

How do 'porphyria's
lover' and 'the sisters'
explore the themes of
love, jealousy...



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The two poems are both stories of love and then murder, and a complex linking of the two. 'Porphyria's lover' is a poem about two lovers, who can not be a couple, due to maybe social status, or other partners, when the woman declares his love for the man, he strangles her in an attempt to preserve the moment. 'The sisters' is a poem about two sisters and an earl, the earl falls in love with one of the sisters, but the other one becomes incredibly jealous, so when the first sister dies, she makes the earl fall in love with her, until she has a chance to kill him and get revenge for choosing her sister first.

Both poems involve love and quite brutal murders. The beginning of 'Porphyria's lover' sets the scene for the rest of the poem. It begins with a description of the weather, it mentions the rain and the 'sullen' wind, but then it talks about it 'tearing the elm tops down for spite' this is personification of the weather, creating an angry, troubled effect, this can be related to the speakers own feelings, his depression and his building bitterness, it also shows his propensity to violence, which comes to a climax when he kills his lover.

The beginning of the poem is quite dark and depressing when the speaker is alone in the cottage, however when the woman enters, she has the effect of brightening up the whole atmosphere, making the cottage feel warm, and more welcoming, or so the speaker believes in this is an illustration of how fond the speaker is of his lover, she has the effect of brightening up his life, this is maybe the reason why he becomes so obsessed with her.

The whole poem is in one long stanza(verse), this is perhaps showing a sort of building anger within the person, or it could also be a hint at the state of mind of the speaker, as it is very unusual to have such a long poem only in one stanza, however the state of the speakers mind is very abnormal so maybe this is symbolised through the arranging of the stanza as also being abnormal.

There is a very sporadic rhyming scheme in the poem; the first five lines have a rhyming scheme of A, B, A, BB, this pattern is continued all the way through the poem, however after each five lines the rhyming words change, causing the next five to become a C, D, C, DD scheme. This creates an effect of irregularity or improper thought, much like the speakers mind, we find the speaker to be a very troubled person as the poem continues, much like the rhyming form.

There is obviously a lot of love between these two people, ' she loved me', however we do get a real sense that there is something stopping them from being together, ' To set its struggling passion free/ and give her self to me forever,' this seems to imply that this is a secret relationship and that it might be an affair, on the part of the woman, this would give more reason as to why the relationship was being covered up, although this would give the speaker a desire to have her with him at all times, and not to let her go.

Also there is a hint that the two people might be from different social backgrounds, ' From pride and vainer ties dissever,' this again might make the speaker angry that he is from a lower class than her and therefore cannot be in a real relationship with her. This will make him very jealous of

people from higher classes, again just building his anger. The motivation for murder in this poem was to preserve the moment in which the woman said she loved him, ' At last I knew/ Porphyria worshipped me That moment she was mine.....

I found something to do,' his plan was to make her earlier wish to be with him for ever to come true. His way of making this happen was to kill her, to make her stay, and never leave. This again shows the state that the speakers mind was in, to be able to do something like this and believe that the person actually wanted them to do it. There had been little phrases all the way through the poem to suggest that the speaker wasn't completely sane, ' Porphyria worshiped me,' this shows us that he sees himself as a sort of god to Porphyria and is therefore raising himself up above being judged and being able to do anything wrong.

That moment she was mine,' again he seems to be elevating himself above everything, and claiming that he was now in control of Porphyria, he thought he could do whatever he wanted to her. ' No pain felt she,' he has just strangled this person with her own hair, of course she would have felt some pain, its just that he sees what he is doing as that right thing to do, so he cant see that it is hurting someone else. ' I propped the head up as before,' he doesn't seem to realise that she is dead, he just carries on as though she is still there, he doesn't realise what he has done. And yet God has not said a word,' this seems to suggest that he doesn't think he has done anything wrong, he thinks that because God hasn't done anything then he hasn't done anything wrong.

