

# Prophyria's Lover

By Robert Browning

# Studying Poetry

- What's the point of a poem...?
- Why not just write what you think clearly - as prose?
- A poet is trying to use condensed language:



*Prose*



*Poetry*



- They want to distill their thinking and get as much meaning in to as few words as possible.

# Studying Poetry

- Because they involve focused and concentrated language - there can be no room for waffle.
- So they must have clearly thought out and structured idea.
- The rule then is - if you can find a technique in a poem - and you think that suggest the poet was trying to say X, then he probably was.
- Nothing should be in the poem by accident.

# Prophylia's Lover

- What we need to study:
- Plot - basics of what happens
- Rhyme scheme
- Form (what is the technical name for this type of poem and what does that tell us)
- The characters
- Ambiguities
- Structure
- Setting
- Sound



# Rhyme scheme

- Put an A at the end of the first line.
- If the next line rhymes then put another A
- if not put a B.
- Carry on repeating a letter if it rhymes with a previous line, or if it doesn't take a new letter alphabetically.
- Look for repeated patterns - this will help divide the poem up into stanzas.

# Rhyme Scheme

- For Example:

An owl once perched in my tree  
at night (when most birds cannot see).  
But when the sun rose,  
he was found by some crows,  
and their caws caused the owl to flee.

# Rhyme Scheme

- For Example:

I live in a room by the sea,  
where the view is great and the food is free.

Some of the tenants come and go.

Some I eat, if they're too slow.

One end of me is firmly locked.

The other end just gently rocks.

I live in a room by the sea.

It's perfect for an anemone.

# Rhyme Scheme

- Write on the rhyme scheme for Porphyria's Lover.
- When the pattern repeats you can go back to A and B etc...



# The Plot

- Sum up what happens in each Stanza...
  - Things to look out for
  - The nature of their relationship.
  - What the speaker does
  - Why he does this.
  - His character.
  - How he feels afterwards.
  - Why he feels this way.
  - How the genre of the poem affects the readers expectations.

# Porphyria's Lover

- What we need to study:
- **Plot - basics of what happens**
- **Rhyme scheme**
- **Form (what is the technical name for this type of poem and what does that tell us)**
- **The characters**
- Ambiguities
- **Structure**
- Setting
- Sound

*THE rain set early in to-night,*

*The sullen wind was soon awake,*

*It tore the elm-tops down for spite,*

*And did its worst to vex the lake:*

*I listen'd with heart fit to break.*

*When glided in Porphyria; straight*

*She shut the cold out and the storm,*

*And kneel'd and made the cheerless grate*

*Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;*

*Which done, she rose, and from her form*



*Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,*

*And laid her soil'd gloves by, untied*

*Her hat and let the damp hair fall,*

*And, last, she sat down by my side*

*And call'd me. When no voice replied,*

*She put my arm about her waist,*

*And made her smooth white shoulder bare,*

*And all her yellow hair displaced,*

*And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,*

*And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,*

*Murmuring how she loved me—she*

*Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,*

*To set its struggling passion free*

*From pride, and vainer ties dissever,*

*And give herself to me for ever.*

*But passion sometimes would prevail,*

*Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain*

*A sudden thought of one so pale*

*For love of her, and all in vain:*

*So, she was come through wind and rain.*



*Be sure I look'd up at her eyes*

*Happy and proud; at last I knew*

*Porphyria worshipp'd me; surprise*

*Made my heart swell, and still it grew*

*While I debated what to do.*

*That moment she was mine, mine, fair,*

*Perfectly pure and good: 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. No pain felt she;*

*I am quite sure she felt no pain.*

*As a shut bud that holds a bee,*

*I warily oped her lids: again*

*Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain.*

*And I untighten'd next the tress*

*About her neck; her cheek once more*

*Blush'd bright beneath my burning kiss:*

*I propp'd her head up as before,*

*Only, this time my shoulder bore*



*Her head, which droops upon it still:*

*The smiling rosy little head,*

*So glad it has its utmost will,*

*That all it scorn'd at once is fled,*

*And I, its love, am gain'd instead!*

*Porphyria's love: she guess'd not how*

*Her darling one wish would be heard.*

*And thus we sit together now,*

*And all night long we have not stirr'd,*

*And yet God has not said a word!*

# Form - Dramatic Monologue

The defining characteristics of the **dramatic monologue**:

(a) a **speaker** (*but not the poet*) who addresses an individual present (*but not the reader*);

(b) as the character speaks he or she **unwittingly** reveals usually unpleasant and nasty aspects of his or her character;

(c) the reader becomes increasingly aware of the **gap** between what the speaker says and the **nasty underlying aspects of his or her character** thus revealed;

(d) the techniques used by the poet contribute to this **revelation of character** and at the time engage the reader's interest. Browning is credited with having thus refined the form of the dramatic monologue.

# Form - Dramatic Monologue

- How does the rhyme scheme add to this (if it does)?
- How does the rhythm add to this (if it does)?
- How does the sentence structure add to this (if it does)?



