

My last duchess and porphyria's lover



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Both My Last Duchess and Porphyria's Lover are dramatic monologues written by Robert Browning. Write a comparison between them showing how typical they are of the dramatic monologue form. Include some reference to the form and language of each poem as well as your personal response. A dramatic monologue is a narrative spoken or thought by one person.

There may or may not be an audience, if there is, it is a passive audience. The story told is usually dramatic and characters often give themselves away. It may not be an accurate representation of the events as only one point of view is given. This is reflected in both poems although they seem entirely different on first reading." My Last Duchess" is written in rhyming couplets (AABB) although these are not felt because the lines do not employ end-stops, they use enjambment, this means one line flows into the next.

This, combined with the iambic pentameter gives the flow of natural conversation, despite the very cold and controlled verse form, accentuated by the fact that it is decasyllabic – each line has ten syllables. This mimics the character of the Duke. He is cold and without passion. He can talk naturally about the murder of his wife and he seems to see women as objects not people.

" Porphyria's Lover" however has an ABABB rhyme scheme. This makes it more fluent and in tune with passion, while the cadence of the poem still mimics natural speech. Although the poem does not display colloquialisms, it is much less formal than " My Last Duchess" It is more fluent and in tune with passion. It does not feel as controlled. The intensity of the poem and the

asymmetrical pattern of the verse suggest the lover's madness even though he presents himself in a fairly reasoned way.

As the two poems are crafted so differently it is easy to concentrate on this and assume there are no similarities. However there are several to be found in the storylines, characters and issues explored within the texts. There are also many differences within these categories too. The first and perhaps most obvious parallel is the murder of two women for no concrete reason. In "My Last Duchess" the Duke "gave commands, then all smiles stopped" The Duke did not murder the Duchess himself, her murder was planned.

He talks about it in a very sage and matter of fact way. However in "Porphyria's Lover" the lover says "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" Porphyria's murder is committed on the spur of the moment, and much more graphic detail is given. In "My Last Duchess" the Duke is speaking to an emissary who has come to negotiate the Duke's marriage to the daughter of another powerful family – he is ready to move on.

Porphyria's lover however is not ready to move on, he believes he has granted Porphyria "her utmost wish" and he sits with her "all night long" This is again exploitive of their characters; the Duke sees women as possessions, the Duchess did not meet his expectations, so she had to be disposed of. Porphyria was secured by "vainer ties" and her lover murders her so he can keep her – "And I, its love, am gained instead" He toys with her corpse as though she has not died and has no intention of leaving.

Neither man believes what he has done is wrong.

Porphyria's lover says that " God has not said a word" and that he has given Porphyria her " darling one wish." The Duke merely brushes his actions aside. After revealing the startling information he calmly says " Will't you please rise" and airily comments on a statue of Neptune on the way down stairs. This also gives the impression that he cares more for art work than people.

While he talks about the murder of his late wife he is admiring a painting of her, which is the state he seems to prefer her in. This suggests perhaps he is some kind of " control freak" Both men are very possessive, the Duke to the extent he almost accuses his wife of having an affair with a monk, he feels that she is too comfortable around other men. She smiles at all she meets and she loves sunsets, her white mule and a bunch of cherries " some officious fool broke in the orchard for her" as much as him and his gift to her of a " nine-hundred-years-old name" To most these would indicate that she had the qualities of a young, happy, innocent and friendly young girl, but the Dukes reactions show his insecurities, throughout the poem he speaks of her ills and he convinces himself with increasing certainty of her unfaithfulness. The Duke is very powerful, he can just have his wife killed if she does not please him, no one will say a word and he can easily secure himself another wife.

He is in a way arrogant as he will not " stoop" to tell her how he feels. On the other hand Porphyria's lover is powerless; he has to wait for Porphyria to come to him," I listened with heart fit to break" And he allows Porphyria control." She put my arm about her waist" Porphyria, in contrast to the Duchess seems less innocent, and more experienced. She is quite forward,

easy in her lover's presence and is portrayed as acting seductively. Her lover says that she is "too weak" to commit to him, this may be true, although she is not portrayed as weak, and seems to have her lover in her power.

We are not told what her "vainer ties" are, perhaps she has a husband or fiancé, or there are family or status ties that prevent her from being with her lover. She comes across as the dominant partner in the relationship. When she "made her smooth white shoulder bare..

...murmuring how she loved me" this gives the idea that the relationship has a sexual element, of which she is in control of. There is no direct mention of sex, passion or love in "My Last Duchess" In both "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover" sex and violence are explored.

There is no reference to sex in "My Last Duchess" but the Duchess is basically murdered for her natural sexuality, despite the fact that this is mainly in the Duke's mind, and to the reader she appears innocent and girlish. Sexuality in some form is implied when the Duke talks about how the "spot of joy" appeared in the Duchess's cheeks while being painted by Fra Pandolf. In "Porphyria's Lover" however the setting is much more sexual, and as we are not told what Porphyria's "vainer ties" are, the scene becomes yet more sexual. Sex out of wedlock would be scandalous enough in Victorian times, let alone unfaithful, premarital sex (that assuming she has another man in her "other life") It is however not expressed as wrong, Porphyria's charm and affection predominate any immorality.

In both poems I think Browning is trying to shock the reader, and reflect many of the Victorian scandals. He also explores issues and boundaries such <https://assignbuster.com/my-last-duchess-and-porphyrias-lover/>

as Are sex and violence both wrong? Which is worse? Are the two connected? How? Another issue to be questioned is the sanity of both men. This is a matter of personal opinion, and can be applied not only to the poem but to various news stories of serial killers and suchlike. Personally I believe that the Duke was sane, although he was possessive and paranoid.

He committed a cold calculated murder. I think it sad that someone of his disposition was put in a place of power and I do not sympathise with him. Porphyria's lover however I do not believe was totally sane, or he would have realised killing Porphyria would not make her his, or preserve the moment and that the feeling she felt before her death had no significance in their earthly relationship. I believe he knew he was killing her but did not understand the concept of her being dead. He says " I wound three times that little throat around and strangled her" and " And yet God has not said a word" implying that he is aware that he has killed her, but he sits with her corpse as if it were alive, he toys with it, he kisses it.

He believes it is her " utmost will" although this appears unlikely. The rocking and pattern of the verse seem to reflect a kind of concealed madness. I do not believe he was right to murder Porphyria, but I do think he was mentally unstable.