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Porphyria's Love/Hate Relationship

In *Porphyria's Lover* by R. Browning there is the speaker of the story who tells of a woman entering his cottage, and it ends with the speaker killing the woman. What was the speaker hoping to accomplish by killing her? Why did the speaker do it? What was the relationship between these two? Through the language of this poem these questions can be answered and it can be found that the speaker had loved Porphyria at one time, but her attitude and actions toward the speaker led to resentment of her and eventually drove him to murder.

We have the speaker of the poem who, at the beginning, is waiting for a woman to arrive at the cottage he is at. In lines 2-4, "The sullen wind was soon awake, It tore the elm-tops down for spite, And did its worst to vex the lake;" it makes the cottage seem like little shelter from the storm. The storm seems to be all around them and isn't muted at all. A cottage is a meager dwelling anyways, but this one seems to be in even poorer condition, assuming the speaker lives here we know that the speaker is not very rich, or part of any upper class. Porphyria, however, comes in with a cloak, shall, and gloves. Not something a poor person would typically own, at least not all three. She also has pale skin "And made her smooth white shoulder bare" (17). Normally women of the upper class had pale skin, because they were not made to do physical labor outside. "To set its struggling

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passion free/ From pride, and vainer ties, dissever" (23-24). From the second half we can discern that her pride and vainer ties that she can't seem to let go of is the fact that she is of an upper class, and the speaker is below her status. Therefore, it is degrading for her to be with the speaker. Despite all of these things she is still attracted to the speaker of the poem, and she struggles with the opposing thoughts within herself over the passion she feels towards the speaker, and refuses to be with them.

Porphyria seems to be struggling with attraction verse social status. Where the speaker seems to struggle on whether he loves or hates Porphyria. The words in the beginning of the poem are very negative, such as: sullen, spite, and vex, which gives it a negative tone. Then when Porphyria finally arrives the speaker seems distant. He doesn't answer her "call" and she has to put the speaker's arm around herself. All of these things make you think that perhaps the speaker is mad at her or doesn't care that she's there. Except there's the line "I listened with heart fit to break" (5). The speaker here seems to be sad if she didn't show. Why then was the speaker so cold to her when she arrived? . It appears that they were probably lovers and having sex, since she so easily takes off her outer clothes and bares her shoulder for him to lie on. And when she "calls" the speaker; that implies a familiarity with a person.

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Since they are obviously very familiar with each other, and lovers, why then would the speaker kill her? Perhaps, the answers can be found in the other interactions between the two. In lines 24-25 the speaker says that because of her ties that she has, proud and vain, she cannot give herself to him forever. In lines 28-29 "A sudden thought of one so pale/ For love of her, and all in vain:". We see that he thinks of her, because he loves, or perhaps loved, her but all in vain. Perhaps it is in vain, because he knows that she will never be with him even though he loves her, and she still shows up to continue their love affair.

Nonetheless, the speaker still ends up killing Porphyria. It is as if the speaker has a mental break and goes insane. The causation could perhaps be due to the mixed signals (Porphyria wanting to be with him and going to see him, but never actually committing to him) that she gives to the speaker. The one that pushes the speaker over the edge appears to be a moment that produces an epiphany.

"Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshiped me: surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do." (31-35)

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In this moment the speaker realizes that Porphyria worships, or loves, this person and she is happy and proud to be with them. This obviously was not something the speaker had anticipated. His heart seemed to swell, but with what feeling? One cannot know for sure, but since he had to debate on his course of action, and then decided to kill her it can be assumed that resentment filled his heart. After all of this time they have been lovers, and she kept denying any kind of commitment, it turns out that she is in love with them. It seems to be too much for the speaker to handle, so he kills her, gaining her love through a different course of action. She could now be his forever.

In conclusion, it can be found that when the heart is entangled with the mind it makes reason unclear. The speaker's thoughts and actions towards the end are not what one would call mentally healthy thoughts. Porphyria's mixed messages and proud attitude towards the speaker, when he obviously loved her was too much for the speaker to handle mentally. The resentment and passion he felt towards her combined into one of the most passionate actions of all, murder, thus rendering Porphyria, as the speaker's own for all eternity.

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Works Cited

Browning, R. *Porphyria's Lover*. 1836. Print.