First, he describes her eyes: they "laughed ... without a stain." The "laughter" here serves a metaphor, standing in for the vibrancy, energy, and delight the speaker thinks he sees in Porphyria's eyes. The reference to a "stain," meanwhile, evokes connotations of sin and corruption; altogether, the speaker is saying that her eyes are still pure and perfect.

Up to this point, the speaker has largely used metaphor to describe Porphyria, but in line 48 he extends the device to himself, describing his "kiss" as "burning." His lips aren't literally on fire; rather "burning" serves as a metaphor for the force of his desire. The metaphors that appear here and there throughout the poem thus quietly shape the reader's experience of both the speaker and Porphyria, underlining their desires—and the speaker's perception of those desires.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-5:** " / fit to break"
- **Line 5:** "heart"
- **Lines 22-24:** "all her heart's endeavour, / To set its struggling passion free / From pride"
- **Line 34:** "heart," " swell"

- **Lines 44-45:** "again / Laughed the blue eyes without a stain."
- **Line 48:** "my burning kiss"

REPETITION

The speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" uses repetition throughout in various forms—including diacope, epizeuxis, and chiasmus. Overall, the repetition underscores the speaker's obsessive state of mind; he keeps returning to the same thoughts over and over again as he attempts to control Porphyria.

For example, the speaker uses epizeuxis just before he strangles Porphyria. He notes that, with the two of them sitting together in his cottage, "she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good." The repetition of the word "mine" reveals what the speaker really cares about: he wants to possess Porphyria, to have ownership over her. That she is "fair, / Perfectly pure and good" thus seems secondary: it's nice, but the thing that the speaker really cares about is controlling her.

Later in the poem, repetitio0n reveals what he really thinks about Porphyria. In lines 55 and 56, he repeats the word "love" in close succession, an example of diacope:

> And I, its love, am gained instead!
> Porphyria's love:

The repetition of "love" calls attention to the two different words that come before, "its" and "Porphyria's." The speaker seems to hesitate here: he can't quite decide if he should refer to Porphyria as a *person* or as an *object*, an "it." This indecision is even creepier if the reader moves up a couple of lines and looks for the antecedent to the word "its" (which contains another example of diacope): "Her head ... The smiling rosy little head."

After he strangles her, the speaker starts to describe Porphyria's body in pieces, talking about her eye, her hair, her neck, and finally her head. When he calls her an "it" in line 55, then, he isn't just referring to her as an object: he's describing her as a dismembered body, a body cut into discrete pieces. The repetition of the word "love" thus calls attention to a disturbing problem for the speaker: he is trying to figure out whether he should refer to Porphyria as a complete person or a series of discrete body parts. That he hesitates at all indicates that he's a little uncomfortable with the consequences of his own actions, the way his violence has transformed her into an object.

Another interesting moment of repetition occurs early in the poem, when Porphyria is trying to comfort the speaker. She bares her shoulder and brushes her hair off it; then she puts his head on her shoulder and lays her hair back over him. Describing the hair, the speaker almost exactly repeats himself in lines 18 and 20. The speaker seems fixated on Porphyria's hair, and the language he uses to describe it in this tender moment reappears in lines 38-39, when he describes strangling her. In line 18 he uses the phrase "all her yellow hair"; in line 20, "all, her yellow hair." In lines 38-39, these words recur, in a slightly different orientation:

> A thing to do, and all her hair
> In one long yellow string I wound

Perhaps the speaker is already imagining using Porphyria's body as a weapon in lines 18 and 20. Or perhaps the use of repetition here reveals something about the way the speaker understands his own violent act. Instead of being a break from the tenderness earlier in the poem, he sees it as a way to extend that tenderness permanently—and he uses the very thing that Porphyria uses to comfort him, her hair, to enact his violence.

Immediately after strangling Porphyria, the speaker uses repetition again, insisting:

> No pain felt she;
> I am quite sure she felt no pain.

