

“Gained Instead”: A Study of Power in Robert Browning’s “Porphyria’s Lover”

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On the surface, Robert Browning’s poem, “Porphyria’s Lover” is a straightforward piece.¹ The plot begins with the speaker, a man, being visited at night by his lover, Porphyria, and ends ultimately with him strangling her. It is a simple story, albeit a distressing one. As literary critic Catherine Ross notes in her article, “Browning’s *Porphyria’s Lover*,” the “standard reading” of the poem is that Browning’s narrator is mentally unstable or “insane,” which allows him to commit the crazed, criminal act of murdering his beloved (Ross 1). In her book *Robert Browning*, Isobel Armstrong adds that the poem itself is an “attempt to examine... neurotic or insane behavior, and in particular the pathology of sexual feeling” (Armstrong 288). Certainly, the act of strangling Porphyria does initially seem insane – an act without a clear or actual rationale – yet this widely held critical view of Browning’s piece is perhaps too myopic. Madness, after all, says little about anything else other than itself. It is the intention of this paper to prove that “Porphyria’s Lover” is a far more complicated piece than a basic tale of a deranged man who commits a deranged act. Textual evidence supports a different, more complex, and perhaps more troubling reading – that Porphyria’s death is the deed of a sane man, motivated by the lust for power.

Browning’s poem was first published in 1836 in the *Monthly Repository*, a British literary journal (*Broadview Anthology* 226). The only details the poem reveals about the poem’s speaker is that he is a man and that Porphyria is his lover. If it is to be assumed that the speaker is also British and is also living in the Victorian Era, then these characters and the murder itself can be greater understood by contextualizing them in terms of the Victorian time period and culture. Porphyria’s murder can then be interpreted as being motivated by the Victorian understanding of gender roles, the state’s stance on the morality of its citizens, and concepts of artistic creation. “Porphyria’s Lover” then becomes a poem that is fundamentally about neither love nor death, but one concerned primarily with power.

¹ Please see the **Appendix** for the complete poem [Ed.].

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In the article “Men of Blood,” author Carter J. Wood acknowledges analyses of Victorian violence necessitate an understanding of the time period’s “constructions of dutiful femininity that excused men’s ‘disciplinary’ violence and an all-male judiciary that stood idly by or even actively supported male household dominance” (Wood 266). To be sure, the Victorian gender ideology that held women in a passive and submissive role, and assumed men had the authority to keep women in this role via “‘disciplinary’ violence,” is a key component of understanding the murderous incident in “Porphyria’s Lover.” Yet Browning’s poem is exclusively expressed from the point of view of a male speaker. While the death of the female character is at the crux of both the poem and this study of the poem, it is the male speaker who executes her. For these reasons, the common focus of “gendered analyses” of Victorian England will be shifted slightly in order to more centrally involve an understanding of how Victorians defined masculinity, and the imagined role of men in their culture and society.

“Victorian England,” explains Jeffrey Richards in his essay in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, “was a male-dominated society” (100). Yet before men dominate their society, they are boys. Victorian boys largely learned about manhood and masculinity through the writings of Thomas Hughes, writing which was “a paean to the virtues of... robust manliness” (103, 4). Hughes’ books “were avidly read in school” by Victorian boys who gleaned from them a definition of manliness that involved “habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-Respect, and all that tends toward a true Christian” (53). These “habits” that constitute manliness are primarily concerned with power – power over the self. In this national notion of masculinity, man first overpowers himself, and is then able (and allowed) to overpower all others. Hughes expounds on this theory in the following manner:

A man’s body is given to him to be trained and brought into subjection and then used for... the advancement of all righteous causes and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men. (103)

Part of the earth that men were responsible for “subduing” was its female population, a population that was, as Richards writes, “regarded as inferior intellectually, physically and emotionally” (94). So, corresponding with the elements of power and control voiced in Hughes’ statements, it is understood that superiority is also firmly located in a Victorian concept of masculinity. Therefore, for a male to lack power – to be subdued rather than “subduing” – would mean that he fails to meet the qualifications of manhood, that he is not a man. Once this Victorian model of gender is applied to the reading of “Porphyria’s Lover,” it can

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be seen that the speaker murders Porphyria not just to control her, which is the widespread interpretation, but to prove his identity as a man according to this Victorian understanding of masculinity.

