

### The Point of View in "Porphyria's Lover"

"Porphyria's Lover" is an exhilarating love story given from a lunatic's point of view. It is the story of a man who is so obsessed with Porphyria that he decides to keep her for himself. The only way he feels he can keep her, though, is by killing her. Robert Browning's poem depicts the separation of social classes and describes the "triumph" of one man over an unjust society. As is often the case in fiction, the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" does not give accurate information in the story.

The speaker is a deranged man who will stop at nothing to keep his dear Porphyria. Although the introduction refers to the weather, it also does an effective job in describing the speaker. In this case, it is nighttime, and the thunder is roaring. The speaker starts by saying: "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(Barnet 567):" This description gives the reader the first glimpse of what is yet to come. These turbulent words help give the poem a gloomy feeling.

When Porphyria arrives at the speaker's cottage, she is dripping wet. The speaker makes it an important point to describe her after her arrival. The description of the articles of clothing that Porphyria is wearing helps the reader know that Porphyria is from an upper-class family. She was wearing a cloak and shawl, a hat, and gloves. It is apparent that the speaker works for Porphyria's family. He lives in a cottage, somewhat distant from the main house. The cottage is cold until Porphyria warms up the room with her presence and by stirring up the fire. The way the speaker introduces Porphyria is very unique. He states that Porphyria "glided" into the room. With this description, the lover insinuates to the reader that he sees Porphyria as some kind of angel who moves swiftly and gracefully across the floor.

The speaker is upset about the party going on in the main house. Porphyria will be married soon, and he feels that if he were an upper-class citizen, Porphyria would be able to marry him. There is definitely much love felt between the two, and the speaker realizes that he will lose Porphyria if he does not do something. There is a sense of desperation felt by the speaker. He also feels that society's rules are very unjust and cruel. At the same time, though, it seems that the lover does not blame Porphyria for what is unfolding, but nonetheless, the speaker acts in a cold manner towards her. She, trying to cheer him up, puts his arm around her waist. During all this time, Porphyria seems to be happy but not necessarily about seeing her lover. The speaker says: "Happy and proud; at last I knew/ Porphyria worshipped me;" Unbeknownst to the speaker, she could have been excited about the party. This also comes to show that the speaker was out of touch with reality.

During the first part of the poem, Porphyria's lover is leaning against her shoulder. He is completely dependent upon her. This is where the lover shows that he is acting in a very cold manner, but he is actually trying to make the reader feel sorry for him. Shortly afterwards, he starts explaining the problem, and states his side of the story. The speaker begins to feel sorry for himself, and his frustration and fears begin to mount into an expected act of violence towards Porphyria.

The only thing that Porphyria's lover can think of is to strangle her with her own hair. By doing this, he believes that she will be his forever. The speaker also sees this as the next best thing to marriage. He is completely out of his mind, and thinks that she does not feel any pain when he strangles her. Robert Browning does an excellent job in emphasizing that Porphyria's lover is not sure if, in fact, Porphyria feels no pain. The speaker states: "No pain felt she;/ I am quite sure she felt no pain(Barnet 568)." By strangling Porphyria, the speaker believes that they will be together, and that everything will be better in the near future. It seems the speaker "witnesses the woman's apparently wholehearted love-

(and) is also the moment that he attempts to preserve by killing her (Maxwell 28)." Of course, this theory could not be further from the truth, and this shows the reader that there is something wrong with the lover's state of mind.

Towards the end of the poem, it is Porphyria's corpse that is leaning on his shoulder. Her lifeless body is supported by her lover. From this point on, the speaker's insanity becomes more evident. The statements that the speaker makes are by no means believable. He is therefore consciously lying, or unaware of reality. The lover makes several statements about Porphyria expressing happiness after she was brutally strangled. The speaker states: "again/ Laughed the blue eyes without a stain." There is no way that a lifeless body could possibly show any signs of life, especially in the eyes. Another example where the speaker is not trustworthy is where he states: "her cheek once more/ Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:" There is no possible way that a corpse can have blushed bright cheeks. Porphyria's body was definitely pale.

Porphyria's lover is so much in love that he cannot think straight. His words let us know there is something wrong with him. By saying, "And all night long we have not stirred,/ And yet God has not said a word!" he is not only saying that what he did is right; he clearly believes that God approves of his actions. Browning wrote about a religious belief in "Porphyria's Lover." John Agricola was the founder of the Antinomian heresy. His belief is that "a Christian under the new dispensation was absolved of responsibility which prevailed under the Mosaic law and hence could not be guilty of sin, however heinous his acts might be. . . . In the Monthly Repository Browning prefaced the poem with an explanatory note:

Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc. are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Potanus, in his Catalogue of Heresies, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.- Dictionary of all Religions,

1704. (Crowell 186)."

This statement was printed in order to avoid possible controversy that could surround the poem's nature. What it translates to is that Porphyria's lover was not responsible for his crime if, in fact, he was a Christian. Brown probably used this poem as a criticism of this point of view.

"Porphyria's Lover" builds up to a startling and spine chilling conclusion. "In the last line ('And yet God has not said a word!'), Browning builds a finely poised ambiguity which captures both the speaker's confidence in the objectivity (he states only what has happened: God has indeed not spoken) and his growing uncertainty provides neither speaker nor reader with an external judge, leaving only the speaker's reconstruction of events: the imposition of his solipsistic consciousness on the world (Slinn 12)."

Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" sets a standard for other poets to follow. The point of view is very dramatic and dynamic. This poem is very effective in expressing to people one thing, and letting the reader know the reality of it all. Although his name is never mentioned, the lover is a unique and memorable character.

Works Cited

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