

Then all smiles stopped together

**Jealousy and Possessiveness in Selected Poems by
Robert Browning**

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Tässä sivuainetutkielmassa tarkastelen kolmea Robert Browningin (1812–1889) runoa sosiaalipsykologisesta näkökulmasta. Tutkimusmateriaaliini kuuluvat runot ”My Last Duchess” (1841), ”Porphyria’s Lover” (1842) ja ”The Laboratory” (1844).

Teoreettisen viitekehäkseni keskiöön olen valinnut käsitteet *mustasukkaisuus* ja *omistushalu*, sillä niiden edustamat sosiaalipsykologiset ilmiöt ovat keskeisessä roolissa tutkimuskohteeksi valituissa runoissa. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on ollut selvittää, voiko näiden runojen kertojat tulkita mustasukkaisiksi ja omistushaluisiksi yksilöiksi. Lisäksi olen tarkastellut, millä tavoin mustasukkaisuutta ja omistushalua esitetään kyseisissä runoissa. Olen etsinyt runoista erilaisia viitteitä – kuten metaforia ja sanavalintoja – argumentaationi tueksi. Analyysissäni olen hyödyntänyt psykoanalyttikko Paul A. Hauckin (1981) teoriaa mustasukkaisuudesta ja omistushalusta. Hänen kehittämiensä tyypillisten piirteiden listan avulla olen lähestynyt tutkimusmateriaaliani ja etsinyt todisteita vastaavista piirteistä runojen kertojissa.

Tutkimuksesta ilmenee, että on perusteltua tulkita runojen kertojat mustasukkaisiksi ja omistushaluisiksi henkilöiksi. Analyysissäni havaitsin, että heidän käyttöksensä sisältää monia Hauckin luokittelemia mustasukkaisuuden ja omistushalun tyypillisiä piirteitä. Löytämiäni piirteitä ovat muun muassa taipumus alemmuuskompleksiin, vaikeus ottaa vastuu omasta käyttäytymisestä, itsekkyyden ja epäkypsyys sekä pelokkuus.

Avainsanat: Robert Browning, sosiaalipsykologia, mustasukkaisuus, omistushalu

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1 Introduction

Robert Browning (1812–1889), one of the foremost Victorian poets, was a master of the dramatic monologue¹ and well-known for his startling subjects. As a result of his choice of themes that did not appeal to the general public, Browning's poems were at first greeted with confusion and misunderstanding. Accordingly, Herbert Grierson and J.C. Smith (1962, 399) claim that in his own day Browning was underrated as a poet. At times he was even referred to as “Mrs Browning's husband”, because his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning initially enjoyed greater success as a poet (Greenblatt et al. 2006, 2051). Despite the modest start of Browning's literary career, he nonetheless managed to gain in popularity and respect. Browning became famous for his explorations of human psychology; he was particularly interested in exposing the deceitful ways in which our minds work as well as exploring the complexity of our motives (Greenblatt et al. 2006, 2054). Similarly, Thomas Blackburn (1967, 192) argues that Browning was more aware of the dark side of human nature than any other contemporary poet. Personally, I am most intrigued by Browning's depictions of damaging love experiences which often include violence or even death. This interest has given rise to the topic of my thesis which deals with jealousy and possessiveness in three selected poems by Browning, namely “My Last Duchess” (1842), “Porphyria's Lover” (1842) and “The Laboratory” (1844).

Although Browning's fascination for psychological motifs has been recognised, there seems to be a shortage of in-depth research into his portrayal of jealousy and possessiveness. Consequently, the purpose of my thesis is to generate more knowledge of Browning's poetry. The only study I found with a topic remotely related to my own is Wen-Lin Lan's (2012) research into the concept of masculinity in Browning's poems. In fact, previous studies have mostly concentrated on Browning's production in its entirety instead of providing deep-going analyses on individual

¹ A poetic technique which involves an implied audience and is characterised by the absence of dialogue. (www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5776)

poems. For instance Richard S. Kennedy and Donald S. Hair (2007) have done a detailed survey of the domestic and literary life of Robert Browning. Their book *Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning* not only introduces the reader to Browning's major works and their possible readings but also sheds light on the poet's private life. Another study of Browning's literary work has been conducted by Esther Loehndorf (1997), who examined Browning's conception of the dramatic monologue and its significance for modern poetry. A more recent study on Browning is Kristi Martin's (2010) Master's thesis, in which she examines the relationship between Browning, his critics and most devoted readers during his life and active career.

On a more general level, the concepts of jealousy and possessiveness have been equally seldom touched upon in the study of literature. The fact that I managed to find only two relevant studies (Lloyd 1995, Keinänen & Pakkala-Weckström 2009) proves my allegation and gives uniqueness to my choice of topic. Thus the study at hand aims to fill a gap in the research field.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine three selected poems, "My Last Duchess" (1842), "Porphyria's Lover" (1842) and "The Laboratory" (1844), by Robert Browning from a social psychological point of view. More precisely, I intend to analyse the poems with the help of two interlinked concepts, *jealousy* and *possessiveness*. The reason why I have chosen to use these particular concepts is that the social psychological phenomena they represent play a key role in the selected poems. As I will argue, the main characters in the above mentioned poems can be regarded as jealous and possessive individuals. Apart from showing my argument to be justifiable, my intention is to find out how these poems depict jealousy and/or possessiveness. In order to be able to answer this question, I will collect textual evidence, such as word choices and metaphors, from the poems and so provide support for my argumentation. As the poems are descriptions of close relationships between men and women, I will focus solely on romantic jealousy and possessiveness.