The speaker seems insecure, worried that he *has* caused Porphyria pain. So he repeats himself to drive away that doubt. In other words, the very strength of the speaker's insistence that she "felt no pain" leads the reader to feel like she probably did feel pain—and that the speaker knows it. (This is also an example of chiasmus, as we discuss in another device entry.) Here repetition reveals the speaker's state of mind, the things he knows but is trying to hide, even from himself.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 18:** "her yellow hair"
- **Line 20:** "her yellow hair"
- **Line 23:** "passion"
- **Line 26:** "passion"
- **Line 36:** "mine," "mine"
- **Line 38:** "all her hair"
- **Line 41:** "pain"
- **Line 42:** "pain"
- **Line 51:** "head"
- **Line 52:** "head"
- **Line 55:** "love"
- **Line 56:** "love"

CHIASMUS

"Porphyria's Lover" contains an instance of chiasmus right after the speaker strangles Porphyria, in lines 41 and 42:

> No pain felt she;
> I am quite sure she felt no pain.

In these lines, the speaker repeats three key words: "pain," "felt,"

and "she." But the order in which they appear flips. In line 41, they go: "pain," "felt," and "she"; in line 42, "she," "felt," and "pain." In other words, there's an abc-cba pattern in the two lines:

a b c
No pain felt she;
c b a
I am quite sure she felt no pain.

The two sentences are parallel in content, but within them the speaker flips the *order* of the key words. This suggests a kind of underlying nervousness and anxiety. He is turning over the idea in his head, fiddling with it, looking at it from all sides.

This is surprising: the speaker is so definite, so absolutely sure that Porphyria "felt no pain." And, by using exactly the same words, he suggests that there's simply no room for doubt or equivocation. But the change in the *order* of the terms (not to mention the fact that he feels like he needs to say the same thing twice, as if to convince himself of it), suggests that things are not quite as certain as the speaker wants the reader to think.

It's possible, of course, that the speaker is simply trying to deceive the reader, and that he knows Porphyria *did* feel pain in her final moments. But it seems equally likely that he's trying to deceive *himself*: to convince himself that his violence was justified and that it did not cause unnecessary suffering.

Where Chiasmus appears in the poem:

- **Lines 41-42:** "No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration appears throughout "Porphyria's Lover" and it often serves to echo or reinforce the speaker's feelings and ideas. As those feelings and ideas change, so does the role that alliteration plays in the poem. For example, early in the poem, the /p/ sound is linked not only to Porphyria (after all, her name starts with a /p/ sound, Porphyria) but to her desire. Note, for example, lines 26:

But passion sometimes would prevail

The alliteration between "passion" and "prevail" links together the two words. In doing so, it emphasizes the force of Porphyria's passion, her desire: it cannot be restrained for long. The /p/ sound reappears two lines later:

A sudden thought of one so pale

Although the word "pale" is two lines away from "prevail," the two words rhyme—and so the reader probably hears the alliteration, despite the distance between these words. This links Porphyria's passion to a particular person—that is, the speaker.

In these early lines of the poem, the alliterative /p/ sound thus underlines Porphyria's desire for the speaker. But as the poem progresses, the /p/ sound begins to take on another function: it registers the speaker's *own* desires and priorities. In line 37, the speaker describes Porphyria as "Perfectly pure and good." The /p/ sound here suggests just the opposite of what it did in line 26: instead of emphasizing the power of Porpyria's sexual desire, it insists that she is pure, untainted by sexuality at all.

In this sense, the /p/ sound no longer tells the reader about Porphyria's relationship with erotic desire; it tells the reader what the *speaker* thinks, or wants to think, about Porphyria and her sexuality. Over the course of the poem, then, the same alliterative sound performs opposite functions. Alliteration does not have a stable role in the poem: rather, it changes with the speaker, registering the shifts in his mood and his ideas.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 26:** "p," "p"
- **Line 28:** "p"
- **Line 37:** "P," "p"

ASSONANCE

"Porphyria's Lover" uses assonance often, in subtle and suggestive ways. For example, in line 13 there's an assonant /a/ sound that appears in "hat," "damp," and "hair" (readers might hear these /a/ sounds as being ever so slightly different, but they are close enough to echo one another throughout the line):

Her hat and let the damp hair fall

The /a/ sound runs through the line—and mimics the way water has run through Porphyria's hat, getting her hair wet. In this way, the sound of the line mimics the effects of the weather. It's a subtle moment—and perhaps one that doesn't have big consequences for the poem as a whole. But it emphasizes the way that the poem uses sound more generally: to echo and reinforce the natural and psychological phenomena it describes.