Browning makes it abundantly clear that power in "Porphyria's Lover" is divided along the lines of gender. However, even the title of the poem portrays that this division is an unconventional one, and therefore problematic. Notice that the poem's title is not, "My Lover, Porphyria," but rather, "Porphyria's Lover." This difference is important for two main reasons. First, a title such as "My Lover, Porphyria" would be in keeping with the first-person point of view through which the poem is narrated. The title, "Porphyria's Lover" oddly references the first-person narrator in a third-person point of view. While this may possibly help communicate to readers that the poem is written in the form of a dramatic monologue, it also resonates with the theory that one of the poem's major themes is the speaker's lost manhood. The title makes him nameless. And, by both naming Porphyria and giving her name precedence, the title suggests the speaker is a person whose existence is qualified by a more important person with whom he is associated. Browning's choice to devalue the speaker in the title foreshadows the crucial power struggle that serves as the poem's axis. Moreover, the title positions Porphyria in an ownership role over the speaker. It is an immediate suggestion of the imbalanced (and irregular) power structure that the rest of the poem expands upon.

Even without the evidence of the poem's title, Porphyria's authority over the speaker is unmistakable. Porphyria enters the poem by "glid[ing]" into the speaker's "cottage" where he sits "with heart fit to break" (6, 9, 5). The characters' initial placement speaks to their positions of power. Porphyria stands while the speaker sits. By standing, Porphyria becomes physically taller/bigger and symbolically more powerful than the speaker. Porphyria has the freedom of movement; she can enter the speaker's room just as easily as she can exit. The speaker, on the other hand, remains stationary. In her article "Browning's Pygmalion and the Revenge of Galatea," Catherine Maxwell also connects Porphyria's physical movement with her personal power, observing that the speaker "picture[s]... her as [a] free agent" and that he is also "resent[ful] of her autonomy" (Maxwell 991). I am arguing that this "resentment" derives from the Victorian concept of masculinity, which held that "autonomy" was a privilege reserved for men, not women.

Once Porphyria is inside the speaker's home, mobility as a signifier of control becomes even more evident. Porphyria "sit[s] down by [the speaker's] side," "put[s] [his] arm about her waist," and positions his cheek on her shoulder (14, 16, 19). As Maxwell observes, "Porphyria enters the poem as the dominant partner, the maker and doer, while her sullen lover is silent and recalcitrantly passive"

(Maxwell 991). The speaker is completely inert, physically manipulated by Porphyria, who “composes the scene, even choreographing his posture, in order to rouse his response, to ‘bring him to life’ again” (991). Thus, she is capable of exercising physical control over her own body as well as his. It is she who plays the “dominate” role – reserved in Victorian gender dynamics for men, while the speaker is in the “passive” position – believed by Victorians to be the role of women.

Another distinguishing feature of Porphyria and her lover is a disproportionate ability to speak. Ironically, the speaker of the poem says nothing in the way of actual dialogue throughout the entire text. The linguistic contrast between the two characters is specifically noted when Porphyria “call[s]” to her lover and “no voice repli[es]” (15). There is a noticeable detachment in this expression; the speaker does not own his voice, and the obvious absence of both his voice and his ownership of that voice suggests a deeper lack of presence, or even identity. Although Porphyria is never explicitly quoted in the text, in addition to “call[ing]” out, the speaker mentions that she “murmur[s] how much she loves [him]” (21). Just as with mobility, speaking freely and expressing oneself are acts of independence and authority. Porphyria’s participation in both physical and verbal acts are demonstrations that her individual power is superior to the speaker’s, whose immobility and speechlessness can be seen as indications of powerlessness. This, certainly, is not in keeping with the Victorian notions and expectations of masculinity and femininity. The power structure that should be in place here, the one Richards’ describes as “male-dominated” in which “inferior” women were “sidelined,” is being blatantly inverted (Richards 100, 94).