The structure of this study is the following: I will begin by introducing the theoretical background in chapter two. Firstly, I will give a general introduction to emotions in chapter 2.1.

Secondly, I will define the central concepts of *jealousy* and *possessiveness* in chapter 2.2. After constructing the theory, I will move on to present the material and the method used in this study in chapter three. In the fourth chapter, I will conduct the analysis of the poems and report the results. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to deal with the poems in separate chapters and simultaneously make comparisons between them. In the final chapter, I will draw conclusions based on the findings and evaluate the successfulness of the study. My aim is also to provide suggestions for future studies within the subject.

2 Theoretical Background

The purpose of this chapter is to construct the theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, I will give a short overview of emotions in general in order to create a background for the two central concepts which I am going to use as the basis of my analysis. Secondly, I will define the concepts of *jealousy* and *possessiveness* in the subsequent chapter. Furthermore, I intend to state how these two concepts are understood and used in the study.

2.1 General Introduction to Emotions

According to W. Gerrod Parrott (2001, 1), emotions are social by nature and therefore belong to the core of social psychology. In fact, psychologists have long conceptualised emotions as responses to important social events and entities (Leach & Tiedens 2004, 2). Arguably, the most prominent social feature in emotions is that they are shaped by culture and context. Colin Wayne Leach and Larissa Z. Tiedens (2004, 4) state that the environment around us provides critical information about what emotions should or should not be expressed, by whom and in what situations. These rules of conduct can vary considerably across cultures in many of their aspects. However, Parrott (2001, 1) reminds that not all emotions are necessarily social – take for instance the fear of heights or the privately felt joy of a personal achievement. David DeSteno, Piercarlo Valdesolo & Monica Y. Bartlett (2006, 626) suggest that emotions, like many psychological phenomena, exist because they “serve some adaptive purpose”. Due to the fact that the field of social psychology in general and emotions in particular are areas of extensive research, there is no shortage of reference literature on the subject. I have chosen to base my short account of emotions mainly on a collection of key readings,² which offers an exhaustive review of emotions as central part of social psychology.

² Parrott, W. Gerrod, ed. 2001. *Emotions in Social Psychology: Key Readings*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis

Parrott (2001, 1–3) considers the nature of emotions as well as their role in social psychological phenomena. To start with, he reminds that the common conception of emotion is in fact more like a prototype than a precise definition, and it is represented by some illustrative examples such as anger, sadness and happiness. Furthermore, membership in the emotions category is determined by mere similarity to these prototypes and not by fixed rules, making the boundaries of the category ill-defined. Despite the existing contradictions, social psychologists are generally unanimous in their description of emotions as on-going states of mind that involve behavioural, bodily and/or mental symptoms.

A widely used approach is to divide emotions into two main categories, namely *basic* and *complex* emotions. This division includes the hypothesis that all emotions ultimately stem from a limited set of primary emotions, such as anger, fear and joy (Mesquita, Frijda & Scherer 1997, 258). As is noted by D.A. Louw (1996, 282), humans are also capable of experiencing complex emotions such as shame, embarrassment, guilt, pride and jealousy. According to Louw, these are called complex emotions because each of them is a mixture of two or more basic emotions. For instance, jealousy is interpreted by Batja Mesquita, Nico H. Frijda and Klaus R. Scherer (1997, 258) as a blend of anger, fear and sadness.

At this point it is important to make a clear distinction between the concepts of emotion and mood, as people often confuse these two in everyday language. Parrott (2001, 3) offers the following explanation: emotions are about or directed towards something in the world, whereas moods lack this characteristic of object directedness. Therefore a person in a melancholy mood is not necessarily sad about anything in particular; he or she can be just generally depressed. However, it is not always as straightforward as this to distinguish between emotion and mood. As a matter of fact they may alternate or even co-occur. Parrott (2001, 4) claims that a certain mood makes it considerably more likely that one will experience the corresponding emotion about something.

Thus, it is justified to state that moods and emotions are not static phenomena, but receptive to changes and fluctuations.

2.2 Jealousy and Possessiveness

Jealousy, also known as the clichéd “green-eyed monster”, is a complex emotion that continues to fascinate not only scientific circles but also artists and audiences alike (DeSteno et al. 2006, 626). Rosemary Lloyd (1995, 2) believes that the jealousy motif succeeds in capturing people’s attention and interest over and over again because it “becomes a metaphor for all the forces of chaos that threaten to disrupt what we take for normality and reality”. DeSteno et al. (2006, 627) suggest that widespread scientific interest in jealousy is at least partly explained by it being associated with aggressive behaviour. Jealousy is generally agreed to be an emotion that serves to motivate behaviour patterns that protect one’s important relationship from potential threats (Harris & Darby 2010, 548). Consequently, jealousy “reflects our fear that someone else will unjustly take possession of something that belongs to us” (Ben-Ze’ev 2010, 44). Psychoanalyst Paul A. Hauck (1981, 34) indicates that the possible loss of the beloved is a constant obsession for a jealous person. So, it seems evident that jealousy presupposes some type of meaningful commitment and cannot arise from utter indifference.

