PORPHYRIA'S LOVER by ROBERT BROWNING
2017

notes taken from GLOUCESTER UNIVERSITY and various other sources

Table of Contents

FULL POEM

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
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,
Murmuring how she loved 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 hair
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,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
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!

HOW TO FIGURE OUT A POEM

If you want to figure out a poem you have to figure out how the speaker is seeing the world

- If you want to figure out how the speaker is seeing the world you have to look at the symbolic language the speaker is using
    - There are many kinds of symbolic languages but one of the most important is metaphor
        - Metaphor is a counter-logical use of language but makes all the sense in the world on a higher level
            - This is how you know you are dealing with a metaphor
            - It makes no sense on the literal level
                - But it makes sense on a 'higher' level
        - We use metaphorical language everyday
            - 'the Whitehouse announced today that...'
            - 'she is a flower, the glory of the day'
                - the beauty, fragility, freshness, fragrance etc are all appropriate to the description of the woman
- when the features of the thing which the speaker is comparing the subject to become so overwhelming that they have stopped seeing the differences, then we can see how the speaker sees the world

POEM OVERVIEW

- Published 1836
- Often described as a classic example of a dramatic monologue
    - This is taken as one of the earlier examples of a dramatic monologue from the Victorian period
- This poem is about
    - Power play
    - Gender play
        - How does this fit into the early Victorian context in which male and female gender roles are becoming more solidified?
            - Is this poem the logical conclusion of taking Victorian gender roles to the extreme?
    - Aesthetics
    - A moral question about love, death and art
        - Browning makes a beautiful poem out of love and death
            - How far are we implicated in this question about love, art and death?
    - The fine line between love and jealousy

FORM: DRAMA

- The dramatic monologue form allows the poet to dramatise the human condition
    - It is possible to combine rhyme, rhythm and metre with narrative
    - They tend to focus on interiority rather than action

FORM AND SYMPATHY

- Dramatic monologues are seen as a method for inviting sympathy for the speaker
    - We judge them but we are also sympathetic towards them
        - We might sympathise with the speaker but by line 40 we realise we are sympathizing with a psychopath
- Browning's monologues are concerned with situations, episodes of lives that are still in the process of developing
    - They focus on examples of self-occupied men and women as they attempt to overcome the limitations of their physical lives

---

FORM: HOW BROWNING COMBINES THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

Browning's dramatic monologues combine both the subjective and the objective

- They explore the 'truth broken into prismic hues' – that is, 'truth' as it is seen by particular individuals, broken down into it component parts
    - Browning presents the Duke as morally corrupted by power and money, to the point that he can no longer think rationally

FORM: 'DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE' DEVELOPMENT

The form of a poem can highlight the kind of relationship the poet desires to create with the reader

- During the Romantic period, many poets adopted a first person, confessional style, creating intimacy with the reader through direct address
    - William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (begun in 1799, but revised many times) is an autobiographical account of the poet's journey to artistic maturity
        - Browning and Tennyson's innovation, however, was to write in the voice of a fictional personae
- Developed during the early to mid-nineteenth century
- The dramatic monologue may be the most distinctive structure of the Victorian period
    - Robert Browning used this form often and has been credited, together with Tennyson, for its creation

FORM: 'DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE' GENERAL FEATURES

- Dramatic monologues tend to focus on interiority rather than action
    - It gives us an interior view of the workings of the speaker's mind
        - Browning wished to make us feel the complex and unstable nature of an individual person
            - In the preface to *Sordello*, he writes:
                - 'My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. Little else is worth study'
                    - Accordingly Browning pays the least possible attention to outward nature.
- It is a poetic form in which there is one imaginary speaker addressing an imaginary audience
    - The speaker ('I') cannot be identified with the poet
    - Speaker addresses an audience within the poem
- The dramatic monologue represents someone presenting a case to an auditor
    - 'Porphyria's Lover' is slightly unusual in this respect
    - there doesn't seem to be an auditor in the poem
    - the woman in the poem may be the auditor but this is debatable
- Characters in dramatic monologues often teeter on the verge of madness or delusion
    - Elsewhere they may represent themselves directly to the reader, perhaps pleading for understanding or anticipating judgment for their actions

        - *Porphyria's Lover*
- In most dramatic monologues, some attempt is made to imitate natural speech
    - Use of enjambment
    - Iambic pentameter
    - Careful use of linguistic techniques
- It represents the distillation of a crucial moment of human experience, focusing on a particular occasion that becomes a revelation of an almost religious nature as the speaker tries to transcend the finite

FORM - BROWING'S PURPOSE

Browning wished to make us feel the complex and unstable nature of an individual person

- In the preface to *Sordello*, he writes:
    - 'My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. Little else is worth study'
        - Accordingly Browning pays the least possible attention to outward nature.