All these quotations suggest that this man was not at all sane, he seems to be amoral, he doesn't think he has done anything wrong. The murder itself is a very gruesome murder, it is not at all pre-meditated, it is just an outburst, 'I found a thing to do,' he thinks he is doing what the woman wanted, as if she had asked him to. She guessed not how her darling one wish would be heard,' this again shows strongly that the readers state of mind is not at all normal. After the murder he just sits back down and positions the woman as she was before, he doesn't seem to realise that he has just killed her, he just carries on like nothing has happened, this is another reason why he can be seen as mad. One of the main things about this poem is the speaker's reaction to killing his lover, a crime of passion.

He doesn't seem to behave as though he knows that what he has done is wrong, he is amoral, he doesn't have any morals, which is quite a disturbing thought. As in the first poem 'the sisters' begins with a description of the weather, this continues to get worse throughout the poem, showing the growing anger of the speaker, much like in the first poem where the weather was also used to illustrate the speaker's state of mind.

This again creates an effect of bringing the emotions to life more, as people can relate with weather conditions, more than with almost psychopathic feelings, generally. The poem is organised into even stanza's causing this poem to take a more structured way of telling the story. Each stanza has an A, A, B, C, C, B rhyming scheme, this is showing a much more organised way of forming a rhyme, this may be symbolising the speaker's less mad mind in this poem, the speaker here is not mad, she still has rational thought for most of the poem.

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Also there is a line in each verse which doesn't change, ' O the Earl was fair to see,' this is called an incremental refrain, this although not as obvious as the other poem this also symbolises madness on the part of the speaker, it is said at the beginning, where it might be taken as a complement, then it is also said at the end, when the earl has been stabbed this could be taken in a sarcastic way, but also it could be taken in a mad sort of vengeful way as to say, he looks better now he is dead.

This adds to the theme of madness within the speaker making them look almost evil. There is also a line in each stanza, which talks about the weather, as the poem progresses the weather gets worse, symbolising a climax to an outburst, this is unlike the first poem when the anger is there from the start and it just manifests itself in a different way in the murder, this poem builds the tension so we can see what's going to happen.

The relationship between the earl and the speaker was quite complicated, the earl had originally loved the speaker's sister, this made the speaker very jealous and bitter, so when the sister died the speaker saw this as her time to act, she convinced the earl to fall in love with her, even though she still detested him, she then managed to get him to go back home with her, where she killed him. Unlike the first poem when there was genuine love between the two people, here it was just to get revenge on a certain person.

The motivation for this murder was to get revenge, nothing more, the speaker wanted the earl to die for not choosing her over her sister, also this was a pre-meditated murder, she had planned it out and had organised it well. Unlike the first poem when the murder was a crime of passion, to

preserve the moment in which two people dearly loved each other, also that was a very spur of the moment thing, an outburst, nothing pre-meditated about it.

The repetition of the phrase, 'The Earl was fair to see,' is a clear symbolism of the speaker's madness, each one has a different meaning, however the fact that the same phrase is used over and over is a sign that the persons mind is not working properly. Also we see a very deep hatred of the victim in this poem, 'I hate him with the hate of hell,' which was not present in the first poem as the victim was dearly loved by the killer. To be able to hate someone this much for the only reason they loved your sister more than you, gives the impression that not all is well in this persons mind.

The actual murder in 'the sisters' is very different to that in the first poem, this murder is pre-meditated, and she knows what she is doing is wrong, however she doesn't seem to care, compared to in the other poem when the murderer doesn't even know that he is doing anything wrong. The difference is that this murderer is immoral, she knows she is doing wrong but doesn't care, compared to the other amoral murderer when he doesn't even know he's doing anything wrong.

At the end of the poem it all returns to normal with the weather returning back to how it was at the beginning and the murderer talking in what is considered a normal tone again, this is the same as in the other poem, in which after the murder everything calms down again and the murderer returns to where he was sitting and acts like nothing has happened. I believe that these two poems are quite similar in content and carry the same sort of

message as each other, even though there are parts which are quite different, there are also parts which are very similar, and both explore the themes of love, jealousy and madness.