Originally, jealousy evolved to defend the continuity of our genes and therefore served an evolutionary purpose (Pelusi 2006). As James W. Kalat (2008, 330) points out, men have traditionally been more jealous of women’s infidelities than vice versa. According to Kalat, this phenomenon is explained by the fact that a man wishing to pass on his genes needs to be sure that the offspring he supports are his own. Consequently, an unfaithful wife would threaten this certainty. In contrast, women can always be certain that any children they bear are their own. However, Kalat (2008, 330) reminds that a woman’s interests are nevertheless threatened by her husband’s infidelity, as he is directing his resources and attention to another woman. Even though

irrational jealousy may once have been a useful instinct when protecting one's mating partner from rivals and other threats, the desire for genetic possession has arguably become an outdated behavioural pattern in modern times.

Due to the seemingly unending interest in the emotion, theories of jealousy have become multi-faceted and characterised by various approaches. Besides resulting in intriguing findings, this variation makes it also difficult to summarise the major theoretical ideas in the field. Christine R. Harris & Ryan S. Darby (2010, 547) point out that researchers of jealousy concentrate on different levels of analyses, ranging from biological functions to psychological mechanisms and situational factors, and often do not place their findings in a larger theoretical framework. Furthermore, inconsistencies in terminological choices add to the challenge (Harris & Darby 2010, 547). Despite the existing uncertainties related to the complete understanding of jealousy as an emotion and the numerous incentives that give rise to it, researchers admit that jealousy expresses profound aspects of the human emotional system (Ben-Ze'ev 2010, 51). In fact, DeSteno et al. (2006, 626) claim that jealousy is an exemplary candidate for a fundamental social emotion. Some researchers (see e.g. Harris & Darby 2010, 548 and Guerrero et al. 2005, 234) argue that jealousy involves different component emotions such as fear, sadness, anger and passion. Depending on the specific circumstances, these feelings can lead to a variety of both positive and negative responses. Accordingly, jealousy need not always be a negative state per se, but instead it can also be interpreted as a sign of deep affection and caring (Ben-Ze'ev 2010, 43). However, Nicholas Tarrow et al. (1990, 319) remind that when taken to extremes, jealousy can develop into abnormal and pathological behaviour called *morbid jealousy*. As is pointed out by Harris & Darby (2010, 563), jealousy in individuals suffering from this disorder is characterised by intense delusional beliefs of a loved one's unfaithfulness. As a result, morbidly jealous people have a tendency towards extreme and controlling behaviour.

Much in the same way as with emotion and mood, it is important to make a clear distinction between jealousy and envy, as people often confuse these emotions in everyday speech. This results from the fact that the two emotions seem to address similar concerns: in envy we wish to achieve something that someone else has, whereas in jealousy we fear losing something that we already have to someone else (Ben-Ze'ev 2010, 40–41). Furthermore, envy can be experienced alongside jealousy which makes it even harder to distinguish between the two emotions (Guerrero, Spitzberg & Yoshimura 2004, 313). However, Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (2010, 41) reminds that envy is essentially a two-party relationship whereas jealousy typically involves three parties, namely the jealous person, the beloved and the assumed rival.

Depending on the object of jealous thoughts as well as situational factors, researchers distinguish between different types of jealousy. According to Harris & Darby (2010, 548), the research into jealousy in adults has mainly concentrated on the emotion as it appears in romantic relationships. However, DeSteno et al. (2006, 626) state that the threatened relationship need not always be a romantic one. Peter Salovey (1991, 16) takes a stand on the same issue by pointing out that jealousy occurs in other types of relationships as well, for instance between siblings, friends or colleagues. The study at hand focuses exclusively on romantic jealousy, because the selected poems depict romantic relationships between men and women. Ben-Ze'ev (2010, 42–43) lists three major components of romantic jealousy: in most cases imaginary fear of losing one's partner to a rival, love of the partner and sorrow or anger at being in such a negative situation. To my mind it is clear that romantic jealousy, like any other type of jealousy for that matter, implies at least some kind of entitlement over another person and assumes the right to control that person's actions.

Using actual case studies as reference points, Hauck (1981, 16–32) identifies six common characteristics of jealous people:

1. Inferiority complex
2. The master-slave mentality
3. Self-defeating behaviour
4. Difficulty in accepting responsibility

5. Selfishness and immaturity
6. Fearfulness

A person suffering from *inferiority complex* tends to conclude that his or her lack of success, money and love is a direct result of being a failure as a person. According to Hauck (1981, 16), feelings of inferiority are among the most prevalent characteristic traits of jealous people. *The master-slave mentality* implies that the jealous person has less strict rules of conduct for himself or herself than for the partner. The third common characteristic is *self-defeating behaviour*, which makes jealous people act inconsiderately with their loved ones. Hauck also claims that jealous people tend to have *difficulty in accepting responsibility*, which means that they often accuse their partners of tormenting them emotionally and do not realise that they themselves are responsible for the feelings of jealousy. Thus, these persons are blind to their own behaviour and cannot perceive that they are in fact their own enemies. As the fifth point of his list of common characteristics, Hauck mentions *selfishness and immaturity*. Jealous people often lack the ability to consider the wishes of others and thus the notion of reciprocity is foreign to these individuals. The final characteristic is *fearfulness*, which means the tendency to feel threatened by even the most innocent events or acts. Accordingly, Hauck argues that it is in fact the way people think about their lover's behaviour and not the behaviour itself that causes jealousy. Paradoxically, it is highly probable that a person who needs constant reassurance of fidelity will eventually drive the partner away. This will, in turn, strengthen the jealous person's view of himself or herself as a failure. I intend to return to Hauck's list of characteristics later in the analysis chapters.