Later in the poem, assonance also helps reveal the speaker's true priority: the desire for control that motivates his violence. Note, for instance, the assonant /i/ sound that appears in lines 36-7:

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found

At first, the line seems to be about Porphyria: indeed, the

speaker is describing her. But the use of assonance in the line suggests that the speaker's focus is really elsewhere. The repeated /i/ sound underscores the speaker's true focus: himself. He's less interested in Porphyria than in the fact she is "mine, mine." And the repetition of the word "mine" (an instance of epizeuxis) underscores that /i/ sound. In this way, the use of assonance subtly contradicts the speaker: it shows the reader that the way he presents himself isn't entirely accurate or honest. And it helps the reader see what his true priorities really are.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "a," "a," "a"
- **Line 36:** "i," "i"
- **Line 37:** "I"

CONSONANCE

Like assonance and alliteration, consonance is a constant presence in "Porphyria's Lover." The poem is full of repeated sounds—and it uses this sonic richness to help reinforce its description of nature, desire, and violence. Indeed, the devices often work together to do so, as with the /t/ sound that appears in line 3:

> It tore the elm-tops down for spite

The /t/ sound is present as both alliteration—linking "tore" and "tops"—and as consonance, in "it" and "spite." It's a percussive, harsh sound that makes the line sound violent and cacophonous. In that way, it mimics the violence of the wind: readers can almost hear the trees cracking in the line's repeated /t/ sounds.

Later in the poem, the speaker uses a consonant /l/ sound as he describes strangling Porphyria:

> ... and all her hair
> In one long yellow string I wound
> Three times her little throat around,
> And strangled her

The /l/ sound runs across four lines, a snaky rope of sound. In this way, it echoes the speaker's own act, the way he gathers up Porphyria's hair and wraps it around and around her throat. It's almost as though the /l/ sounds represent that hair, and the lines of the poem are like Porphyria's throat. Reading through the lines, the reader feels the hair wrapping around and around, tightening as it does so.

It's striking and cruel, then, to re-encounter that same /l/ sound in the next two lines, in the word "felt"

> No pain felt she;
> I am quite sure she felt no pain.

It's almost painful to hear that sound again in these lines. These lines deny the obvious: that Porphyria *did* feel pain. The memory of the /l/ sound from the previous lines, where it came to embody the hair wrapped around her neck is still all too present, too close: the reader viscerally remembers the tightening of the hair, the way that tightening was communicated through the same sound the speaker uses here. In this moment, then, consonance conveys to the reader both the sensation of being strangled—and the speaker's cruelty in his refusal to recognize the pain he causes.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "t," "t," "t," "t"
- **Line 38:** "ll"
- **Line 39:** "l," "ll"
- **Line 40:** "l"
- **Line 41:** "l," "l"
- **Line 42:** "l"

VOCABULARY

Sullen (Line 2) - Angry, malicious, or moody.

Spite (Line 3) - A desire to do damage or cause hurt. The wind is angry and destructive for no meaningful reason—just because it wants to be so.

Vex (Line 4) - Trouble or roil. The wind makes big, violent waves on the lake.

Porphyria (Line 6) - The name of the speaker's lover. Also, a disease that causes chest pains, confusion, and fever—leading to delusions and death. Browning was fascinated with diseases like porphyria, and may have used its symptoms as inspiration for the poem.

Straight (Line 6) - Right away, without hesitation.

Grate (Line 8) - The fireplace or hearth of the cottage.

Soiled (Line 12) - Dirty and wet. The word also has a moral sense: it could also mean that, from the speaker's perspective, Porphyria has committed some sin or indiscretion.

Displaced (Line 18) - Moved out of the way.

O'er (Line 20) - Over or above.

Endeavor (Line 22) - Attempts. In the speaker's mind, Porphyria's "heart" has made several attempts to break free of the forces that constrain its desires.

Passion (Line 23, Line 26) - Desire, most likely erotic or sexual desire.

Vainer (Line 24) - More useless or foolish—in comparison to "pride," which the speaker seems to think is, in itself, foolish or

useless.

Ties (Line 24) - Links or bonds. The "ties" constrain Porphyria and her heart, preventing her from acting on her desires.

Dissever (Line 24) - To separate or split.

Prevail (Line 26) - Win out: to overrule the feelings—like "pride"—that prevent Porphyria from acting on her desires.

Gay (Line 27) - Happy or festive. At the time the poem was written, the word had not yet acquired its modern meanings; it had no association with homosexuality.

Restrain (Line 27) - Prevent or stop.

String (Line 39) - The speaker is saying that he has gathered her hair into one long piece, essentially like a rope.