These attributes of power – a power that Victorians reserved for men – are particularly important not only because they portray Porphyria as the dominate character, but because aspects of Porphyria’s murder echo these attributes, and thus make it clear that the speaker perceives murdering Porphyria as a means to obtain her authority and, in doing so, affirm his own masculinity. For instance, the very moment when the speaker claims Porphyria is “mine, mine” he is prompted to kill her in order to preserve the moment, in order to sustain this ownership (35). Thus, in claiming possession over Porphyria, the speaker simultaneously reclaims his masculine identity, thereby configuring Porphyria’s murder as an act induced by concepts of gender and power, not insanity.

Obviously, in exerting deadly physical force over her, the speaker corrects Porphyria’s previously discussed physical “autonomy” (Maxwell 991). The speaker’s act of strangling his lover is actually the first independent action the speaker makes. In direct correlation with Porphyria’s prior physical power over him, once she is dead he “prop[s] her head up as before” only, he notes, “this time [his] shoulder bore / Her head” (49, 50, 51). Now it is the speaker who physically

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animates Porphyria. He is indeed repositioning them as they “were before,” only in their “correct” gender roles of a powerless female and a powerful male. Also in terms of physicality, after he has killed her, the speaker twice describes Porphyria as “little” (40, 52). Prior to her death, as mentioned, it was Porphyria (standing) who was physically greater, and the speaker (sitting) who was physically smaller. Again, this affirms that this act of murder is a means by which the speaker claims the exact power that Porphyria (as a female) unjustly had over him.

The discussion of masculine and feminine must now be broadened to include the sexual politics that governed those genders – specially the feminine – in Victorian England. Although the characters in the poem are alone in the speaker’s cottage, it must be understood that the Victorian society of which they are members is not entirely absent. The speaker’s perceptions of Porphyria are highly informed by cultural notions of sexuality and virtue. Just as the speaker’s cultural concept of masculinity can be seen as motivating Porphyria’s death, so might government-endorsed and upheld notions of feminine virtue.

In Victorian times, “women came to be seen as more moral and vulnerable while men were perceived as more dangerous, more than ever in need of external disciplines and, most of all, self-discipline” (Wood 266). Yet Porphyria is clearly outside of the “moral and vulnerable” space Victorian women were expected to occupy. Likewise, the speaker is submissive and restrained – he is nearly immobile until the moment he strangles his lover – and hardly the “dangerous” Victorian male “in need of” discipline. Therefore, the dramatic occurrence of Porphyria’s murder is still an assertion of power but, in this sense, it is a declaration of the power of the ruling state. By murdering Porphyria, the speaker punishes her for her sexual promiscuity – for which the culture would have condemned her – and in doing so aligns himself with the Victorian masculine model of a “dangerous” man who lacks control (266). In this sense, Porphyria’s death affirms the authority of the state.

From the poem’s start, Porphyria’s actions not only indicate assertiveness, as the preceding argument detailed, but a *sexual* assertiveness in particular. The very first thing she does upon entering the speaker’s cottage is feed the fire, which causes the flames to “blaze up” and create a noted “warm[th]” (9). Fire is often used to signify sexual passion and lust. When Porphyria “kneel[s]” in front of “the... grate” – which is as “cheerless” as the speaker – it is specifically noted that she rouses “up” the flames (8-9). The flames then act similarly to the male sexual organ at Porphyria’s touch, figuratively connecting her with a sexual act. This idea is also reinforced by the speaker’s mention of the “warm[th]” that then pervades the cottage. Therefore, this initial, minor action symbolically introduces Porphyria as a sexual being.

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Porphyria's sexuality, however, quickly ventures from the figurative to the more literal. After she tends to the fire, Porphyria removes her "cloak and shawl," as well as her "soiled gloves," and makes "her... shoulders bare" (11, 12, 17). She is literally stripping. By shedding her clothing, Porphyria physically reveals her body, and further reveals herself as a sexual being. In addition to removing her outer garments, Porphyria "untie[s] / Her hat and let[s] the damp hair fall" (12-13). Browning's attention to Porphyria's "untie[d]" hat and loose hair indicates an overall lack of restraint – both physical and social. Each deed makes Porphyria less formal, and thus heightens the intimacy of the relationship between her and the speaker. It is then highly significant that the line of poetry stops on the word "fall" (13). While this is specifically associated with Porphyria's hair, in the context of this highly sexualized moment, the focus given to the word "fall" also resonates in terms of Porphyria's status as a sexual woman, a "fallen" woman, in Victorian society. Browning's emphasis of this word indicates that Porphyria's sexuality delineates her to a lower moral standard, has caused her to "fall from grace."