An emotion strongly connected to jealousy is that of possessiveness. As stated earlier, both emotions originate from the evolutionary advantage of paternity certainty and mate guarding. Once serious concerns, these causes of uncertainty have in my opinion become more or less superfluous in the modern context. However, the emotions that once evolved to defend our genes have survived up until the present day and continue to intervene in people's relationships. Furthermore, jealousy

and possessiveness are often intertwined and occur simultaneously. In fact, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* supposes a close connection between the two emotions by describing possessiveness with the following example phrase: "I couldn't stand his jealousy and possessiveness" (Wehmeier 2007, 1174). Also Hauck (1981) sees the two emotions as interlinked and strictly speaking his list of characteristics presented above is intended for describing both jealous *and* possessive people. Meanwhile, Peter Goldie (2002, 237) does not believe that jealousy necessarily involves possessiveness. Instead, he suggests that jealousy can sometimes involve mutually agreed legitimate expectations which do not involve controlling the beloved in a compulsive manner. However, I am inclined to agree with Hauck and consequently I intend to treat the two emotions as inseparable parts of the same phenomena. As I find Goldie's suggestion interesting and worth considering, I nonetheless intend to make use of it in my analysis of the poems.

According to Goldie (2002, 233), unhealthy and excessive possessiveness involves not only a strong urge to keep one's beloved away from the attention of possible rivals but also a compulsive need to control the partner's thoughts and feelings. In other words, a possessive partner wishes to be the sole source of happiness for his or her loved one and consequently gets upset if the beloved has other interests as well. Ben-Ze'ev (2010, 46) reminds that other people do not readily allow being controlled and therefore it is self-deceptive to believe otherwise. However, Noelle Nelson (1997, 88) points out that signs of possessiveness may initially be latent and resemble intense, yet normal, involvement. As a result, controlling behaviour often enters the relationship in the disguise of love.

Granted that moderate jealousy and possessiveness can signify deep devotion, the two emotions are nonetheless often associated with violence which emerges as a result of obsessive thoughts. Georges Bataille (1986, 20) claims that possession of the beloved does not necessarily imply death, but the possibility of death is strongly related to the urge to possess. Bataille adds that

the prospect of losing the beloved might be too devastating; unable to control the beloved, the jealous partner might even consider killing her or him.

Ben-Ze'ev (2010, 46) argues that the possessive person typically suffers from low self-confidence and is therefore likely to be constantly on the lookout for signs to confirm his or her authority. Not receiving these signs, the jealous person's self-imposed inadequacy might lead him or her to act disturbingly. Goldie (2002, 237), who has his doubts about jealousy entailing possessive behaviour, states that "if jealous thoughts can be possessive, then they also will presuppose possessive rights over the loved one". It is my belief that severe possessiveness may result in a vicious circle: the partner will struggle vehemently to free herself or himself from the claustrophobic relationship, hence making the possessive party feel even more insecure and desperate to gain control. As a result, possessiveness makes it harder for feelings of mutual love to develop. Accordingly, Hauck (1981, 18) point out that a deeply jealous and possessive person follows an undemocratic philosophy and thus acts like a slave driver toward his or her loved one. Also Goldie (2002, 233) considers the same issue by saying that jealous thoughts and actions might lead people to "treat the other person in an ethically unjustifiable manner, which involves treating them as a possession". Nelson (1997, 89) agrees with both Hauck's and Goldie's view and remarks that possessive partners are fundamentally selfish individuals who only care about themselves. However, I do not believe that jealous thoughts necessarily imply that one will inevitably act according to them. In my view, our emotions and thoughts are separate from our actions in a sense that one can always choose how to behave.

3 Method and Materials

As stated earlier, the material of this study consists of three poems by Robert Browning, namely “My Last Duchess”, “Porphyria’s Lover” and “The Laboratory” (see Appendix). First published in 1842 in *Dramatic Lyrics*, “My Last Duchess” is one of the best-known dramatic monologues Browning ever wrote (Kennedy & Hair 2007, 89). The speaker of the poem is a duke, who is giving the emissary of his bride-to-be a tour around his palace. While discussing a portrait of his former wife, the duke reveals himself as a domineering and morbidly jealous husband who wanted to keep his lovely wife as his possession. “Porphyria’s Lover” was originally published as “Porphyria” in the January 1836 issue of *Monthly Repository*, but Browning republished the poem six years later in *Dramatic Lyrics* alongside “My Last Duchess” (Kennedy & Hair 2007, 1). In “Porphyria’s Lover” it is the lover who tells the story and describes in detail how he strangled Porphyria in order to preserve their love. The third selected poem “The Laboratory” first appeared in the June 1844 issue of *Hood’s Magazine and Comic Miscellany*, but it was republished the following year in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. “The Laboratory” is narrated by a jealous woman to an apothecary, who is preparing her a poison which will kill her rivals in love.