FORM – A 'PERCEIVED' RATHER THAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VIEWPOINT

The form of a poem can highlight the kind of relationship the poet desires to create with the reader. For example, the lyric is often based on autobiographical material and is written from a personal point of view, thus allowing the poet to forge a link between the reader and herself; however, the dramatic monologue creates a different kind of relationship between poet, subject matter and reader

- It gives us an interior view of the workings of the speaker's mind
- The poet and 'I' are separate entities; imagination replaces experience; and the viewpoint is 'perceived' rather than personal
    - In the 1970s and 80s, women poets used real, fictional, mythical and historical personae as an alternative means of exploring what it meant to be a woman – or at times, a man.
    - They often used this technique to challenge gender, racial, social and religious expectations through the characters they create

FORM - THE ROLE OF THE SILENT INTERLOCUTOR

It is the role of the silent interlocutor, more than anything else that gives the Victorian monologue its innovatory distinctiveness, though this is less true of Tennyson than of Browning.

- With few exceptions – *The Holy Grail* being the most important – Tennyson represents the speaker addressing a not very closely defined audience.
- By contrast, Browning's silent interlocutor is always a specific personage, whose role and reactions are inferred from the speaker's words

- The outstanding example is *My Last Duchess*, in which an Italian Renaissance duke, addressing an envoy of a prospective father-in-law appears to confess to the murder of the wife he is hoping to replace. This sort of self-revelation is a hallmark of the Browning monologue
- In certain other poems of Browning's, the speaker is not himself the object of interest, but either addresses in imagination the character who is, or describes the character to an unnamed person

STRUCTURE & FORM: SPEAKER

This could be argued to be one of the most sinister of all Victorian or any poem because this is a poem about murder

- When we get to line 40, two thirds of the way through the poem, the speaker kills the woman he is talking about
  - He strangles her
  - The poem ends with them sitting together in a romantic pose, but he is with a dead woman on his shoulder
  - The murder is shocking
    - He does it to preserve a moment of perceived devotion
      - His tone is unnervingly calm, and it gradually becomes clear that he is still cradling the body in his arms
        - The final lines, however, express uneasiness at the suspension of consequences for his actions
        - 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!

STRUCTURE & FORM: THE DIRECTION OF THE POEM

A well-plotted dramatic monologue has a compelling sense of direction to it

- *My Last Duchess* is a downward spiral into the warped mind, psyche and soul of one the most evil characters in English poetry
  - The duke is fairly complicated in his evilness
    - But he is untouchable because he has wealth, power and ancestory

        - There is an abrupt surprise at the end
    - The duke is deliberately misleading in the beginning of the poem

---

STRUCTURE - ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment is where lines continue onto the next which means that they dont make sense on their own;

- you have to read the next part of the line to make sense of it
- but it also focuses our attention on the words at the end of the line and at the beginning of the next line.
- We can also look at it as meaning which is continued across line boundaries.
    - From this perspective, perhaps Browning is using enjambment to question gender social norms of the Victorian era
        - This poem can be seen as an examination of Victorian social boundaries
- This approach was common in 16th and 17th century poetry but was used far less frequently by eighteenth century poets.
    - In the 19th century the Romantic poets were reacting against the restrictive rules governing 18th century verse.
        - They aimed to use everyday language and the rhythms of speech
            - run-on lines were a natural extension of this principle – therefore, they represent natural speech, an essential part of our human nature and this poem is can be interpreted as being about human nature, particularly as viewed through the eyes of the Victorians.
                - In a way the enjambment (run-on lines) remove the pleasure that comes with the correspondence of line and thought neatly concluding at the end of the line
                - Enjambment can also produce a kind of pleasure where emotion and intellect compels us forward in order to obtain that pleasure of meaning.

Enjambment can also reflect the erratic nature of thought, as well as environment.