Additionally, it is important to remember Porphyria's actual contact with the speaker, her "choreograph[y]" of their interaction (Maxwell 991). Previously, it was examined how Porphyria portrays her "dominance[ce]" in the relationship by "put[ting] [the speaker's] arm about her waist" and arranging herself so that his cheek lies against her bare shoulder (16, 19). These gestures are sexually provocative. Porphyria is not only controlling the physical movements of the speaker, she is controlling them in such a way so as to initiate physical intimacy between them. In addition to being the dominant figure, she is seemingly also the partner with more sexual prowess. What objections the speaker may personally have to Porphyria engaging with him in this manner go unnoted, if they even exist. However, the contentions Victorian society would have had are well known. Critic Catherine Ross situates Porphyria within a cultural context by commenting that she "is driven by a powerful sexual passion and the desire for agency, but she lives in a society that discourages both" (Ross 2).

Porphyria's sexuality is clearly a major conflict in the poem, a conflict that arises out of a Victorian notion of what is moral, acceptable conduct for a woman. While Porphyria's actions indicate some level of knowledge of and familiarity with her sexuality, the speaker's description of her is exactly otherwise. Alongside a fairly unconcealed characterization of her as a sexual being, Porphyria is equally spoken of in religious terms. She "glide[s]" into the cottage, more like an angel than a human being (6). She is said to "worship" the speaker, which positions her in the condition of the spiritually devout (33). The speaker even explicitly describes her as being "fair, / Perfectly pure and good" (36-37). Obviously, "fair," "pure," and "good" denote a virginal (and thus morally as well as sexually sound) character, divergent from the simultaneous characterization of Porphyria associated

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with passion, nakedness, and physical touch. This conflict or conflation of the sexual with the virginal is not unique to Browning's poem; it was a ubiquitous confusion during the Victorian Era. As Chris Foss explains in his article, "The duality of the Victorian woman (angel/whore, Virgin Mary/Mary Magdalene) [was]... inextricably a part of the Victorian patriarchal vision" (Foss 15). Thus, the speaker's incongruous attempts to understand and identify his lover are strongly influenced by the dominant cultural understanding (or lack thereof) of women in general. The polarized view of women as either an "angel" or a "whore" lacks any gray area in which a woman might be considered morally "good" and sexually aware. One can see then that Porphyria's actions in the poem, although not flagrantly sexual, still relegate her to the position of a sexually promiscuous woman, and also why the speaker's descriptions of Porphyria are elevated to the point of making her angelic. The crucial difference between the two characterizations is that one (the sexual) is how Porphyria represents *herself*, the other (the virginal) is composed of terms and images the speakers *ascribes* to her. In a sense, Porphyria portrays the reality of who she is as a woman, while the speaker represents the cultural concept of what she, as a woman, *should* be.

The speaker, representing the state, cannot allow Porphyria to live because she is a promiscuous woman, and the survival of Victorian ideology depends on virtuous women. When figured in this manner, Porphyria's death becomes necessary in order to confirm the authority and stability of the state. Again, this interestingly refutes the prominent theory of the speaker's mental *instability*. From this perspective, he is actually maintaining the solidity and permanence of his culture and country. Although the logic may be skewed and the ideas it is based on are presently considered sexist and/or patriarchal, it is logic nonetheless.

The argument that Porphyria is murdered to preserve Victorian ideals and the government that promoted them can also suitably explain the bizarre method by which she is killed. The speaker takes "all her hair / In one long yellow string" and "wound[s]" it around her throat "three times" to strangle her (38-39, 40). As aforementioned, the description of Porphyria letting her "hair fall" indict her as a "fallen woman" (13). In using this same hair to eliminate her, her murder is then directly connected to her promiscuous nature, deplored by the Victorian culture. The "three times" that the hair is "wound" around her neck also helps to support this reading, as three is a significant number in Roman Catholic theology because it signifies the Holy Trinity. This aspect of religiosity in the murder of a promiscuous woman allows one to believe that this is an act meant to uphold the Victorian concepts of morality and virtue that were based on Christian concepts of morality and virtue.