The above mentioned poems can all be categorised as dramatic monologues, which is a technique frequently used by Browning. The technique, as Browning uses it, “separates the speaker from the poet in such a way that the reader must work through the words of the speaker to discover the meaning of the poet” (Greenblatt et al. 2006, 2051). Some scholars seem to disagree on this term and its suitability for representing Browning’s poems. For instance, Richard Kennedy (Kennedy & Hair 2007, 86) prefers to use the term *monodrama*, as he believes that the more commonly used term *dramatic monologue* has been used too loosely for the great variety of dramatic poems that Browning composed. Browning’s own definition of “dramatic” is one he would incessantly insist on: that he was not speaking in his own voice in the poems he wrote (Kennedy & Hair 2007, 85). However, I do not intend to take a stand on terminological issues in

this thesis. Consequently, I have chosen to use the term *dramatic monologue* throughout the study and refrain from referring to any other related terms. Regardless of terminological irregularities, Kennedy & Hair (2007, 3) point out that Browning explored this poetic form until he became “the unsurpassed master of it, the model for poets of his own age and the teacher of those of a later [...] time”.

With the help of close reading, I will collect textual evidence from the poems and provide support for my argumentation. Accordingly, the method I have chosen is both qualitative and descriptive. With the help of Hauck’s list of characteristics presented in chapter 2.2, I intend to look for different textual indications of the main characters’ jealousy and possessiveness, such as word choices, metaphors and the like. Even though the main focus of this thesis will be on the content of the poems, I will support my own argumentation with references to other texts and studies.

4 Analysis

In this chapter I am going to conduct the analysis of the poems and introduce the results. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to deal with the poems in separate chapters and simultaneously make comparisons between them. After conducting the analysis, I will summarise the results in chapter 4.4.

4.1 “My Last Duchess”

The poem “My Last Duchess” is preceded by the word “Ferrara”, indicating that the events are loosely based on incidents in the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy during the Renaissance. According to Greenblatt et al. (2006, 2058), the story goes that Alfonso’s first wife Lucrezia died under suspicious circumstances after only three years of marriage. Following her death, the Duke negotiated through an emissary to marry a niece of the Count of Tyrol. The events of the poem evolve around the Duke who is giving the appointed emissary a tour around his palace and showing off his extensive art collection. In the opening scene the two noblemen have stopped to admire a painting of the late Duchess. Judging from the way the Duke speaks and attends to his visitor, his discourse is highly polished and his manners aristocratic. However, from the Duke’s one-sided monologue the reader can reconstruct a story quite different from the one the Duke believes he is telling. As Loehndorf (1997, 166) puts it, Browning’s monologues show that the speakers’ account of their own character is not entirely accurate. While discussing the portrait, the Duke starts to reminisce about his deceased wife and at the same time reveals himself as a domineering and morbidly jealous husband who wanted to keep the Duchess as his possession. Even though the title would suggest otherwise, the poem is not so much about the Duchess as it is a portrait of the power loving and egocentric Duke. As the story starts to unravel, it becomes evident that the Duchess had an appealing personality in contrast to that of her proud husband. Kennedy & Hair (2007, 89) aptly remark that the poem has “the gradual ironical revelation of the character of the speaker and the

implication of another action in the past". The action that is being alluded to is the Duchess's sudden death. In fact, hints emerge that the Duke himself is responsible for her early passing. With comments that are insinuating at best, the Duke does not openly confess any involvement in the Duchess's death. My own interpretation is that the Duke's self-revelation, given in a rather nonchalant way, is at least partially unconscious.

Evidence of Jealousy and Possessiveness

In my opinion, the Duke reveals his jealous nature by disapproving of the Duchess's tendency to devote just as much of her attention to trivialities, like a beautiful sunset or a ride on a white mule (26–28), as she did to her husband. Furthermore, the Duchess unwittingly wounded her husband's pride and made him jealous by accepting commonplace flattery and politeness from other people as reasons for open friendliness, "such stuff / Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough / For calling up that spot of joy" (19–21). Hauck (1981, 15) indicates that there are "no accidental coincidences in a jealous person's world" where every detail or event is regarded as sufficient proof of the loved one's infidelity. In the Duke's case this is exemplified by the following statement: "Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt, / Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without / Much the same smile?" (43–45) Then again, Thomas Blackburn (1967, 60) suggests that the Duke felt cheated by his wife's undisguised delight in everyday pleasures and her friendliness towards all acquaintances. I agree with Blackburn on this point and argue that the Duke was so jealous of his wife's attention that every "approving speech" (30) she directed to something or someone else was a personal insult for him, as the Duke wished to be the sole source of his wife's happiness. Unable to succeed in this aspiration, the Duke resigns from all responsibility by claiming that "[s]he had / A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed" (21–23). Arguably, the Duke fostered an unhealthy fear of being rejected by his wife. Hauck (1981, 27) comments on the same phenomenon on a more general level by pointing out that jealous people have a tendency to feel threatened when

their loved ones show completely innocent interest in anyone or anything that does not make the jealous partner the centre of attention.