# Rhythm

- The poem is written in **iambic tetrameter**.
- Iamb (iambic) = unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
- da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM
- So:

The *rain* set *ear-ly in to-night*,  
The *sul-len wind* was *soon a-wake*,  
It *tore* the *elm-tops down* for *spite*,  
And *did* bits *worst* to *vex* the *lake*:

# Rhythm

- Not all the poem is in this rhythm.
- Important sections break from it.

# Rhythm Break

I *list-ened* with *heart fit to break*.

- Here the break in the rhythm draws the readers attention to the fact his heart is about to break.
- This is an early clue to the fact the Speaker is unwell and that something inside him will soon 'break'.

# Rhythm Break 2

*And strangled her. No pain felt she;*

*I am quite sure she felt no pain.*

*As a shut bud that holds a bee,*

*I warily oped her lids: again*

*Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain.*



- Here the double stress at the start of the second line emphasizes the Speaker's **egotism**.
- It adds to the meaning of the lines as it reinforces the Speaker's confusion between his opinion and actual fact.
- The unusual stress on the word '*Laugh'd*' also emphasises the madness that we are becoming increasingly aware is part of the Speaker's personality.

# Rhythm

- Lastly it's important the poem is in an odd Rhythm - iambic pentameter is usual in English poetry.
- This gives the whole poem a slightly uneasy feel, mirroring the fact there is something slightly off, slightly imbalanced in the Speaker.

# Imagery

- The storm
- Sullen / spite(ful) / vex(ed)
- Personification.
- Because it is the Speaker using these words to describe the storm we can wonder if these are not his emotions he is projecting on to the weather

# Imagery

at last I knew  
Porphyria worshipped me

As a shut bud that holds a bee,  
I warily oped her lids: again  
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