The poem's haunting final line, "And yet God has not said a word!" also validates this interpretation (60). Concluding with a reference to "God" completes

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the patriarchal power hierarchy of citizen, government, and God. The presence of this traditional hierarchy strengthens the sense that this is an act, ultimately, motivated by power. The mention of “God” additionally underpins the issues of morality and virtue. The state is in accordance with God, and therefore God voices no objections with the state. The power of both is undeniable, and maintained by the justice of Porphyria’s death.

In yet another interpretation of the poem, the speaker not only acknowledges God, but claims God’s role, achieving the final and ultimate plateau in the hierarchy of power. As Maxwell argues, the speaker “succeed[s] to the position of... masculine deity, becomes the maker of his own match” (Maxwell 989). The closest human approximation to a “deity” in the poem is the role of the artist, who is also both a “maker” and a destroyer. In killing Porphyria, the speaker destroys her living self in order to create a “perfect” version of her (37). As with the two previous interpretations, at the core of this embodiment of the role of the artist is the speaker’s desire for power, the total power an artist has over his creation.

In order to construct the speaker as an artist, one must first be aware of the potential source of inspiration for the poem itself. Many critics, among them Catherine Maxwell, have noticed that the basic theme of “Porphyria’s Lover” can be easily related back to “Ovid’s story of Pygmalion” (Maxwell 990). In her book, *About Men*, Dr. Phyllis Chesler explains that, in this myth, the sculptor Pygmalion “was devoted to his art, and despised the sexually wanton” women among whom he lived. Pygmalion was a misanthrope who talked to no one and made perfect sculptures” (Chesler 60). Pygmalion could have easily been the model for Browning’s speaker, as he also clearly prefers “pure” over “wanton” behavior in women, desires “perfect[ion],” and like Pygmalion, specifically does not speak (Browning 37, Chesler 60). The speaker’s act of murdering Porphyria to preserve the moment in which she exemplifies a “fair, / Perfectly pure and good” woman, like the one Pygmalion sculpts, then links this act of murder to Pygmalion’s act of artistic creation.

Another sign that the speaker is to be seen as an artist is the name given to the speaker’s lover. The origin of Porphyria’s name might very well be connected to another piece of art, Keats’ poem “The Eve of St. Agnes,” which contains a character named “Porphyro,” the male version of Porphyria’s name (Maxwell 992). Maxwell explains “Porphyro’s name [as well as Porphyria’s] is derived from the Greek word for purple (as Keats knows when he alludes to the “purple riot” in Porphyro’s heart)” (Maxwell 992). But the real significance of this name in terms of Browning’s poem is the fact that “the vermillion dye of porphyry is obtained by pulverizing (“porphyrizing”) a hard red shell or equally hard red slab of rock” (Maxwell 992). And so by virtue of her name, Porphyria is inherently linked to “dye” and the manipulation of “rock,” both associated with artistry. Again, the

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notion of working with "rock" relates the speaker to a sculptor. It is also highly important that the purple dye from which Porphyria's name is derived is obtained by "pulverizing" shell or rock. A certain level of physical force is necessitated before the shell or rock can transform into the intended product. In light of this, one might more avidly interpret Porphyria's murder then as simply the necessary physical force needed to assist in the act of artistic creation.

This notion is supported by the text in the way the speaker describes Porphyria's actual death, twice noting that she "felt no pain" (41, 42). Realistically, this is unlikely. However, if Porphyria is to be seen merely as the material the speaker/artist manipulates to construct his version of an ideal woman/art, the statement is then a reflection murder as purely an act involved with artistic production.