It becomes clear early on that the Duke not only disapproved of his wife's friendly nature but also suspected her of extramarital affairs: he insinuates that "'twas not / Her husband's presence only, called that spot / Of joy into the Duchess' cheek" (13–15). Even though the Duke describes his late wife as a disgraceful adulteress, he nonetheless treasures her painting as one of his most valuable objects and calls "[t]hat piece a wonder, now" (3). Arguably, the word "now" deserves further attention, as it suggests that the Duke sees his deceased wife as a wonder in the picture but less so while she was still alive.

Based on the Duke's recollections, I got the impression that he regarded the Duchess as a shallow and naïve person who "liked whate'er / She looked on" (23–24) and thus lacked the ability to appreciate her husband's merits. B. R. Jerman (1957, 491) considers the same issue by pointing out that it took the artist only a day to finish her portrait: "Frà Pandolf's hands / Worked busily a day, and there she stands" (3–4). Jerman interprets this detail as an indication of the Duchess's claimed shallowness: if she indeed was as common and superficial a person without much inner beauty as the Duke is implying, it would not have been a difficult task for a skilful artist to paint her picture in one day. However, it must be noted that the Duke might not be entirely reliable in his account of the Duchess's character and behaviour.

Keeping Hauck's list of characteristics in mind, the Duke does not initially appear to be entirely prototypical in his jealousy, as he seems to lack an inferiority complex. However, I believe his arrogance and unfeeling hardness might as well be carefully planned disguises for his lack of confidence. As a matter of fact, Hauck (1981, 15) points out that jealous individuals often give the impression of being very self-confident when the actual situation is the exact opposite. In the Duke's case this view is supported by the fact that his vanity is fairly easily wounded. A case in point is his testimony of how the Duchess failed to appreciate his authority and consequently ranked

his “gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody’s gift” (33–34). For Kennedy & Hair (2007, 89) this indifference is the very reason why the Duke got rid of his wife. I do not entirely agree with Kennedy & Hair on this point, as I do not believe that the Duchess offended her husband on purpose. Instead I suspect that the Duke misjudged her expressions of kindness in his jealous and insecure mind. Also Blackburn (1967, 58) argues that the Duke secretly suffers from insecurity and consequently could not tolerate his wife’s independence. Joseph Nowinski (2001, 115) notes that outwardly successful men can be tortured by severe insecurity on the inside, which might lead to pathological jealousy. As in the Duke’s case, this form of jealousy can result in violence when taken to extremes.

With reference to the second characteristic in Hauck’s theory, the Duke is showing clear signs of the master-slave mentality in his urge to possess and control. This is exemplified by the fact that he keeps the painting behind a curtain to make sure that the Duchess’s smiles are directed to him alone, as he remarks that “none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I” (9–10). Arguably, he has covered the painting in order to forbid strangers from admiring the Duchess’s beauty without his permission, undoubtedly something he wished to do already when she was still alive but failed to accomplish. Now that she is dead and only exists in the painting, he can have absolute control over her. As I see it, the Duke’s aim was to stifle his wife’s independency and reduce her to servitude in order to conceal his own insecurity. Correspondingly, Nowinski (2001, 115) points out that severely insecure men can become very possessive in close relationships. Another indication of the Duke’s possessiveness is the fact that he is an art collector who likes to own things and fill his palace with various items. To put it bluntly, the Duke went as far as to add his wife to his private collection. In fact, the Duke explicitly binds artistic works and women together in the context of property with the following remark about his bride-to-be: “Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed / At starting, is my object” (52–53). As Hauck (1981, 19) puts it, jealous individuals regard their partners as property with which they can do basically anything they want.

In my opinion, the very end of the poem includes another broad hint at the Duke's possessiveness: "Notice Neptune, though, / Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!" (54–56). In Roman mythology, Neptune was the god and ruler of the sea (Britannica Online Encyclopaedia 2013). I am under the impression that Browning aimed at drawing a parallel between the Duke and Neptune who both attempt to subdue those with less power: the Duke wanted to control his wife whereas the bronze-cast Neptune tries to tame a sea horse. Another detail worth noticing is the subtle nonchalance with which the Duke tries to change the subject from his late wife to a statue in his collection. Arguably, the Duke has suddenly realised that he has revealed too much about his past and abruptly turns his visitor's attention into another direction.

A detail unrelated to jealousy that gives further evidence of the Duke's possessive and controlling nature is his behaviour with the emissary. Even if the Duke is polite and careful in his speech when addressing his visitor, he nonetheless seems to forget the emissary's presence from time to time as he is so absorbed in his own recollections about the late Duchess. To my mind, also the structure of the poem seems to anticipate its speaker's state of mind. Browning has composed the poem of rhyming pentameter lines which do not employ end stops but use enjambment³ instead. Consequently, the rhymes do not create closure, but rather remain a subtle driving force behind the powerful and dramatic development of the Duke's fervent monologue. The Duke is in fact quite a performer, even though he seeks to mislead the emissary with the following remark: "Even had you skill / In speech – (which I have not)" (35–36). Clever at drawing attention to himself, the Duke also exercises topic control, which according to Keinänen & Pakkala-Weckström (2009, 80) is something that the more powerful party in a discussion usually does. Loehndorf (1997, 164) claims that the addressees in Browning's dramatic monologues are more than anything else mere pretexts

³ Enjambment means that the sense of a phrase continues beyond the end of a line of verse. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/188413/enjambment)

for the main characters to speak. While the Duke describes his former wife to the emissary, he simultaneously rationalises his past actions and consequently composes self-defence.

