

13 nov 2020 - Porphyria's Lovers

p. 23

He talks about a murder: a man kills his lover because she is not ready to leave her husband and go with her lover.

It belongs to *Madhouse Cells*, because here Browning studies abnormal psychologies. The soliloquy consists in twelve five lines stanzas.

What makes P.L. particularly interesting is the detailed confession of the murderer, who obsessively reports every particular of the crime.

It can be divided into three parts

Part 1

Line 1 to 5

The rain set early in to-night,
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.

It's a sort of prologue, with the description of the time of the day (late afternoon, merging into night) and the weather conditions, which are bad: it's raining hard, and the wind is tearing the elm-tops.; the wind is also rising little waves on the lake.

The **gloomy weather** mirrors the psychological lability of the speaker, who listens to the noises of the external storm with a similar tempest in his heart.

The lover is in the cottage, waiting for Porphyria, the woman he passionately love, but of whose love is not sure.

Part 2

Line 6 to 30

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 for ever.
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.

We see the lady who arrives at the cottage, she glide in;
she is a lady, she is aristocratic, she is very rich, and her lover instead is of a lower class;
even though she is a lady, she kneels in front of the fireplace, and she pokes the fire,
which is dying out.

She takes off her wet cloak, her shawl and her gloves, and she let her damp hair fall.

She calls her lover, but he doesn't reply, because he is angry and aggressive. She coaxes
him, and she murmurs she loves him.

Why is he so angry?

Because he knows she is too proud and too weak to exchange the glittering world she
belongs to for a humble life with him forever. In this moment her passion prevails, and she
is happy and belongs to him.

Part 3

Line 31-60

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
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.
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 oped 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!

Here the crime occurs, and it is devoted to the lover, and to his joyful surprise when he realizes that Porphyria does love him.

What can he do to detain this perfect moment?

The answer of his deranged mind is that in order not to lose his possession **he must kill her**; by killing her she will be his forever.

He winds her hair around her slender neck three times and strangles her.

But madness is evident when he says "no pain felt she", that reminds us of Othello's words: "I would have thee linger in thy pain".

When a person murders another person, especially in this condition, he thinks he is similar to God, because he has the power of life and death; Othello's mind is deranged by jealousy, Lover's one by madness: they both assume they are similar to God because they think they have a right to allot [assegnare, distribuire] death.

Now Porphyria is dead, she is in his arms, he opens her lids, he loosens her hair, and he kisses her repeatedly. He stays all night long, without stirring, with her corpse in his arms; the conclusion he draws is that **as God has said nothing, he has made a good action.**

Browning closes the poem with the line whose meaning is obscure. Does he mean that madness is beyond God's judgement? Who can condemn a man who doesn't know the boundaries between good and evil?

After murdering the woman, the speaker feels he has complete power over her. The speaker is mentally alienated, he is cool and murderous, pitiless. It is a case of lucid insanity; the tone is cold and reflective.