Considering the speaker in the role of an artistic creator, the speaker's actions after Porphyria is dead also take on a new meaning. Prior to her death, as previously discussed, the speaker confuses Porphyria's actions with his perception of what he desires her to be. Maxwell views this struggle "to control, master, fix" Porphyria as artistic "creative anxiety" (Maxwell 989). Yet after Porphyria has been strangled, the speaker is noticeably calm and at peace. Before her death, Porphyria sits "by [his] side" (14). After her death, though they are in the same position, the speaker describes them as "sit[ting] together" (58). Though Porphyria and the speaker have been with one another since the start of the poem, it is the first time the word "together" is employed. This sense of unity the speaker now has can be seen as proof that the "creative anxiety" has left him, he has created what he desired to create. It is also in this post-murder scene that the speaker, for the first time, willingly participates in an act of intimacy with Porphyria. Before, Porphyria had to physically move the speaker in order to be touched by him (16, 19). Yet after her death, the speaker places a "burning kiss" on her "blush[ing]" cheek (48). The use of the adjective "burning" creates a "cosmological motif" in the poem that grounds its concept of love in "associations of primordial eros and strife" (Carson 20). Also, by opening her eyelids, readjusting her hair, and "prop[ing]" her head upon his own shoulder, the speaker reveals "the extent to which" Porphyria is "narcissistically conceived as a prop," an artistic creation (Browning 44, 46, 49, Maxwell 989).

In the poem's final line – "God has not said a word!" – the speaker noticeably ascribes to God his own same peculiar feature of speechlessness that he himself has been characterized by throughout the poem (60). This minor resemblance between the speaker and God underscores the larger parallels between the two; in killing Porphyria, the speaker literally becomes one who has the power to decide who lives and who dies. Figuratively, he, like God, has also become a creator. God's lack of verbal presence may indicate his absence or his accordance with the

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speaker's murderous act. Should it be read this way, the speaker's murder of Porphyria not only replaces the actual woman with an artistic ideal, it also replaces the deity with the speaker. He becomes both the artist and the god. Most importantly, he becomes all-powerful.

What began as a simple love poem has revealed itself to be much more than simple and about far more than love. Scholars have rightly noted that Porphyria embodies both the virgin as well as the promiscuous woman, and that the speaker is both a civil gentleman and a bestial man (Foss 3). Beyond this, the poem has also done justice to other diametrically opposed forces that two people can represent: the masculine and the feminine, the powerful and the powerless, the ability to love and the inability to love. But the remarkable genius of Browning's writing is that these antagonistic forces are not split evenly between the two characters, they are all at work within each character, dividing them into complex beings who are in conflict with both their interior and exterior world, as well as each other. Whether it is viewed in terms of gender, social expectations, or an abstract notion of art, Porphyria's death is always needless, and in each case she dies at the hands of one whose motivation is the lust for authority. In this way, Porphyria's death develops into a devastating portrayal of the awful power of power.

Readings of "Porphyria's Lover" which maintain that the speaker is a madman must contend with the evidence shown here that the speaker can be seen as motivated by various strands of logic, conscious of the decision he is making and, in the end, unremorseful for what he has done. And yet, Browning published "Porphyria's Lover" under the category "Madhouse Cells" (*Broadview Anthology* 226). The poet himself clearly believed the poem was not free of irrationality or even insanity. Given the historical and cultural context of the poem, perhaps Browning's notion was that these various motives – the masculine ideal, the feminine ideal, and the aesthetic ideal – should be questioned in terms of their reasonableness. It should also not be forgotten that before he is guilty of a crime, the speaker is guilty of desiring power over another person, and choosing to seize that power, with complete disregard to the other's utter loss of power, autonomy, and life.

When one considers the imbalanced power structure for certain individuals (both inside and outside of England) under the rule of the British Empire during this time period, this synopsis of the need for control and its tragic results is a haunting warning. Browning, significantly, offers no resolution. "Porphyria's Lover" does not end with the speaker being caught in his crime, nor punished for it. It does not end with the speaker even realizing that the act he has committed is heinous, or what the basic ramifications of what he has done are. Though it may be the end of the poem, it is neither the beginning nor the end of the problem.

Appendix: Robert Browning, *Porphyria's Lover* (1836)

The rain set early in tonight
The sullen wind was soon awake
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listen with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled 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 soiled gloves by, unties
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And last, she sat down by my side
And called 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 love 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 tonight'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 looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped 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 ahir
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,

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I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a strain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped 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 scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

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