- In this sense, the run-on lines create a sense of surprise which is emphasized with the shocking murder on line 42
    - clearly Browning is trying to convey a sense of shock and horror, perhaps to force us to question the speaker's motive and point of view which he later tries to justify with 'no pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain'

STRUCTURE: ENJAMBMENT - DEFINITION AND EXAMPLES

'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;'

- enjambment is where lines continue onto the next

- which means that they dont make sense on their own;
  - you have to read the next part of the line to make sense of it
    - but it also focuses our attention on the words at the end of the line and at the beginning of the next line.
      - straight
      - storm
      - grate
      - warm

STRUCTURE: THE HISTORY OF ENJAMBMENT

We can also look at it as meaning which is continued across line boundaries

- This approach was common in 16th and 17th century poetry
  - but was used far less frequently by eighteenth century poets
    - In the 19th century the Romantic poets were reacting against the restrictive rules governing 18th century verse.
      - They aimed to use everyday language and the rhythms of speech
        - run-on lines were a natural extension of this principle –
          - therefore, they represent natural speech
            - natural speech is an essential part of our human nature and this poem is about human nature

STRUCTURE: EFFECTS OF ENJAMBMENT

- In a way the enjambment (run-on lines) remove the pleasure that comes with the correspondence of line and thought neatly concluding at the end of the line
- Enjambment can also produce a kind of pleasure where emotion and intellect compels us forward in order to obtain that pleasure of meaning
- Enjambment can also reflect the erratic nature of thought, as well as environment
  - In this sense, the run-on lines create a sense of surprise which reflects Browning's use of 'in media res' at the beginning,
    - where he thrusts us straight into the middle of the duke's conversation – clearly Browning is trying to convey a sense of shock and horror,
- Enjambment can also create a kind of dramatic pause

STRUCTURE - HOW BROWNING COMBINES THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

Browning's dramatic monologues combine both the subjective and the objective

- They explore the 'truth broken into prismic hues' – that is, 'truth' as it is seen by particular individuals, broken down into its component parts

STRUCTURE – BROWNING'S DRAMATIC SETUP

There is a sense that we are setup to be suspicious or skeptical of what the speaker is saying

- This is one of the big differences between a dramatic monologue and a soliloquy
  - A soliloquy represents the speaker's true inner thoughts whereas with a dramatic monologue, everything is open to interpretation
  - We are the people that the speaker in the dramatic monologue is trying to convince

STRUCTURE - INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TITLE

Usually the name of the dramatic monologue is the name of the person speaking

- Andrea Del Sorto by Robert Browning
- Ulysses by Alfred Lord Tennyson

This is one of the few examples, particularly in his early dramatic monologues, where the speaker is a man but the poem is not named after him

- In this case, the man is defined against someone else
  - The only name on the title is Porphyria, the woman
- Additionally, we never find out who this man is
  - This puts him in a kind of passive position
    - She is what defines him
- This could be seen as a kind of subversion of customary gender relations in the Victorian period
  - Here, a man is being named for a woman instead of the other way around

STRUCTURE - THE ACTIVE WOMAN WITHIN THE POEM

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, untied

Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me.

The speaker is sitting in the cold and dark with no fire, with the door, apparently, open

- She then 'shut the cold out' in this miserable situation
- In a very domestic way, she makes everything bright and cheerful and homely
    - She turns his little hovel into a home
- She is very active
  She 'glided in', 'shut the cold out', 'kneeled and made the cheerless grate / blaze up', 'rose', 'withdrew', 'laid her soiled gloves by', 'untied her hat', 'sat down' and 'called me'
  The phrase 'glided in' may be sarcastic; as if he is unhappy about where she has been; she has been somewhere that he has not
    - Meanwhile the speaker is only observing
        - He does nothing to contribute to this
            - he does not even seem to speak
                - And it appears as though she does not expect him to do any of those things
                    - It seems as though this is a familiar space for her
                        - There are two ways to look at this situation
                        - They are either so comfortable that they do not need to speak
                        - Or they are so uncomfortable that neither knows what to say
- Letting 'hair fall' in Victorian times would have been seen as very intimate
    - Adult women in public always wore their hair up as a sign of modesty
        - Untying her hair could also signify her untying the social bounds that would have dictated a certain mode of public behavior for her

untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,

- Her 'damp hair' indicates that she has been walking through the rain to get to him

---

STRUCTURE - ANTITHESIS

We can see a situational antithesis

- Browning begins by using pathetic fallacy, personification, and powerful nouns and verbs to convey the sense of a storm brewing outside
    - But he uses beautiful imagery within the house to illustrate the woman as performing very domestic duties, brightening it up and bringing warmth and familiarity to a miserable situation
        - Antithesis is a common technique for highlighting conflict
            - He is indicating a conflict between the woman in the poem and the speaker

