

"porphyria's lover"
and "the laboratory"
by robert browning
essay sample



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“ Porphyria’s lover” and “ The Laboratory” by Robert Browning Essay Sample

“ Porphyria’s lover” (PL) and “ The laboratory” (TL) are two dramatic monologues written by Robert Browning. Browning uses a range of techniques to reveal the characters psyche. The characters are both insane and deluded but have big differences, such as one of them is sadistic and the other suffering from subconscious guilt. I will be discussing the techniques that Browning uses to reveal his characters in PL and TL.

In TL Browning begins to suggest a sense of paranoia in the wife: she seems to feel as if her husbands lover’s ‘ laugh, laugh at me’ as if she can sense them laughing behind her back. Further more, the repetition of the word ‘ laugh’ is used to emphasize her paranoia, anger and jealousy towards the actions of her husband lovers. Moreover there is an increase in pace and rhythm in verse 2, as the wife claims ‘ he is with her’ she seems to lose control: she becomes aggravated by what she is saying.

As browning develops his character, her psychopathic tendencies become more prevalent through her affection for a ‘ wild crowd of invisible pleasures’. The idea that the poisons, that can harm and kill a person, are seen as ‘ invisible pleasures’ emphasizes her sadism. Also the poisons are seen as a ‘ wild crowd’ and this use of personification clearly shows her unstable mind as it is as if the poisons are jumping out at her, the poisons have come to life showing the strength of her deluded mind. Her unstable mind is also clear through the enjambment of ‘ No minion like me;/ That’s

why she ensnared him' which conveys her sudden switches and excited thoughts.

Browning places his potential killer in a 'devil's smithy' which immediately establishes a sinister mood. She seems to relish the 'faint smokes curling whitely' and eagerly asks 'Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?' Her enthusiasm for the setting reveals her violent tendencies. Browning similarly uses the setting to introduce the PL killer's psyche, it is stormy and the wind does 'its worst to vex the lake', this is clearly effective pathetic fallacy mirroring the lover's frustration, furthermore the fire in the grate, symbolizes how only she can warm his heart and appeal to the readers senses.

Similar to TL Browning gradually reveals PL psyches by writing the poem in a dramatic monologue form. The character opens up emotionally as the lover as the lover 'listened with heart fit to break' but then his psychotic feelings of sexual jealousy come apparent as he sees her as 'pure and good' yet ironically he strangles her, showing that the lover is somewhat deluded.

Both characters are jealous but only the woman in the lab hates, which is emphasized by her sadistic psyche. Browning's choice of words such as 'let death be felt' shows how much she hates the women her husband are with and how she enjoys killing them. This repetition of these sadistic thoughts emphasizes the amount of hatred she has for the women and that she is deluded by only this, this is also apparent by the amount of times she refers back to this, showing she has only one thing on her mind; revenge.

Furthermore the wife in TL is much more sure of her self, than the lover in

PL. Browning conveys this by rhyme and rhythm, as in TL the rhythm is full
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of pace and concise, as the wife is sure of what she is about to do, and seems to have no regrets and instead would 'dance at the King's' after the murder. This shows she is clearly sadistic as after she committed the crime she would dance and have a good time, whereas her husband would 'remember her dying face'. Yet in PL, the rhythm is slow and tense as he broods and claims 'no pain felt she / I am quite sure she felt no pain' to reassure himself. Also it is clear that the lover has a fear of god as he believes 'God has not said a word' this is to reassure himself that god feels what he has done is right. This is an obvious sign of subconscious guilt.

However both characters are delusional, and Browning uses black humour to reveal this. The wife in TL imagines 'could I keep one half-minute fixed, she would fall / shrivelled' obviously a person with only the eyes could not do such things. This shows how her hatred has deluded her. Also in PL, the lover sees Porphyria's 'smiling rosy little head'. The lover's delusion is apparent as his love and fear have clouded his judgement and have led him to believe she is smiling as if she is free, yet clearly she is dead and lifeless, she cannot be a 'smiling rosy little head' black humour reveals his delusional thought. Both characters also move from anger to contentment: the wife in TL seeks revenge and completes her poison to gain her revenge. The lover in PL seeks to capture the love of Porphyria he achieves this through the action of strangling her, to hold the moment.

Furthermore, similarly through out the poems an idea of anger, jealousy and desire is apparent, however at the end of each poem they both gain contentment, the wife in the lab has took her revenge and in PL the lover has gained Porphyria's love forever.

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In conclusion, Robert Browning uses a range of techniques to reveal the characters psyche. Browning in TL uses a confident and more blunt tone to show her violent, decisive and psychotic pretences. PL contains more tension because the lover is less sure. The wife is portrayed as sadistic through the use of her matter of fact language to describe her future cold actions.

Whereas PL is full of subconscious guilt.