

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

Porphyria's Lover

by Robert Browning

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 a 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 forever.
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 worshiped 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 opened 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!

Context of *Porphyria's Lover* by Robert Browning

Porphyria's Lover is one of Robert Browning's famous dramatic monologues, first published in 1836 in the *Monthly Repository*. The poem reflects Browning's interest in the psychological exploration of his characters, often revealing the darker aspects of human nature. The Victorian era, when Browning wrote this poem, was a time of strict moral codes and gender roles, but Browning often explored themes of power, desire, and transgression in his works.

In *Porphyria's Lover*, the speaker recounts the events of a night when his lover, Porphyria, visits him. In a twisted act of love and control, the speaker strangles her with her own hair to preserve a moment when she "worships" him, believing that this act will ensure her eternal submission to him. Browning uses this narrative to delve into themes of obsession, possessiveness, and power dynamics within relationships. The poem is significant for its exploration of the fine line between love and control, a subject often examined in Victorian literature.

Themes in *Porphyria's Lover*

1. Possessive and Obsessive Love

- The main theme of *Porphyria's Lover* is obsessive love, in which the speaker's desire for absolute control over Porphyria leads to her death. The speaker cannot bear the idea of Porphyria leaving him or being constrained by societal expectations, so he kills her to preserve the moment when she fully belongs to him. His act of murder is a manifestation of his need to possess her completely, forever freezing her in a moment of submission and devotion.
- **Example:** "That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good."

2. Power and Control

- The theme of power dynamics is central to the poem. The speaker exercises total control over Porphyria when he strangles her, ensuring that she remains with him in a state of eternal submission. The imbalance of power is emphasized by Porphyria's passive role throughout the poem, even after her death. The speaker believes that in killing her, he has granted her deepest wish to be with him forever.
 - **Example:** "I found / A thing to do, and all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around."
- 3. The Conflict Between Passion and Societal Expectations**
- Browning hints that Porphyria is constrained by societal norms and "vainer ties" that prevent her from fully committing to the speaker. The speaker interprets her visit as a sign that her passion for him is stronger than these social barriers. His act of murder, in his mind, releases her from these constraints and allows them to be together without interference from societal expectations.
 - **Example:** "Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour, / To set its struggling passion free / From pride, and vainer ties dissever."
- 4. Psychological Depth and Moral Ambiguity**
- The speaker's calm, almost detached description of his actions reveals a disturbed psychological state. Browning leaves the speaker's moral judgment ambiguous; the speaker believes he has acted out of love and that God has not condemned him, adding a layer of moral complexity to the poem. This ambiguity challenges readers to reflect on the fine line between love, madness, and morality.
 - **Example:** "And yet God has not said a word!"

Grammatical Techniques in *Porphyria's Lover*

- 1. Dramatic Monologue**
- The poem is a dramatic monologue, meaning the speaker directly addresses the audience, revealing his thoughts and justifying his actions. Browning uses this form to delve deep into the psyche of the speaker, allowing the reader to understand his motivations and emotions. However, the reader is also distanced from the victim (Porphyria), as she has no voice in the poem.
 - **Example:** The entire poem is narrated from the speaker's perspective, giving insight into his disturbed mental state.
- 2. Imagery**
- Browning uses vivid imagery to create a detailed and unsettling portrayal of the speaker's actions. The descriptions of the storm at the beginning, Porphyria's beauty, and the act of strangling her all contribute to the poem's eerie and intense atmosphere.
 - **Example:** "And all her yellow hair displaced, / And, stooping, made my cheek lie there, / And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair."
- 3. Symbolism**
- **Porphyria's Hair:** Porphyria's long yellow hair becomes a symbol of the speaker's control over her. Initially, her hair is a sign of her beauty and sensuality, but it ultimately becomes the tool of her death, symbolizing how something beautiful and intimate can be turned into a means of domination.

