 Porphyria's Lover

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 listened 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 10

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,

And laid her soiled gloves by, untied

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, 20

Murmuring how she loved me — she

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,

To set its struggling passion free

From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

And give herself to me forever.

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. 30

Be sure I looked up at her eyes

Happy and proud; at last l knew

Porphyria worshiped 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 l wound

Three times her little throat around, 40

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

Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

And l 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 50

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 aword! 60

Student Activities

1. Annotate the poem
2. Porphyria's Lover is also a dramatic monologue. What effect does the use of this form have on the presentation of Porphyria's Lover himself?
3. What social class do you think Porphyria and her partner belong to? What influence do you think this would have on the power dynamics in their relationship?
4. The poem uses some fairly dark and violent imagery. How does this reflect the subject matter which was conveyed in the media in Victorian England?
5. Porphyria's Lover expects to be punished at the end of the poem, and is surprised when he is not. How does this event reflect or react against attitudes towards religion in Victorian England?
6. My Last Duchess and Porphyria's Lover cover fairly similar subject matter. Do you think Robert Browning was a misogynist, or do you think he had an ulterior motive?