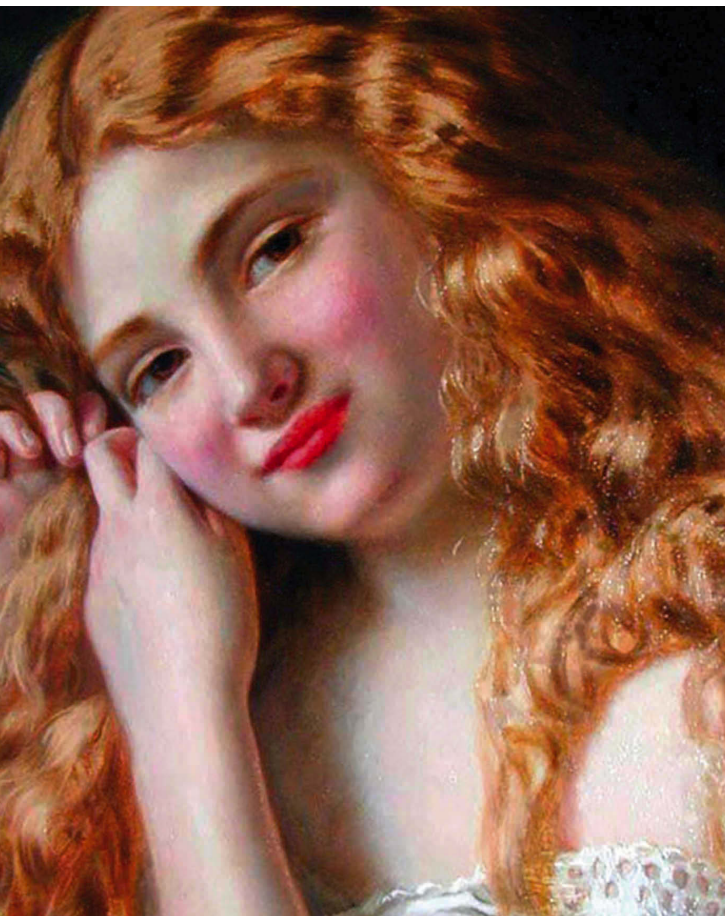


Summary

Porphyria's lover – the narrator of the poem – is alone in his cottage, heartbroken to think that Porphyria will not brave the storm outside to come and visit him.



Suddenly, she arrives. She stokes the fire, removes her wet clothing and sits next to the narrator. She calls his name, puts his arm round her and rests his head on her bare shoulder, before covering his face in her long yellow hair. She quietly says, 'I love you'. (We only have the narrator's word for all this. Perhaps he is describing what he wants rather than what actually happens.)

The narrator tells us that the only thing that stops Porphyria from giving herself to him 'for ever' are the ties she has to ordinary conventions and her sense of duty to others. Tonight her passion for the narrator has given her the strength to break those ties, brave the storm and come to visit him. (The narrator always presents himself in a theatrically pathetic way: he has been neglected by Porphyria who lacks the moral courage to 'do the right thing'.)

When he looks in her eyes he sees that she 'worships' him. This surprises him but makes him proud. He wonders how he can make this moment – when she is 'perfectly pure and good' – last forever.

He strangles her with her own hair, assuring himself that she felt no pain. He opens her eyes 'warily', undoes the noose of her hair and kisses her reddening cheek. Then he rests her head on his shoulder. (This is a shock because the killing of Porphyria is so sudden and so calmly carried out.)

They sit like that all night, with the narrator thinking about how Porphyria has now got what she always wanted – happiness and him forever. He notices that God is silent about what he has done.

DEFINE IT!

dissever – break

elm-tops – the tops of elm trees

endeavour – try

fair – beautiful

gay – lively and happy

grate – fireplace

oped – opened

straight – straight away

sullen – sulky

tress – lock of hair

vainer – prouder (but in a selfish way)

vex – annoy, unsettle

warily – cautiously