The rhyme scheme also portrays antithesis

- The ABABB rhyme scheme portrays an antithesis between neatness, flow and familiarity against abruptness, disruption and hints of chaos

The iambic tetrameter verse is both familiar and natural in terms of the classic iambic rhythms, yet the tetrameter verse instead of the classic pentameter of dramatic monologues creates an underlying feeling of something unnatural

---

STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE - HOW BROWNING SETS MOOD AND TONE

Context, sadness and anger are established through pathetic fallacy

- 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:
  - 'Sullen' denotes sadness, in a general sense
    - it can also mean 'resentfully silent or repressed or showing irritation'
      - it foreshadows an impending explosion of emotions, particularly negative ones
  - 'spite' and 'vex' show anger
    - Pathetic fallacy was defined by John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III (1856)
      - Here, we ask ourselves if the words 'sullen', 'spite' and 'vex' are really attributes of the weather or if they simply describe what the speaker is feeling

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

- Browning is taking us into the eye of a storm
  - He both evokes a natural world of tempestuousness as well as literary tradition and cliché
  - He uses gothic elements to set us up to expect something dramatic and / or romantic

The rain set early in to-night,

- The first line seems to imply that it is always raining
  - Especially 'early' and 'to-night'
    - 'to-night' it's just worse than usual
      - things are starting to go wrong
      - it could also imply that the feelings of anger and sadness have been lingering constantly for some time
        - a scene of something familiar and strange is being set for us

anger is also established through personification

- The sullen wind was soon awake,
  - The wind is about to become a severely destructive force
- And did its worst to vex the lake:

- Browning is portraying the storm as having a mind of its own
  - Perhaps this is showing how the speaker's feelings have got out of control or how the speaker can no longer control them

STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE - RHYME SCHEME AND VERSE

The rain set early in tonight,	
The sullen wind was soon awake,	A
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,	B
And did its worst to vex the lake:	A
I listened with heart fit to break.	B
When glided in Porphyria; straight	B
She shut the cold out and the storm,	C
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate	D
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;	C
Which done, she rose, and from her form	D
	D

Many dramatic monologues are in unrhymed blank verse iambic pentameter

- unrhymed blank verse iambic pentameter is a classic mode for English speech
  - Shakespeare's unrhymed blank verse iambic pentameter makes speech feel natural
    - But here the speech is in iambic tetrameter (4 beats of unstressed and stressed syllables)
      - The verse is carefully constructed
        - But in this case, it also makes the speech seem unnatural
          - The careful construction makes it seem as though the speaker has been preparing for this moment over a considerable period of time or perhaps that it has been building up over a considerable period of time.
            - It is not entirely spontaneous

The rain set early in tonight,	
The sullen wind was soon awake,	A
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,	B
And did its worst to vex the lake:	A
I listened with heart fit to break.	B
	B

The first 4 lines flow back and forth neatly but the fifth line creates a sort of judder (BB)

- The BB rhyme scheme on the fourth and fifth lines disrupt the neatness of the rhyme scheme
  - Therefore we can see the structure as packets of five lines rather than four
    - The even rhyming couplets suggest something even or familiar and the fifth line suggests something odd

LANGUAGE - ROMANTIC CLICHES

I listened with a heart fit to break,

- Browning is implying a romance story
    - The broken-hearted lover is almost a cliché
        - But the heart is not yet broken
            - It is 'fit to break'
                - The first five lines have put us on the brink of a crucial moment in the speaker's life

STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE - THE SPEAKER'S VIEW OF THE WOMAN AND LACK OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Which done, she rose, and from her form

- The noun 'form' hints at a coldness towards her
    - It gives us a strong sense of the gaze
        - There appears to be an element of objectification and dehumanisation
            - We also know that she is the one in the light, but he may still be in the dark

And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,

- Calling someone, who is sitting next to you, is a strange thing to do
    - It gives us a sense that she felt although he was sitting next to her, his consciousness was, in fact, absent
        - Browning is portraying a lack of humanity in him, foreshadowing horror

And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,

- 'no voice replied' again emphasizes the absence of humanity in him
    - his conscience was absent and so was his voice

She put my arm about her waist,

- once again we see the swapping of gender roles
    - we would normally expect the man to be the active one in putting his 'arm about her waist' but here it is the other way around
        - she positions him so that they are sitting together, like a couple

And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,

- ‘smooth white shoulder’ hints at a woman of the upper classes
    - her skin has not been roughened by work and weather
- it is also statuesque
    - like a sculpture which objectifies a particular type of female beauty
        - she is like marble
- it also shows that they are familiar with each other

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread o’er all her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me —

- the verb ‘stooping’ once again hints of her being in a higher position
    - like she is bending above him and he is sitting down

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,

- ‘made my cheek lie there’ seems to be emphasizing his passivity
    - this passivity will have implications later in the poem

---

STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE - THE SPEAKER’S STATE OF MIND: PREMURDER

And spread o’er all her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved 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.