- **The Storm:** The storm at the beginning of the poem symbolizes the speaker's turbulent emotions and foreshadows the violent act that follows.
 - **Example:** "And all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around."
4. **Pathetic Fallacy**
- The use of pathetic fallacy at the beginning of the poem mirrors the speaker's emotional state. The stormy weather outside reflects the turmoil and tension in the speaker's mind before Porphyria enters the cottage and temporarily brings warmth and calm.
 - **Example:** "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."
5. **Rhyme Scheme**
- The poem follows a strict ABABB rhyme scheme, which contrasts with the unsettling content of the poem. The rhyme scheme creates a sense of control and order, mirroring the speaker's desire to control the situation and Porphyria herself. The regularity of the rhyme also adds to the eerie calm with which the speaker recounts the murder.
 - **Example:** "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."
6. **Repetition**
- Repetition is used to emphasize the speaker's possessiveness and to heighten the intensity of the poem. The repeated phrase "mine, mine" shows the speaker's obsessive need to own Porphyria completely.
 - **Example:** "That moment she was mine, mine, fair."
7. **Juxtaposition**
- Browning uses juxtaposition to highlight the stark contrast between love and violence in the poem. The tenderness with which Porphyria attends to the speaker is juxtaposed with the brutality of her death. The peaceful, calm description of Porphyria's lifeless body after the murder further intensifies the disturbing nature of the act.
 - **Example:** "As a shut bud that holds a bee, / I warily oped her lids."

Conclusion

Porphyria's Lover by Robert Browning is a dark exploration of love, possessiveness, and psychological control. Through the use of a dramatic monologue, vivid imagery, and a chilling, regular rhyme scheme, Browning delves into the mind of a disturbed speaker who confuses love with domination. The themes of obsessive love, power dynamics, and the conflict between passion and societal expectations are explored in depth, making this poem a complex study of human psychology and morality. The use of symbolism, pathetic fallacy, and repetition contributes to the unsettling atmosphere of the poem, making it one of Browning's most famous works.

COMPARISON WITH,

A farmer's bride

Sonnet 29 ___ I think of thee

A comparison between *Porphyria's Lover* by Robert Browning, *Sonnet 29 – I Think of Thee* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and *The Farmer's Bride* by Charlotte Mew reveals contrasting depictions of love, desire, and emotional or physical distance in relationships. Each poem offers a different perspective on love: while *Sonnet 29* explores a deep emotional longing, *Porphyria's Lover* and *The Farmer's Bride* focus on possessive love and the imbalance of power in relationships.

1. Theme of Love and Desire

- **Porphyria's Lover** (Robert Browning)
In *Porphyria's Lover*, love is portrayed as obsessive and destructive. The speaker is consumed by his desire to possess Porphyria completely, leading him to murder her in order to preserve a perfect moment of submission. The theme of love here is intertwined with power and control, and the speaker's desire to make Porphyria "pure" and "good" reflects his need to dominate her.
 - **Example:** "That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good."
 - **Sonnet 29 – I Think of Thee** (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)
In *Sonnet 29*, love is depicted as passionate, longing, and idealized. The speaker expresses a strong emotional desire for the presence of her beloved, whose absence creates a deep yearning. The speaker's thoughts of her lover are likened to "wild vines" that "twine" around him, representing the intensity of her emotions. Unlike the other two poems, *Sonnet 29* portrays love as something joyful and fulfilling, rather than dangerous or controlling.
 - **Example:** "I think of thee! – my thoughts do twine and bud / About thee, as wild vines, about a tree."
 - **The Farmer's Bride** (Charlotte Mew)
In *The Farmer's Bride*, love is shown as one-sided and filled with frustration. The farmer desires a close, affectionate relationship with his wife, but she is emotionally distant and fearful of him. The imbalance of love and desire is stark, as the farmer longs for connection while his wife withdraws further into herself. The poem reflects the complexity of unreciprocated love and the pain of emotional distance.
 - **Example:** "The short days shorten and the oaks are brown, / She sleeps up in the attic there / Alone, poor maid."
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2. Power Dynamics and Control

- **Porphyria's Lover**
Power and control are central to *Porphyria's Lover*. The speaker desires complete control over Porphyria, which he achieves by killing her. He views the murder as a way to preserve her love and submission, ensuring she will never leave or change. The extreme power dynamic is evident in how the speaker silences Porphyria permanently, taking away her agency.

- **Example:** "In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around, / And strangled her."
 - **Sonnet 29**
In *Sonnet 29*, the power dynamics are more balanced and reciprocal. The speaker longs for the physical presence of her lover but does not seek to control or dominate him. Her emotional yearning is rooted in love and desire for closeness rather than possessiveness. The poem expresses the speaker's joy when imagining her lover's presence, showing a healthy and mutual emotional connection.
 - **Example:** "I am too near thee."
 - **The Farmer's Bride**
In *The Farmer's Bride*, the farmer holds physical power over his wife, but he is unable to control her emotions or win her love. The power imbalance is clear: the bride is voiceless, and her fear of the farmer and others suggests a feeling of entrapment. The farmer's frustration stems from his inability to dominate her emotionally, and his desire to possess her leads to an increasing sense of isolation and despair.
 - **Example:** "We caught her, fetched her home at last / And turned the key upon her, fast."
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3. Emotional Distance and Isolation

