

Comparison Between Poems 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover'

Robert Browning's poems 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' were both written in the form of a dramatic monologue, meaning that the narrator is also the protagonist. Both poems show a similarity because they are narrated from a male's point of view. Even though the Duke is talking to an emissary in 'My Last Duchess', it is still a monologue, just a monologue within a dialogue. Since the poems are written in this manner, the reader can become more involved in the male's very strong emotions. Both poems are also written out with no stanzas, indicating the insanity of the two males with no actual structure to the poem.

Between the two poems there are four main characters, with the two male protagonists only speaking. Between the two of them there is a huge difference, one is a Duke, coming from a wealthy background, only getting the best assets in life, while the other protagonist is a handsome low class man, who is like a male prostitute for Porphyria. Both men are clearly from different backgrounds and it is shown by their behaviour, not just by the way they look. The Duke is very arrogant and a show off, everything that he has is the best and he has to show it off. The portrait he has of his Last Duchess was painted by the best, by "Fra Pandolf's hands". Porphyria's Lover is the opposite of this and is very shy, but he changes and kills Porphyria. Both men represent the macho man in society today, with the attitude of men still being the same today as it was four hundred years ago. The two protagonists are both determined to get what they want in the end. The difference between the two here is that the Duke "gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together" because he had the money to do so, whilst Porphyria's Lover had to carry out the murder himself. The Women are in control most of the time, especially Porphyria, until they are killed. The Men have to have complete control and this is achieved when the women are dead. The men have craved to have control over the women, especially the Duke because he did not want his Duchess to smile at anyone except for him and now it is his "object". The worst part about these two individuals is that they do not regret anything that they did and they are not afraid of what might happen to them in the future. Particularly in 'Porphyria's Lover', the protagonist truly believes that he has done nothing wrong, "And yet God has not said a word".

The two Women in the poems are both Upper class women with Porphyria being the more dominant, because she takes control over her lover. The Duchess is a very simple down to earth woman. She appreciates the sun set and admires everything which her husband hates. They are very different from each other, even though they come from the same background. Both women need more than they have, which is why they end up getting killed. Their marriages are incomplete and they both paid with their lives for trying to have the most out of their lives.

We see numerous themes in the poems but the biggest theme is jealousy. Both the poems revolve around jealousy or possessiveness. There was no need for the jealousy that the Duke shows, the Duchess has not done anything wrong to him, she is just being nice. She is the perfect wife for anyone else, except the Duke. He wants her just to smile at him, not to admire the sunset but to admire him. The Duke believes that the Duchess should just be happy with his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name". Another theme that we see during the poems is ambition, which is human nature. We always strive to get the best things in life and to have more and this is what the women were looking for. They were not satisfied enough with what they had in their lives and looked to increase what they had. The Protagonists were also looking for obsessiveness, which was not healthy or even possible. Another big theme in the two poems is concept

of divine retribution. Both Protagonists try to play the role of God, deciding when the person's life should end, and even though they say that both women were at their happiest when they died, we cannot believe them to a certain extent.

A major Literary Device that we see in the poems is Psychological Reader Manipulation, automatically hating the Duke when we meet him, sympathizing for the ex-Duchess and also for his new Duchess. The Psychological Reader Manipulation also fluctuates. In 'Porphyria's Lover', at the start, we dislike Porphyria for making this innocent man wait, but when she "glides" in, we begin to like her. Another Literary Device present in both poems is Dramatic Irony. We see this in 'My Last Duchess', because we know what is going to happen to the Duke's new Duchess but the Count does not mind because he will be related to the Duke and that is much more important than his daughter. "I found a thing to do" is what Porphyria's Lover said before he killed Porphyria. This is not the normal thing to do, kill your lover by strangling her. Before this the lover "debated what to do" because he was thinking whether to kill her or tell her that he wanted change, but there was no way he could convince her.

Overall the two poems are similar to each other, both possessing extreme cases of obsessiveness which is beyond belief. You could debate whether it was obsessiveness or just plain insanity. Both poems have the same structure and focus on one person, the male Protagonist. The only real difference between the two is that one is based on more of an upper class person, a Duke, and the other is based on a lower class gigolo.