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The Poems

VOLUME ONE

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If such as I might understand,
 Make out and reckon on his ways,
 And bargain for his love, and stand,
 60 Paying a price, at his right hand?

Porphyria's Lover

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;
 10 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,
 20 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:
 30 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
 40 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,
 50 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,
 60 And yet God has not said a word!

Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr

I
 As I ride, as I ride,
 With a full heart for my guide,
 So its tide rocks my side,
 As I ride, as I ride,
 That, as I were double-eyed,
 He, in whom our Tribes confide,
 Is descried, ways untried
 As I ride, as I ride.

In 1840 she was forced to leave Spain temporarily when her secret marriage to one Muñoz was revealed; Browning's poem may well belong to the same year.

For a challenge to the conventional view that the poem embodies Browning's 'doctrine' of elective affinities (or his belief - reflected in his life and art - in love at or before first sight), see, with the suggestion that the speaker is not sane, C. S. Kilby, 'Browning's *Cristina*', *Explicator* II, November 1943, Item 16.

- 61-4] That just holds out the proving
Our powers, alone and blended -
And then, come next life quickly,
This life will have been ended! 1842.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION

First published, entitled 'Johannes Agricola', in the *Monthly Repository*, new series X, January 1836, 45-6, immediately following 'Porphyria', each poem signed 'Z.' like others Browning published in Fox's journal. Slightly revised, it was reprinted in *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842, grouped with its earlier companion under the general title 'Madhouse Cells'. Neither poem was otherwise titled: this poem was simply 'I' and the other, 'II'. In 1849 it assumed its final title, and as 'I. - Madhouse Cell' was again grouped with 'Porphyria's Lover' ('II. - Madhouse Cell'). In 1863 both poems were classified as 'Romances'; perhaps significantly, 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation' immediately preceded 'The Heretic's Tragedy'. In 1868 it joined 'Men and Women', the only poem reassigned after 1863; perhaps significantly, it there follows 'An Epistle'.

Griffin and Minchin (73) state, without evidence, that the poem and its companion were written in Saint Petersburg in April-May 1834, but in 1863 Browning wrote that 'Porphyria's Lover' was written in London in 1836. Both dates are probably wrong; the poem probably belongs to 1835 since (a) in the headnote given below, Browning changed the date in his quotation from 1538 to 1535, and (b) the poem stems from Browning's reading for *Paracelsus* and probably especially from Adam's *Vitae Germanorum Medicorum*. Johannes Schnitter or Schneider (1494-1566) adopted the name Agricola; he founded Antinomianism, a doctrine roughly defined in the headnote Browning printed in 1836: 'Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, &c. are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, &c. Pontanus, in his Catalogue of Heresies, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.' - *Dictionary of all Religions*, 1704.

Browning had no sympathy (as *Paracelsus*, for instance, makes clear) with doctrines of predestination, eternal damnation, salvation by faith alone, election and so on.

- 29 *irreversibly*] irrevocably 1836-68.
42] With unexhausted blessedness 1836.
46 *life*] like 1836.

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

First published as 'Porphyria' in the *Monthly Repository*, new series X, January 1836, 43-4, immediately before 'Johannes Agricola', each poem signed 'Z.', like others Browning published in Fox's journal. With slight revisions it was reprinted in 1842 in *Dramatic Lyrics* with its earlier companion under the general title of 'Madhouse Cells'. Neither poem was otherwise titled: this poem was simply 'II' and the other, 'I'. In 1849 it assumed its final title, and as 'II. - Madhouse Cell' was again grouped with 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation' ('I. - Madhouse Cell'). In 1863 the poems were separated, though both poems were included in 'Romances', the division in which this poem remained.

The remark of Lady Ritchie (*Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning*, 1892, 221) that the poem was written in Russia probably lies behind the unsubstantiated claim of Griffin and Minchin (73) that the poem was written in Saint Petersburg in April-May 1834. In 1863 Browning wrote that he composed it in London in 1836; it probably belongs with 'Johannes Agricola' to 1835.

Two sources have been identified: John Wilson's "'Extracts from Gosschen's Diary' No. I", *Blackwood's* III, 1818, 596-8, and 'Barry Cornwall's' poem 'Marcian Colonna' (1820) (see M. Mason, 'Browning and the Dramatic Monologue', in *Robert Browning*, ed. I. Armstrong, 255-8). Essays include: D. Eggenschwiler, 'Psychological Complexity in "Porphyria's Lover"', *V/P* VIII, 1970, 39-48; C. R. Tracy, 'Porphyria's Lover', *MLN* LII, 1937, 579-80.

- 32 *Happy and proud*] Proud - very proud 1836; Proud, very proud 1842-9.
50 *my*] *my* [italics] 1836, 1849-63; *my* 1842, 1868-88.
58-60 'She died, and spoke no word: and still he sat / Beside her like an image'
('Marcian Colonna').

THROUGH THE METIJDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR

In 1863 the poem was included in 'Lyrics'. The text has remained virtually unchanged. It was composed on horseback in the summer of 1842.

Abd-el-Kadr ('Servant of the Mighty One') (1808-83), Emir of Mascara, a popular hero of the day, fought for Algerian independence from France for ten years. In the summer of 1842 he suffered severe defeats. Browning's speaker is riding to his relief through the Metijda, the plain south-west of Algiers.

- 23 *reside*] abide 1842 (despite Browning's change to 'reside' in two sets of proofs).
38 *the Prophet and the Bride* Mohammed and Ayeshah.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

First published in *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842, it was a late addition when Browning learned that the projected pamphlet was not filled; the poem is not in the first set of proofs in Harvard's Widener Library, but is in the second set. DeVane (*Handbook*, 128) errs in stating that the manuscript is at Baylor University. Six lines were added in 1849 (DeVane, *Handbook*, 127, errs in stating that two lines disappeared), but other revisions then and in future printings were slight. In 1863 it was included in 'Romances'.

The poem was probably written early in May 1842 (and/or perhaps in late April). William ('Willie') Macready, oldest son of the tragedian, was ill in May, and