

Porphyria's Lover

'Porphyria's Lover', by Robert Browning, is a poem in which the speaker's personality is gradually revealed. The poem is about a character who has a difficult relationship with the woman he loves because she is unable to love him fully. When he realises she really does love him his reaction is surprising, disturbing and bizarrely understandable. Throughout the poem aspects of the character gradually emerge through the content and language used.

At the start of the poem we get the impression that the character is angry and vengeful. One way this is created is through the word choice in the first five lines which combine to create an effect of pathetic fallacy. The word 'sullen' suggests a dark and frustrated mood; when someone is described as sullen it often means they are holding a grudge or feeling mutinous which becomes clear in this character as the poem progresses.

Another word which gives the reader an idea of the writer's personality initially is the word 'tore'. This action has connotations of violence and shows how angry and impassioned the character is.

Later in the poem we get a clearer idea of the direction of the character's anger and the reasons for this negative feeling. In line 21 he describes Porphyria as 'too weak' and is very critical of her, indicating his underlying anger. The word 'weak' suggest he is dissatisfied with her and thinks her pathetic. He also describes her love for him as 'struggling' which implies it is not strong or constant but is barely surviving - revealing the issues which are evident in their relationship. In addition to this the word 'murmuring' is effectively used to show her declaration of love for him is spoken without earnest or conviction showing he feels his love for her is futile and he is desperate, hence the anger and disappointment seen in his personality at the start of the poem.

The poet then goes on to create the complexity of the character's personality through a clear change in his tone and word choice. The character begins to talk about Porphyria very lovingly, describing his feelings as he looks at her as 'happy and proud'. This is a complete turn-about in his mood and the word 'happy' directly contrasts with words such as 'sullen' that have previously described his personality. 'Proud' suggests he feels in some way to credit for the merits of her personality or looks and is quite possessive - a character trait which becomes clear later in the poem through the repetition in 'mine, mine' which shows his controlling nature. Porphyria's lover also describes her as 'perfectly pure and good', this shows that now she has completely given herself to him she is no longer flawed in his eyes. He now appreciates her love and is contentedly happy. The reader can tell that Porphyria's arrival to the cottage is the cause of this shift of the character's personality by the way her entrance is described. The word 'glided' suggest a calm and almost ethereal elegance, describing a graceful and smooth movement very different from words such as 'tore' in the third paragraph. The character also says Porphyria's presence 'made the cottage warm', showing that not only did she shut out the cold weather and make the environment physically more comfortable but her being there brings about a positive change in his mood and reveals another level to his character.

Great job comparing/contrasting.

Good analysis. Maybe give a bit more context? (How it's the wind).

Again, great - but it might be useful to first quote the line/phrase it's in (to give context), then analyse specifically.

rep?

The character's final act and his attitude to what he has done reveals a shocking and disturbing side to his personality. When he achieves his heart's desire, instead of being content in his happy moment, his mind is calculating. He sat and 'debated what to do', the fact that he feels he needs to do anything shows he thinks very differently from other people. The word 'debated' indicates a two-sided argument; perhaps suggesting he has multiple opinions or voices in his head. The response he decides upon is shocking to us. However the big reveal, 'And strangled her', does not even get a separate line in the poem indicating it is not a big thing to the character. He does not seem to look on death as an end to something or as a tragedy but more of a solution to a problem, showing his psychosis. ✓ Yes!

After Porphyria's death the character tries to maintain his moment of perfection further. He 'propp'd her head up as before', ~~this~~ hints at his controlling nature. He feels a power over her now - he wants to feel like he is supporting her. His attitude is almost like nothing has changed and everything is 'as before', further degrading the importance of his act. His strange thought processes and psychosis are hinted at earlier in the poem when he says of himself 'no voice replied', giving him a kind of detachment from the moment like he is not all there. This gives us an idea of his strange and slightly creepy personality which is revealed more and more as the poem progresses. Finally he says 'God has not said a word!'. This shows he feels justified in his actions and not guilty for killing someone he loved, adding to his complex and disturbing character which the poet creates. ✓

Through the poem the reader gradually becomes aware of aspects of the narrator's character which build up a bigger picture of an interesting and unusual personality. At first we see an angry and passionate person who is not content with his lover. However a very different aspect of the narrator's personality is revealed to the reader where we see a loving and tender man who is deeply happy and surprised to have earned Porphyria's love. With the character's response to achieving his moment of perfection we finally see his true nature which is almost inhuman in its disregard for the value of life and startlingly understandable in its logic and reasoning. This complex personality is effectively created by Browning in the language techniques and content throughout. ✓

Exactly 1000 words =)

This is freakin' good!

You're focused on the question/task throughout, and you're analysing your evidence relevantly.