- **Porphyria's Lover**
While the speaker believes that Porphyria loves him, there is a sense of emotional distance between them. This distance is bridged through the act of murder, as the speaker believes that only in death can Porphyria truly belong to him forever. The speaker's desire for control creates a chilling distance between their love and reality, as he ignores Porphyria's agency in the relationship.
 - **Example:** "That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good."
 - **Sonnet 29**
The speaker in *Sonnet 29* experiences emotional distance because of the physical separation from her lover. This distance, however, is not destructive. Instead, it fuels her longing and heightens her desire for reunion. The speaker's thoughts are consumed by the image of her lover, but when she imagines his presence, she finds joy in the thought of their love.
 - **Example:** "Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should, / Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare."
 - **The Farmer's Bride**
Emotional distance is a dominant theme in *The Farmer's Bride*. The farmer longs for emotional and physical closeness, but his bride is terrified of him and remains distant. This emotional isolation is mirrored by the physical isolation of the bride, who is locked away in the attic. The farmer's frustration grows as he realizes that his desire for a close relationship will never be fulfilled.
 - **Example:** "She sleeps up in the attic there / Alone, poor maid."
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4. Use of Nature and Imagery

- **Porphyria's Lover**
Nature in *Porphyria's Lover* mirrors the speaker's emotions. The stormy weather at the beginning of the poem reflects his inner turmoil and foreshadows the violent act he will commit. Porphyria herself is associated with beauty and calmness, bringing warmth to the stormy night, but her death turns this beauty into something sinister.
 - **Example:** "The sullen wind was soon awake, / It tore the elm-tops down for spite."
 - **Sonnet 29**
In *Sonnet 29*, nature is used as a metaphor for the speaker's thoughts. Her thoughts are compared to "wild vines" that grow and twist around the figure of her lover, symbolizing her deep emotional connection and desire. The imagery of a tree and vines suggests growth, vitality, and the natural bond between the speaker and her beloved.
 - **Example:** "My thoughts do twine and bud / About thee, as wild vines, about a tree."
 - **The Farmer's Bride**
Nature in *The Farmer's Bride* is used to reflect the emotional distance and isolation in the relationship. The changing seasons and rural landscape mirror the coldness between the farmer and his bride. Animal imagery, such as comparing the bride to a hunted hare, emphasizes her fear and the farmer's desire to possess her.
 - **Example:** "We chased her, flying like a hare."
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5. Tone and Mood

- **Porphyria's Lover**
The tone of *Porphyria's Lover* is eerie and unsettling, marked by the speaker's calm, matter-of-fact recounting of the murder. The mood is dark and chilling as the speaker justifies his actions and believes that he has acted out of love. The juxtaposition of love and violence creates an uncomfortable tension throughout the poem.
 - **Example:** "No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain."
 - **Sonnet 29**
The tone of *Sonnet 29* is passionate and joyful, with an undercurrent of longing. The speaker's intense emotions are evident in her yearning for her lover's presence, but the tone shifts toward happiness when she imagines him near. The mood is filled with warmth and optimism, unlike the darker mood in *Porphyria's Lover*.
 - **Example:** "I think of thee! — my thoughts do twine and bud / About thee."
 - **The Farmer's Bride**
The tone of *The Farmer's Bride* is melancholic and frustrated. The farmer's growing isolation and his unreciprocated love create a mood of sadness and unease. His longing for closeness contrasts with the emotional distance maintained by his bride, leading to a sense of despair by the end of the poem.
 - **Example:** "What's Christmas-time without there be / Some other in the house than we!"
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Conclusion

Porphyria's Lover, *Sonnet 29 – I Think of Thee*, and *The Farmer's Bride* all explore love and desire, but they do so from very different perspectives. *Porphyria's Lover* presents a dark, obsessive love that leads to violence and possession, while *Sonnet 29* portrays a passionate and joyful love that celebrates emotional connection. In contrast, *The Farmer's Bride* delves into unreciprocated love and emotional isolation, highlighting the pain of a one-sided relationship.

While *Porphyria's Lover* and *The Farmer's Bride* share themes of possessiveness and control, *Sonnet 29* offers a more balanced, idealized vision of love. Nature plays a significant role in all three poems, with natural imagery reflecting the emotional states of the speakers, from the stormy violence in *Porphyria's Lover* to the natural growth of love in *Sonnet 29* and the cold isolation in *The Farmer's Bride*. Ultimately, the three poems present different facets of .

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