To my mind, the Duke's severe jealousy resulted in self-defeating behaviour, the third characteristic on Hauck's list. In the otherwise sophisticated Duke, this behaviour manifests itself through unfounded suspicions and an overall patronising attitude. It is probable that the Duke succeeded only in distancing his wife, the very person he loved the most and did not wish to lose. Arguably, the reason why he criticises the Duchess's character harshly in front of the emissary is his inability to accept responsibility for his jealousy. My interpretation is that he sees nothing wrong with his own behaviour and thus justifies his actions with the Duchess's uncontrollable nature. Blackburn (1967, 60) is thinking along the same lines and suggests that the Duke "does not realize the cruelty of his behaviour but believes that he has acted with propriety as a great nobleman and husband". Another reasonable explanation for the Duke's fervent accusations is the fact that the visitor is an emissary of the Duke's bride-to-be and consequently the Duke wants to make a favourable impression by blaming his former wife for the past incidents.

Based on evidence from the poem, the Duke clearly suffers from jealousy-evoked insecurity and fearfulness, which seems to be twofold – on the one hand he is afraid of losing the woman he loves, but on the other hand he fears for a scandal she might cause. Failing in his attempts to control his wife, the Duke decided to take extreme measures and so he "gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together" (45–46). In my opinion, Bataille (1986, 20) provides a credible explanation for the Duke's behaviour by claiming that "[i]f the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her . . ." Although the meaning of the commands is never specified, there is reason to assume that the Duke arranged his wife's murder. Jerman (1957, 493) suggests that the Duke was blinded by pride when he made the decision to get rid of his wife. Indeed, it must be said in all fairness that pride seems to have played a central part in the Duke's actions. This is exemplified by

a passage in the poem which insinuates that the Duke felt degraded and humiliated by having to reprimand his wife, whose obedience should have been a self-evident fact:

Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark” – and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 – E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. (34–43)

Again, Browning has chosen his words carefully in order to create textual ambiguity. Namely the expression “to stoop” has two meanings: to bend one’s body forwards and downwards or to drop one’s moral standards (Wehmeier 2007, 1511). In this context the second meaning is undoubtedly more appropriate. To my mind the Duke regards himself too important to even be bothered with petty annoyances and thus he will not stoop to the lowness of requesting his wife to change a behaviour that is upsetting him. According to Patrick Colm Hogan’s (2011, 220) intriguing analysis, the primary reason for the murders often associated with jealousy is not jealousy itself but humiliation. In fact, I consider this mode of thinking suitable for the Duke’s case. Granted that the Duchess most likely hurt her husband’s inwardly fragile ego by not restricting her cheerful personality in the company of others, I nonetheless argue that the most dominant motive behind the Duke’s actions was his morbid jealousy.

To sum up, in this chapter I have demonstrated that the Duke can be interpreted as a jealous and possessive individual. Evidence of this is collected in Table 1 on the following page, in which I have applied Hauck’s list of typical characteristics. In short, the Duke shows multiple recognisable signs of severe jealousy and possessiveness.

Table 1 Summary of the Duke's jealous and possessive characteristics

<p>Inferiority complex</p>	<p>Initially it seems like the Duke did not embody this characteristic at all. However, closer inspection reveals that he is clever at hiding his insecurity behind cool calculation. <i>Evidence:</i> the Duke's vanity is easily wounded, he misinterprets the Duchess's friendliness as an insult to his merits.</p>
<p>The master-slave mentality</p>	<p>A prominent feature in the Duke's character. In fact, he wanted to reduce the Duchess to his servitude. This mentality is exemplified by the fact that the Duke keeps the painting hidden behind a curtain to make sure that the Duchess's smiles are directed to him alone. Unable to control his wife, the Duke arranged her death.</p>
<p>Self-defeating behaviour</p>	<p>The Duke only succeeded in distancing his wife with his compulsive controlling.</p>
<p>Difficulty in accepting responsibility</p>	<p>The Duke accuses his late wife and her "uncontrollable behaviour" of the past incidents and fails to recognise his own faults.</p>
<p>Selfishness and immaturity</p>	<p>The Duke wanted to be the sole source of his wife's happiness and was infuriated when she shared her attention with others as well.</p>
<p>Fearfulness</p>	<p>The Duke's fearfulness is twofold: on the one hand he is afraid of losing the woman he loves, but on the other hand he fears for a scandal she might cause.</p>

4.2 “Porphyria’s Lover”

In the style of “My Last Duchess”, “Porphyria’s Lover” is a complex psychological study of a disturbed character who murders the woman he loves. Rather than being narrated to an implied audience, the events of the poem are replayed in the lover’s mind as he recounts how he killed his mistress. As he is not telling the story aloud, it is perhaps somewhat inaccurate to refer to him as the poem’s speaker, but I have nonetheless decided to do so. In addition, I base my analysis on the assumption that the speaker is male, even though the poem does not explicitly reveal the lover’s gender.

