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Queer Criticism Sandbox

Sandbox Essay: Queer Criticism Analysis of *Porphyria's Lover*

Porphyria's Lover can be viewed through a queer lens as the narrator's gender is ambiguous. Through first read, the reader can understand the text to depict a heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman. The examples of this is how the narrator describes Porphyria, and the language that is used, with emphasis on hair color and head size. The strangulation of Porphyria can be viewed as a man doing it as it alludes to one having the strength to do so. "That moment 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 around, and strangled her." There would have to be a certain amount of force and it is typically viewed that men contain that force. The language of text in terms of the use of "little," and "pale," could be a contrast between the narrator and the Porphyria, this could be used as a big contrast as the narrator could be big in stature with color.

Through a queer lens one could view the line, "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" as an innuendo for a same sex relationship, or it could just mean a good time. Browning's ambiguity when it comes to the narrator could have been done with intention. Perhaps viewers can see the narrator as a female describing relations with another female. Perhaps the murder alludes to forbidden love, or a disinterest in the same sex on the narrator's part, and that's why the murder ensued. The ambiguity of this makes the poem interesting as how it is understood is

limitless. According to Tyson, “heterosexuality is not a norm against which homosexuality can be defined because the range of human sexuality cannot be completely understood in terms of such limited concepts as homosexual and heterosexual.” So the fact that the sex of the narrator is ambiguous, allows the poem to delve into other concepts of sexuality, and how each lens is entirely up to interpretation.