Oped (Line 44) - Opened; the speaker lifts Porphyria's eye-lids.

Untightened (Line 46) - Loosened or released.

Tress (Line 46) - A lock of hair.

Burning (Line 48) - Passionate, full of lust.

Droops (Line 51) - Hangs down limply or lifelessly.

Utmost (Line 53) - Highest or most cherished.

Will (Line 53) - Desire or wish.

Gained (Line 55) - Won or secured.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

Porphyria's Lover" is a dramatic monologue, a form for which Robert Browning was well known. According to the literary critic M.H. Abrams, dramatic monologues have three key characteristics. First, they are written in the voice of a character who is definitely *not* the author: there's a strong separation between speaker and author. In "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker is a strange, violent man who murders his lover—one hopes there's a big difference between him and the poet!

Second, that character interacts with other people—but readers only learn about those people through the character's description of them and their actions. In other words, the speaker of a dramatic monologue is an unreliable narrator. The reader sees the world through his or her eyes—and has to judge how accurate or fair that perspective really is. Thus, in the key moments of "Porphyria's Lover," the reader has to judge the speaker based on his description of what happens. One might doubt, for instance, whether to believe the speaker's claim that "No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain." However, the reader can't appeal to Porphyria to confirm or deny the speaker's assertion: she doesn't get to speak in the poem.

Third, the point of the poem is to reveal the dynamics of the speaker's character: his or her motivations, the things that make him or her tick. Thus "Porphyria's Lover" meditates on the speaker's desire for control over Porphyria, his interest in making her into an object. It exposes his psychology—and the psychology of his culture, with its tight restrictions on female sexuality.

In this sense, "Porphyria's Lover" is a textbook example of a dramatic monologue—fittingly enough, since Browning helped make the form popular. He's still one of its most famous practitioners. A dramatic monologue does not have a set meter or rhyme scheme: it's up to the poet to find a form that suits the character they've created—in the case of "Porphyria's Lover" a single long stanza, with a meter and rhyme scheme Browning concocted for the occasion. Occasionally the poem is printed with its five-line sections separated out into distinct stanzas in accordance with the poem's ABABB rhyme scheme.

METER

"Porphyria's Lover" is written in iambic tetrameter. This means there are four poetic feet in each line, each with an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern. One can hear this rhythm in the poem's opening line:

> The rain | set ear- | ly in | to-night,

Iambic tetrameter is a little looser, a little lighter, than its close relative, iambic pentameter (which has the same rhythm but with one more foot per line, for a total of 10 syllables). It signals that the poem is not intended to be grand and ambitious; it feels, at least initially, a bit playful. This is a red herring: Browning lulls his reader, making them feel like the poem won't be ambitious or serious. When the poem explodes into violence, it's thus all the more shocking.

The meter of "Porphyria's Lover" is extremely strict: the poem contains relatively few metrical substitutions, especially for a poem of its length. Poets usually use metrical substitutions to make their poems feel natural and fresh; without such variations, a poem written in meter quickly becomes monotonous. Without these breaks and syncopations in the rhythm, "Porphyria's Lover" feels a bit unnatural, obsessive: the poem's regularity reflects the speaker's own damaged and obsessive state of mind.

When metrical variations *do* show up, they're much louder and more disruptive than they'd be in a poem with more substitutions. For instance, there is a trochee (stressed-unstressed) in the second foot of the poem's final line:

> And yet | God has | not said | a word!

The line is straightforward and metrically regular, except for the word "God" which breaks up the rhythm. The word seems

to throw the speaker's confidence, to knock him out of the obsessive orbit of his thoughts. Perhaps he is not quite as confident as he pretends to be about whether God approves of his crime. The metrical substitution suggests that he might have some niggling doubts.

Similarly, line 48 opens with a spondee (stressed-stressed) in its first foot:

Blushed bright | beneath | my burn- | ing kiss:

The spondee suggests the force of the speaker's sexual desire, which overpowers his otherwise tight control of the poem's meter. If the regularity of the meter in the poem suggests obsession and control, the metrical variations—when they do appear—suggest moments of passion and doubt that overwhelm the speaker and invade his otherwise tightly limited world.

