

Compare the two poem "porphyria's lover" and "my last duchess"

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Both poems are dramatic monologues written by Robert Browning in the nineteenth century. A dramatic monologue is a poem written showing only one point of view, which is that of the narrator, and in " My Last Duchess" it is the Duke. Browning has carried on a tradition of dramatic monologues from Shakespeare. His soliloquies in " Macbeth" when he is alone and debating whether to kill the King or not. Also Allen Bennett produced a television programme entitled " Talking Heads" which shows one person talking to a camera, which is another example of a dramatic monologue.

In the opening paragraph of " Porphyria's Lover" Browning describes a storm brewing outside by using words such as " vex, sullen, spite" which personifies a storm raging in the narrators head. We tend to think Porphyria has an unreal quality as she " glided" in which suggests she is very elegant, in comparison to the storm. She then " shut the cold out and the storm, and kneeled and made the cheerless grate blaze up, and all the cottage warm." The repetition of the word " and" suggests the narrators increasingly excited state of mind as one thought runs into the next. He is like the " cheerless grate" and wants to " blaze up" when he sees Porphyria, yet his pride permits him from doing so.

He then, as she is late, decides to put her feelings for him to the test. She calls him " when no voice replied she put my arm about her waist". Her affection is cruelly rebuffed, despite all her love he feels, she has not passed the " test", because she will not free herself from " vainer ties". These ties are the implications of her current lifestyle, as she is from a higher social

class than him and he wished her to sacrifice everything for him " and give herself to me forever."

Porphyria was late that evening due to a " gay feast" which his social inferiority permitted him from attending. He wishes her to be totally devoted to him and is pleased when " at last I knew Porphyria worshipped me". He relishes his God like power over her and the provocative role he has in the relationship. His paranoia is again exposed when it catches him by " surprise" that she is devoted to him. He has not trusted her until now but now she " made my heart swell, and still it grew."

He then becomes rather sinister " while I debated what to do." This shows him as a completely cold human being as he is callously calculating the advantages and disadvantages of her position. The fact that it is part of the rhyming couplet draws attention to it and gives it the impression of completeness. " That moment was mine, mine" the repetition of the word " mine" concocts the image of a child finally owning the play-thing they have longed for, yet in this case it suggests his delight at possessing her and realising she loves him. The actual murder immediately follows the description of Porphyria as " perfectly pure and good", this completely shocks the reader.

After he " strangled her" he needs justification that she was not hurt, " no pain felt she". I am quite sure she felt no pain!" The repetition aims to appease his conscience. He now believes that death has sealed their love, it has frozen the moment in time. He warily opens her eyelids " as a shut bud

that holds a bee, I warily opened her lids." This simile is affective as it conveys that he is frightened of what he may see in those eyes; accusation, pain, fear or hate. To his delight he sees " blue eyes without a strain" this shows she does not blame him and is almost like the Duke's painting, the perfect ideal. The murderer feels he has aided Porphyria as he has freed her from society. He feels that he has made her happy as he sees the blameless " smiling rosy little head." The final justification of his crime is that " God has not said a word" and seems himself to give consent.

The rhyming pattern consists of two rhyming couplets, with the final line of the poem rhyming with the previous line. This helps to emphasise key stages of the poem and builds up climax.

" My Last Duchess" tells a torrid tale of a young Duchess and her megalomaniac husband. The poem is a one sided conversation between the Duke and a representative of his next bride's family.

The Duke firstly shows the servant a portrait of " my last duchess." The Duchess is shown to have " depth and passion in that earnest glance". This is ironic as it is an indirect contrast to the Duke's personality. He is portrayed as a cold and shallow person. The Duke then discloses that he can only view " the curtain I have drawn for you" which conceals the painting. The portrait shows the Duchess giving the painter (Fra Pandolf) an " earnest glance" yet the Duke does not associate this infidelity instead with joy and courtesy to the painter.

The Duchess' character is epitomised when her husband says, " she liked whate'er she looked on and her looks went everywhere." So for the Duke's wife seems to possess charm, beauty and compassion. He however does not wish to recognise these qualities. Her husband feels " too easily impressed". From this we can see that the Duke despises her " common" behaviour and is critical of her natural charm. He is angered by the fact that the causes of the Duchesses gaze and happiness are below him. He feels their " nine hundred years" old name means nothing to these people.

The Duke shows clear signs of his growing irritation at the Duchesses behaviour. Her general manner can be seen as flirtatious " twas not her husband's presence only, called that spot of joy into the Duchesses cheek." The word " cheek" maybe significant as it could also show that the Duke thought the Duchess had a " cheek" (which is a modern colloquial expression) to look towards other men. Later she becomes more irate, " she thanked men good! But thanked somehow-I know not how-as if she ranked my gift of a nine hundred years old with anybody's gift." He is at the point where everything she does discredits him. The punctuation is significant as the use of a hyphen as opposed to a full stop, conveys the image of the Duke beginning to shout in a rude manner. The Duke strongly believes he has given his wife too much freedom, a belief emulated by riding on a mule.

The event of the revealing of the painting questions the Duke's authority and the sign of a rebellion is evident to him, yet for one so power conscious, it seems odd that he can do nothing to stop it. The Duke does not want " to stoop to blame" the Duchess as he cannot lower himself to say anything

about her indiscriminate behaviour as it is below him. It comes to the point where he cannot bring himself to talk to her even if he begged for forgiveness.

The cold, detached statement, " and I choose never to stoop," shows that he could bear the humiliation no longer, so " all smiles stopped together." The Duke is now in a state where he has a warped personality and arrogance as he confesses murder yet knows his treasured name is his defence. The Duchess was not to blame for her downfall, as she had to live up to the Duke's impossible ideal, which she only now fulfils in portrait. Here the writer uses a sinister euphemism to describe the Duchess as just a portrait now.

The poem is written in heroic couplets, and the formal vocabulary is in keeping with the Duke's nobility yet the tone is conversational. The Duke exercises his authority yet speaks politely to the Counts' representative even though he is socially inferior. The regular rhyming pattern shows that the Duke is the stereotypical helpless husband and is in firm control of him. The sophisticated language reaches a climax when the Duke requests the dowry; " the count's known munificence is ample warrant" for a respectable dowry and a bride who likes that dowry will be his ultimate possession.

There are a few comparisons between the two pieces. Firstly they both involve their partners murdering the women of the relationship. Secondly, both men are extremely jealous. They cannot bare the person they love being with anyone else that hurts them emotionally. The only way they can stop this is to kill them.