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## Subject and Power in "Porphyria's Lover"

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Abstract

In his pioneering book, Robert Langbaum sees the dramatic monologue as a generic response to nineteenth-century cultural crisis, enabling debate of contending ideas, requiring the reader to respond to its speaking subject with a balance of "sympathy" and "judgement". Later critics have found in the dramatic monologue a tension between the passionate utterance associated with romantic lyricism and the challenge to idealist notions of the single and essential self, one which gives the poet a political or "interventionist" role. And certainly for Robert Browning, the dramatic monologue seems to have offered a way out of the dilemma of "the subjective poet" as he himself characterized it: a movement out of the solipsism of addressing the state of his own soul, reaching beyond the confessional mode towards dramatization and the attainment of a more authoritative or public vision, dialectical in its strategies, the attainment of "what God sees". By the end of "Porphyria's Lover", "God has not said a word". And what the reader might see is problematic.

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Killing Porphyria is almost a hyperbolic way of preserving her as a work of art, or visual object. With his maniacal narrator, Browning seems to be satirizing this literary convention we've traced in other works throughout the semester. Advertisements. I agree that the narrator and his lover go through a power reversal. Porphyria's activity changes to her passivity, her worshiping of the narrator leads to his worship of her through her death, and her happiness leads to her emptiness through death. The important thing to understand about this transition is what caused it. What could make this pathetically passive narrator go from waiting and worshiping his lover to finding it appropriate to kill her for his own satisfaction, unprovoked?