RHYME SCHEME

"Porphyria's Lover" has an unusual rhyme scheme. The poem can be divided into groups of 5 lines, each rhymed

ABABB

In some printings of the poem, each of these five-line groups is its own stanza. Each group of five lines introduces a new set of rhymes: the poem doesn't repeat its rhymes between stanzas in any patterned way. So the rhyme scheme extends in five-line segments through the whole poem:

ABABBCDCDDEFEFF

...and so on.

English poetry generally avoids organizing rhymes into five-line groups. It's hard to find a logical organization for a five-line rhyme scheme—as "Porphyria's Lover" itself makes clear. The poem's rhyme scheme is a little awkward, a little strange. It looks like a standard ABAB rhyme scheme—but with an extra line tacked on. As a result the poem feels obsessive, as though the speaker can't quite let go of something. Alongside the poem's highly—uncomfortably—regular meter, the poem feels just a bit off. Its unusual rhyme scheme registers the strained, obsessive character of the speaker's thinking.

It's worth noting the relationship between the poem's rhyme scheme and its use of enjambment and end-stop. Often poets coordinate rhyme scheme and enjambment: for example, a set of four lines rhyming ABAB will close with an end-stop. This helps divide a poem into clear units. Working together, end-stop and rhyme guide the reader. This can serve as a sign that the speaker is in control, confident.

The first five lines of "Porphyria's Lover" exhibit this confidence and control: the speaker uses them to describe the poem's settings and his feelings. There's an end-stop at the end of line 5; in line 6, he switches topics and describes Porphyria's arrival. Once she enters the poem, things get a bit more complicated.

Line 10 is not end-stopped: the five-line group of rhymes ends, but the sentence doesn't. It keeps going into a new group of rhymes. This happens again in line 15 and in line 20. Porphyria's dynamism and energy have upset the poem, overwhelming the boundaries of the units of rhyme.

Only in line 25 does the poem right itself: the line is end-stopped and it also ends a group of rhymes. The speaker has regained his control and assurance. This happens at a key moment: when he contemplates Porphyria giving "herself to me for ever." At just the moment when the speaker considers controlling Porphyria, he also takes control over his poem. The speaker only loses that control twice in the rest of the poem: in line 50, when he's putting her head on his shoulder. In this moment his passion and violence overcome his control—perhaps subtly suggesting that he has lost control of himself.

SPEAKER

From the very start of the poem, the speaker is a mysterious, scary, and downright weird figure. The poem opens on a dark and stormy night: despite the rain and wind, the speaker has no fire to keep the place warm. When his love, Porphyria, arrives, he is weak and "pale," as though the life has been sucked out of him: Porphyria has to support his head on her shoulder. (Though the speaker never explicitly reveals his gender, it's safe to assume that he's a man, given the period in which the poem was written). However, once the speaker realizes that Porphyria loves him, he becomes violent and powerful. He transforms from a weak, wan figure to someone capable of strangling his lover. He ends the poem in control of Porphyria's body, which he has reduced to an object. And, in contrast to his earlier indecision, he is so confident in his own violent choices that he assumes God Himself approves of his decisions.

Because the speaker is so unpredictable, so weird and so violent, many people characterize the speaker as a madman. The poet who wrote "Porphyria's Lover," Robert Browning, was fascinated with abnormal psychology; Porphyria takes her name from a disease that causes weakness, delusions, and eventually death—a disease that had been recently diagnosed in the years before the poem was written. It seems likely that the speaker is crazy—but if he is, then his madness is not the main focus of the poem. Instead, the focus is on the acts that his madness makes him commit—and the reasons he develops justifying them.

Some of the speaker's strangeness comes from the poem's literary form. "Porphyria's Lover" is a dramatic monologue. In a dramatic monologue, the poet writes in the voice of a character, who speaks directly to the reader about his or her life—as though on stage. This gives the poet the freedom to imagine and occupy other people's minds. In poems like "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess," Browning used this freedom to

imagine the minds of violent, disturbed people. Because the character in a dramatic monologue is so separate from the author, the author has the space to discuss things that might otherwise be shocking or taboo.

SETTING

"Porphyria's Lover" is set in a cottage on a stormy night. In the opening lines of the poem, the speaker gives the reader some important details about the setting: it's raining and windy. The speaker is in a cold cottage and he hasn't built a fire. From the cottage, he can see elm trees and a lake. The wind is violent enough that breaks the tops of the elm trees and tosses the lake with big waves.