- She is showing an abundance of love and care towards him
    - ‘murmuring how much she loved me’
        - ‘murmuring’ illustrates how he paid little attention to her words
        - or it could be that she is saying it with very little meaning
    - ‘shut the cold out’

- ‘made the cheerless grate
  Blaze up,’
- ‘and all the cottage warm;’

- but he only thinks that she is ‘
  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.
  - He thinks that she is too proud and vain and that she sees herself as being above him
  - Vainer ties could also indicate that she is too familiar with other men (for his liking); he wants her to sever her relationships with other men

Nor could tonight’s gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:

- He upset that she enjoys a ‘gay feast’ without him

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.

- ‘And give herself to me for ever’ illustrates how the speaker conflates love with total possession
  - Browning’s poetry is often about making love transient and making love last forever by possessing someone else
    - Here, the question seems to be about men understanding relationships with women as possessions
      - ‘and give herself to me forever’
  - He often also questions who has the will in a love relationship
  - Browning is very interested in power relationships between men and women
    - This is one of his most disturbing poems in his exploration of this idea
      - You can go back through the poem and notice all the ways in which he as ‘tied’, ‘untied’, ‘set... free’, ‘dissever’, ‘restrain’
        - Browning later plays on this with the strangling of the Porphyria
          - These verbs of binding shows a preoccupation with the subject
            - The speaker is questioning whether or not this is a moment where she gives herself to him forever

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.

- ‘be sure’ actually implies that perhaps he wasn't sure

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud;

- ‘happy and proud’ is ambiguous
  - is it her eyes that are ‘happy and proud’ or his?

at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me;

- ‘worshipped’ is a strong word
  - did she really worship him or is that his own mental projection of her?
  - Perhaps she did ‘worship’ him because we see a multitude of signs of love from her to him
  - Or perhaps Browning is saying that all men (even if they don't know it) want women to worship them
    - This is also ironic because her head is above his head
      - Worship happens from the lower position to the higher one
        - She is sitting above him

surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.

- As his heart swells, so does the poem
  - The sentences are getting longer, swelling
    - Browning is using more enjambment to swell the size of the sentences as the poem build towards a climax
      - Enjambment also reflects stream of consciousness as his thoughts flow faster and faster
        - His emotions are beginning to override him and the poem begins to build towards an explosive moment, hinted at earlier

While I debated what to do.

- This line shows how he is the one in control
  - He has become the active one but this is not something spontaneous; he has been planning something for some time
  - Or perhaps it is spontaenous

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

- This line indicates that before she walked through the door, he assumed that she wasn't his
  - The repetition of ‘mine’ emphasizes possession

Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do,

- This may be seen as a kind of epiphany
    - Although his feelings had been brewing for some time, he had not yet decided what to do until this moment

and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her.

- Notice how the full stop after 'her' coincides with the end of her life

No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.

- 'No pain felt she;
  I am quite sure she felt no pain.' – these lines seem to indicate that the speaker is trying to reassure the silent interlocutor

---

STRUCTURE AND LANGUAGE - THE SPEAKER'S STATE OF MIND - POST-MURDER

I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

- 'laughed' indicates how she looked like she came back to life

And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

- now the speaker is in control and she is 'beneath' him
- he is now the active one in the relationship

I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:

- roles are reversed
    - he is now above her
        - they are sitting together as a romantic couple but she is dead

The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,

- 'its utmost will' shows that he thinks he gave her what he wanted
    - she wanted to be with him so he made it happen
        - now she will not go anywhere else about town

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!

- 'God has not said a word!' indicates that he thinks this is destiny and shows how he felt no guilt
    - he has no shame and he thinks he has done the right thing
        - here we are forced to ask the question as to whether or not he was crazy if he was able to explain his logic so clearly
            - this raises further questions about the (male) human mind and how it can justify killing
        - o
    - o