burning kiss



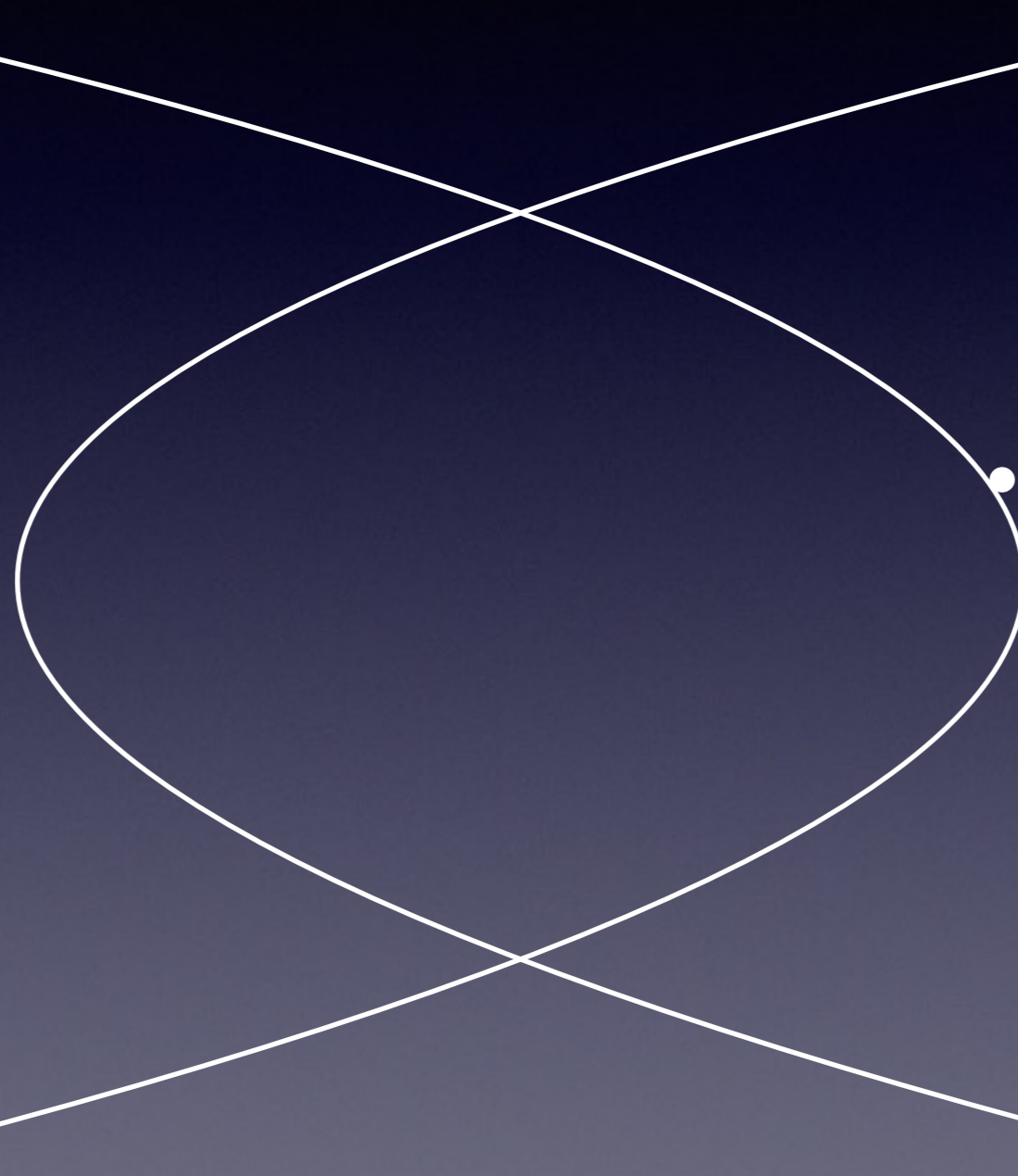
# Porphyria worshiped me

- Her feelings for the the Speaker

- A devotee revering and adoring a deity

# As a shut bud holds a bee

- Shut bud with a bee inside



• Porphyria's  
now dead  
eyes

- burning kiss

# Ambiguities

- *And yet God has not said a word.*
- Does the Speaker expect God to congratulate him - is he so Egotistical he believes he has done right and should be congratulated?
- Is he mocking believers because he thinks he has got away with murder - also suggests egotism as he thinks he is above everyone else, as if he knows there is no God and laughs at those who believe.



# The title

- A disease that can affect the nervous system or the skin.
- Causes urine to turn blue.
- Sometimes named 'The Royal Disease' as it has been linked to many of the Royal family down the years.
- There are many symptoms including madness and inevitably, a long and painful death.
- ***So - what might the poem have to do with illness - who might be ill and how does that change your view of what is happening?***

# But wait a minute....!

and her lover kills her out of mercy, not psychopathy. To the modern reader, the connection between the name and the disease sounds plausible. However, Browning published this poem in 1836. While the group of blood disorders known as "porphyria" have been around for centuries, the term *was not coined until 1889*, when Dr Barend Stovkis coined the term for the blood disorder after the Greek "porphyrus" (purple) after noting the reddish-purple urine of his patients with the disease. Robert Browning would not — could not — have called the disease "porphyria" unless he could see 53 years into the future.

Porphyria's name more likely suggests she is a member of the nobility, since purple is commonly associated with royalty. With the correct historical perspective, Best's article falls apart at the seams. I came across this article while doing research for a paper and wanted to point this out so that other

It might be best to use the argument here a stick to the idea that Porphyria adds to her characterisation as upper class - due to the connotations of the colour purple.

# Sounds in the poem

- Alliteration
- Any repetition of certain sounds (not only at the start of words)
- Assonance (same sound in the middle - usually vowels)
- Plosives (p, t, d, g, k)
- Sibilance (lots of s, sh, z)



# How to write an Essay on Poetry

- First of all what an essay needs to do.
- Show knowledge of the text.
- Answer the Question.
- If it does both it passes (10/20)



# Examples of poetry Questions...

- **Choose a poem which takes as its starting point a memorable experience.**
- *Discuss how the poet's presentation of the experience helps you to appreciate its significance.*
- **Choose a poem which encourages you to think differently or to understand something in a new way.**
- *Discuss how the poet's ideas and techniques led you to change your thinking or understanding.*
- **Choose a poem which is written in a particular poetic form or which has a particularly effective structure.**
- *Discuss how the poet's use of form or structure contributes to the impact of the poems' central concerns.*

# Structure of a poetry Essay

Introduction

Analyse the form of the poem (rhyme scheme / stanzas / rhythm)

Main Body 2

Main body 3

Main body 4

Conclusion

- **Choose a poem which is written in a particular poetic form or which has a particularly effective structure.**
- *Discuss how the poet's use of form or structure contributes to the impact of the poems'c central concerns.*

- Introduction.
- Title and author.
- Reference to the question.
- Sum up the poem.
- Explain what the essay will do.

- **Choose a poem which is written in a particular poetic form or which has a particularly effective structure.**
- *Discuss how the poet's use of form or structure contributes to the impact of the poems' central concerns.*
- ***Robert Browning's Porphyria's lover is a poem which utilises the effective structure of a Dramatic Monologue.***
- You need to sum up what a dramatic monologue should do.
- Porphyria's Lover fits or does not fit in to these convention (this is the equivalent of a "IN this Essay I will look at ..." sentence)



# Example Introduction

- ***Robert Browning's Porphyria's lover is a poem which utilises the effective structure of a Dramatic Monologue. This particular poetic form is one which has some significant conventions; the poem should have one voice (the 'mono' bit) who is a character created by the poet; this 'Speaker' should be talking to another character who remains silent; as the poem progresses they should reveal (unknowingly) disturbing parts of their character, this will create a gap between how they view themselves and we as readers view them.***
- ***Porphyria's Lover, is written from the point of view of a man who has just killed Porphyria, as the poem progresses we become more and more convinced of his madness and egotism, until he ends with an ambitious call to God. One part of the poem that does not fit the expected conventions of a dramatic monologue, however, is that it is unreal who the Speaker is talking to.***

# Section on Structure

- Topic Sentence.
- Quote the first stanza.
- Explain the rhyme scheme - why might this be important?
- Anything you notice about the sentence structure.
- Explain the rhythm and why this might be important.