

Psychoanalytic Essay

In "Porphyria's Lover" by Robert Browning, a woman named Porphyria and her so-called lover find solace in the narrator's home during a storm. The narrator depicts a vicious storm and the warmth that Porphyria brings into the home. As he continues to describe Porphyria and all that he desires from her, his thoughts and emotions escalate and mount into one violent action. Upon feeling no remorse for his actions, and even is confident that he has made the right decisions, the mental sanctity of the narrator becomes questionable. The narrator has a clear hatred for the outdoors and an incredible desire to keep Porphyria. Browning instills this instability into the narrator by having him kill Porphyria and stop her from ultimately abandoning him.

Immediately, the narrator makes his feelings for the outdoors abundantly clear. As the "sullen wind" roared outside, it "tore the elm tops down for spite" and "did its worse to vex the lake." Browning takes the weather around the narrator and uses it as a pathetic fallacy to highlight the feelings of the narrator: sullen and spiteful. When Porphyria comes in, she "made the cheerless grate blaze up, and all the cottage warm." Now that she has arrived, the fire and her simple presence have changed the atmosphere of the cottage. However, the narrator only sees Porphyria's "dripping cloak and shawl" and her "soiled gloves." As much as he may be attracted to her "smooth white shoulder bare," the "sullen" outside has still tainted her. Although, now that she is

indoors and has shed these “soiled” clothing items, the narrator takes it upon himself to make sure Porphyria doesn’t have the chance to go back outdoors.

As the narrator ponders the situation that he is in with Porphyria, there was a “sudden thought of love for her... all in vain.” The narrator has this love for Porphyria, but it is all “in vain” because at the end of the night, or by the next morning, she abandons him and leaves the security and regularity of the home. While Porphyria “worshipped” the narrator, he is acutely aware that that is just simply not enough for him. She will leave, and he is suddenly unable to handle that thought. Knowing that he wanted to keep her “perfectly pure and good” and wrapped her hair around her neck and strangled her. This ultimately keeps her in his control for all of time. The narrator then goes on to assuredly state that, of course, “she felt no pain.” While, in the beginning, there was not much physical description of Porphyria, now that she is dead and unable to make any movement against the wishes of the narrator, he has plenty of comments to make. From her “blue eyes” that “laughed without a stain” to her “smiling little rosy head,” Porphyria was much more attractive now that she had no control over her own decisions and is unable to ultimately abandon the narrator and return outside. With no moral resistance of the murder from the subconscious of the narrator, his mental instability is abundantly clear. Browning has the narrator murder Porphyria due to his fear of abandonment and repulse to the outdoors. His impulsive decision to kill her highlights the rashness and unreliability of the mental state of the narrator.