

During the time of Robert Browning's *Porphyria's Lover*, society was very strict for young women. It was still expected that women retain their virginity until marriage. Browning uses the unnamed speaker to examine the human psyche and provoke an emotional and moral reaction to the murder of a lover from the audience. The speaker displays a repressed desire for Porphyria and yet at the same time aspires to preserve her purity for the sake of her reputation.

At the beginning of the poem, the unnamed speaker is shown to be waiting for someone anxiously. He states, "I listened with heart fit to break." This suggests he was listening eagerly for someone he cares about. If the person does not come, his heart will break. Porphyria is the person he was waiting for and she shows up during a storm. After her long awaited arrival, Porphyria murmured, "how she loved me – she too weak, for all her heart's endeavour, to set its struggling passion free." Despite societal views, she wants to have sexual relations with the man she loves. The speaker is "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."

He is shocked that she has made this decision about a sexual encounter however he is delighted to know that Porphyria loves him. Yet the audience is left wondering what the speaker means by debating what to do. While the speaker may have feelings for Porphyria, he wants to preserve her purity. He states, "that moment she was mine, mine, fair, perfectly pure and good." In that moment he realized the perfection of that moment and decided to preserve it forever. The speaker explains, "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." With this brutal, yet bloodless murder, the speaker sustains her appearance. In his mind she will never change and will stay forever pure.

The title and beginning of the poem mislead the audience into believing it will be a love poem. In a true love poem, the ending would be happy and the partners would end up together. However, the author decides to use love to examine the human psyche and elicit a reaction from the audience. The unnamed speaker loves his partner, Porphyria, however the preservation of her purity and beauty becomes more important.