Porphyria's entrance, in line 6, transforms the setting of the poem: she shuts the door and lights a fire, turning a dreary and cold cottage into a warm, welcoming place. The poem thus draws a contrast between the violence of the natural world and the warmth and coziness of the cottage, warmth and coziness which is associated in the poem with femininity.

The setting of the poem is thus almost a cliché: the poem might as well start, "It was a dark and stormy night." And associating the wholesome warmth of a house with a woman is also a cliché: in the Victorian period women were expected to be "angels in the house," working to make their homes warm and welcoming for their husbands and sons. This is an intentional set-up, a kind of red herring. Browning wants the reader to feel like the poem is familiar and predictable, well within the borders of both literary tradition and Victorian morality, so that the reader feels lulled, complacent. The violence that erupts later in the poem will thus be all the more shocking and unexpected. It breaks, radically, with the reader's expectations.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Porphyria's Lover" is a dramatic monologue—one of the classic examples of the form. Browning didn't invent the dramatic monologue, but he did a lot to sharpen and crystallize it. As the literary scholar M.H. Abrams argues, a dramatic monologue focuses on a single character: the poem unfolds in that character's voice. And the form is marked by its interest in that character's motivations, his or her state of mind. For that reason, dramatic monologues tend to pay close attention to psychologies of the characters they present, offering up telling details that help the reader understand a character's motivations, ideas, and background.

Dramatic monologues developed out of British Romanticism. At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley started writing autobiographical poems that focused, in detail, on their inner lives. (Indeed, Wordsworth's book long epic, *The Prelude*, concentrates entirely on the development of his own mental habits as a poet.) They were the first English language poets to focus on the depths of the psyche—and they inspired poets like Browning and Matthew Arnold to go further, to imagine how they could bring the same psychological depth to poems about other people's lives.

In the Victorian period (the historical and literary period that followed Romanticism), the dramatic monologue thus became a popular and widely written form. Some of the most famous examples from the period include Browning's own poem, "My Last Duchess," as well as Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," and Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses." And although Browning wrote in other forms, he is best remembered as a writer of dramatic monologues.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At first glance, "Porphyria's Lover" feels disconnected from history. It does not refer to historical events or even objects that belong to a specific historical period or place. It feels like the poem could take place anytime, anywhere. This is part of what makes it so terrifying. The speaker is unusual, even crazy. But it's easy to imagine him emerging from any number of human societies—including our own.

However, the poem does reflect the gender norms of the period in which it was written, early in the Victorian era. (The poem was actually published in 1836, just before Victoria took the throne—but it is usually grouped, for convenience's sake, with other Victorian poems.) During the Victorian period, social norms around gender and sexuality began to harden. Particularly in middle- and upper-class households, women were expected to be "angels in the house," as one popular Victorian saying has it—dedicated to the comfort of their husbands and sons, constrained to domestic duties, while men worked in public life and in business. For a Victorian reader, the opening description of Porphyria—out alone, on a stormy night—would've been shocking, even scandalous. She is marked as someone who refuses the social constraints on women's lives and activities. And she's out in the storm to satisfy her heart's "struggling passion"—all the more shocking in a society that tightly controlled women's sexuality.

However, she quickly expresses her agency and willfulness by making the speaker's cottage more warm and welcoming—activities more in line with an "angel in the house." In the way that Porphyria both performs—and refuses—the limits placed on women in Victorian society, the poem subtly acknowledges its own historical context.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Porphyria's Lover" Out Loud — Listen to "Porphyria's Lover" aloud in its entirety. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fE6PjB1kn4w)
- Robert Browning and the Dramatic Monologue — A detailed analysis of Browning's relationship with the dramatic monologue, including M. H. Abram's definition of the form. (https://blogs.baylor.edu/armstrongbrowning/2012/08/01/robert-browning-and-the-dramatic-monologue/)
- What Is the Blazon? — A definition of the blazon, a tradition of Renaissance love poetry, which Browning employs in "Porphyria's Lover." (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/blazon)
- Robert Browning's Life — A detailed biography of Robert Browning from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-browning)
- Amoretti XXXVII — Spenser's sonnet, Amoretti XXXVII, where his speaker refers to his mistress' hair as a "net of gold"—anticipating the obsession that the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" has with her golden hair. (https://www.poeticous.com/edmund-spenser/amoretti-xxxvii-what-guile-is-this-that-those-her-golden-tresses)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER ROBERT BROWNING POEMS

- Meeting at Night
- My Last Duchess

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