

Candidate 9

The candidate evidence used in this workshop has achieved the following marks for this Course Assessment component.

Porphyria Speaks

The candidate has chosen to write a creative piece in the form of a poem; specifically a dramatic monologue entitled 'Porphyria Speaks'. This is a response to Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, 'Porphyria's Lover' which is spoken by the murderer of Porphyria; the candidate's poem is spoken by the murdered woman, directly addressing her killer.

The candidate demonstrates skilful command of the genre and strong creative qualities throughout, for example in creation of the persona of Porphyria; introduction and development of themes such as the nature of love, possession and objectification of the loved one; and skilful use of language to convey atmosphere and mood. The candidate's poem picks up many of the nuances of the original and we see skilful use of rhythm, language and poetic structure.

The piece follows the narrative of Browning's poem : Porphyria has left a 'great gathering' to spend time with her lover; she brings life and colour into the lover's 'frozen and alone' world by setting the fire alight and embracing him; there is a sense of their physical intimacy before and as he strangles her with her own hair; she moves from an active role: 'As I swept in' and 'I set ablaze' to passivity at the moment of her murder: 'I watched entranced'; and the poem ends with her reflection on her death as she observes her lover holding and kissing her body, now forever his.

The poem begins with the central thematic question, 'What am I to you?' which the speaker answers with two further questions: one, the only direct quotation from Browning, a 'smiling rosy little head' (description of the woman after death) and the other, in which the persona shows understanding of her own objectification: 'fantasy of an innocent to corrupt?' In this creation of the speaker's voice, the candidate combines a modern sensibility with awareness of 19th Century Romantic values. Porphyria is able to analyse their relationship and speak for herself, at the same time as celebrating the sublime, passionate and overwhelming in her love. This dichotomy is mirrored in the verse form, which in places captures Browning's iambic rhythm, 'And stole away into the night / Oh how it broke my heart to think' while elsewhere, varying line length suggests dynamic or fragmented emotional experience, for example 'I entered in'. There is repeated skilful use of enjambment, for example: 'so wrought/With horror' and 'to find/My lover...'.

We see skilful use of language, creating a strong impact, in the atmospheric description of the storm raging outside, reflecting the emotional turmoil within: 'alone and cold upon this winter's eve', 'the howling wind and pelting rain' and 'horror, grief and pain'. We sense Porphyria's transformational presence and the depth of her devotion for the lover who 'sat still/ Upon the sofa, pale and ill' while she 'ran' to him. The energy she brings is conveyed through the 'flames' which

'crackled and sputtered out of the grate...hissing and beckoning'. She addresses her lover, asserting the power of her devotion, which conquers even a sense of her doom at his hands, while simultaneously there builds up a sense of unease through the disjointed sentence structure, again reminiscent of the original: 'Called upon you? But to no avail, yet still – I persevered'. Confident poetic skill is shown in, for example, the echoing sounds of 'I thought myself lucky, blessed/ And I caressed your face and laid you head upon my breast' and in the description of the murder itself, with the use of 'Twisting, turning...charming' to convey the hypnotic nature of the moment.

The poem moves seamlessly into the final section, when Porphyria watches the ghastly reversal of their earlier active/passive behaviour: she, now 'a lifeless shell', is moved into the position of beautiful object, dependant on and controlled by the lover, who opens her eyes and rests her head on his shoulder. There is some beautifully economical and powerful use of language: 'blue eyes, icy as the storm that tore down trees nearby' and 'As though to show you cared, but now/ It seems instead, you cared for nought...'. The speaker's realisation that by murdering her, her lover has now taken possession of her, 'I could be no man's but yours' combines poignantly with the assertion that he only had to ask her for confirmation of her love. The last three lines again demonstrate the candidate's confident skill: rhyme is used to reinforce the final irony: to be sure of her love forever, he has destroyed her: 'there we sit/I told you we would be as one forever/ Is this how you ensured it?' Ending on this question effectively echoes the opening, 'What am I to you? Nothing...': in order to be everything to him, she has become nothing.

This poem is a confident and strong piece of creative writing. There is a genuine sense of the persona's voice and personality, bringing a modern perspective, and skilful use of a range of linguistic techniques to create the atmosphere of doomed love mirrored by sublime nature. Structure, in the build up to the climax of the murder and its aftermath, enhances the meaning of the piece. This is a sophisticated achievement which is placed in Band 15-13 and is awarded **15 marks**.