The poem begins with a description of the setting: a storm is raging outside while the lover is waiting for his mistress to arrive. As in a pathetic fallacy,⁴ the storm is personified and endowed with human intentions: it sets in early, it tears down tree limbs for spite, and its force disturbs the calmness of the nearby lake (1–4). The weather and surrounding nature seem to reflect and intensify the speaker’s inner feelings, as he anxiously waits for Porphyria “with heart fit to break” (5). The setting is portrayed to be rather gloomy until Porphyria arrives, instantly bringing warmth into the cheerless cottage. To my mind, the way in which “[s]he shut the cold out and the storm” (7) with her presence is an indication of her strength of personality. Furthermore, the fact that Porphyria seems to feel at home in her lover’s cottage suggests a relationship of some duration. Immediately after her arrival, she proceeds to take care of the nearly extinguished fire and makes “the cheerless grate / Blaze up, and all the cottage warm” (8–9). Dripping from the storm, she starts to undress in front of her strangely passive lover who neither moves nor utters a word at the beginning of the poem. Towards the poem’s midpoint the lover suddenly awakes from his coma-like state and strangles Porphyria with her own hair. After the killing he rests contentedly beside Porphyria’s dead corpse, amazed by the fact that “God has not said a word!” (66)

⁴ Pathetic fallacy is a poetic practice which involves attributing human intentions or emotions to nature, animals or inanimate objects. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/446415/pathetic-fallacy)

Evidence of Jealousy and Possessiveness

To my mind, Porphyria's lover is far less obvious in his jealousy than the Duke in "My Last Duchess". One reason for this might be the fact that the Duke is telling his story aloud whereas the lover is merely reliving the events in his mind. In fact, the reader can gather only little about the anonymous speaker's character; what is learned about this person is to be concluded not only from what he reveals about himself but also from what he does not say. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate in this chapter that it is appropriate to interpret the lover as a jealous and possessive individual. David Eggenschwiler (1970, 39) states that when reading the poem "we follow the elaborate workings of a mind that struggles, rationalizes, distorts, and protects itself from an intolerable situation". At this point it must be noted that the lover's description of Porphyria and the circumstances that led to her death might not be entirely accurate. As is pointed out by Loehndorf (1997, 166), neither is the lover's account of himself necessarily trustworthy.

Based on evidence from the poem, I conclude that the lover suffers from a severe inferiority complex. This argument is supported by the fact that Porphyria seems to be of higher social rank than her lover, which to my mind appears from the following remark by the lover: "And, stooping, made my cheek lie there" (19). As in "My Last Duchess", Browning uses the expression "to stoop" to hint at a difference in social status between the lovers. In this case both of the meanings (introduced on page 20) associated with the expression are applicable: Porphyria has to stoop both literally and metaphorically to be at the same level with her lover. According to my interpretation, Porphyria has slipped away from festivities to be with her lover, because "passion sometimes would prevail, / Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain" (26–27). However, the lover seems to be insinuating that Porphyria had other, possibly romantic, relationships as well which she was not willing to abandon for his sake:

[S]he
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. (21–25)

These doubts also seem to echo the lover's fearfulness. Confident and extrovert, Porphyria appears a threat to her lover who might be feeling unable to satisfy her needs. Arguably, the lover does not consider the possibility that Porphyria may have been genuine in her devotion to him yet simultaneously at a loss when confronted by surrounding pressures. It is highly probable that both Porphyria's family and society in general would have disapproved of the relationship. Then again Porphyria might as well have made all the excuses mentioned in the quote above in the hope that her lover would be understanding and sympathetic towards her dilemma. In any case the lover seems to believe that he is not Porphyria's first priority, an insinuation made explicit by the following remark: "And, last, she sat down by my side / And called me (14–15). The word "last" is of importance here as it hints at the lover's impatience and suggests that he was displeased with Porphyria who wanted to put the scene in order first before attending to him. In my opinion, the lover's behaviour is in fact self-defeating: the more he doubts Porphyria and suspects her of deceit, the sooner she will find her company elsewhere.

To my mind, a further indication of the lover's inferiority complex lies behind the subtle contrasts that Browning makes between the two characters: Porphyria is an active and talkative person who has arrived after being with other people whereas her lover is passive, silent and isolated in his cold cottage. Furthermore, Porphyria is described in bright colours and with an abundance of verbs in contrast to her lover who is both pale and motionless. I interpret the lover's initial passivity and melancholy mood as signs of resignation in the face of events over which he has no control, namely Porphyria's assumed affairs. What I am arguing is that the lover seems to be at a loss before he comes up with a plan how to gain control over the disturbingly independent Porphyria who appears a constant threat to his self-confidence. Thus, I conclude that the lover's jealousy is founded on false illusions about Porphyria having other romantic relationships without

his knowledge. These doubts are slowly increasing his frustration and lead him to act disturbingly. As Hauck (1981, 34) notes, competition and the possible loss of the loved one are constant obsessions for a jealous person. Goldie (2002, 232) points out that “when you act out of jealousy or when you express your emotion in action, what you do is a sort of explosive bursting-out of a trance-like condition: what has been pent-up powerless rage at what you see or imagine floods out into uncontrolled actions”. To my mind, this quote is an exact description of the lover’s behaviour.

Like the Duke in “My Last Duchess”, the lover is showing clear signs of the master-slave mentality in his urge to possess Porphyria. This is exemplified by the fact that the lover would want Porphyria to abandon her former life as well as all the social ties that belong to it for the sake of their love. Severely jealous of her attention, the lover decides to kill Porphyria in order to make sure that he does not have to share her with other people. In my opinion, the lover’s eagerness to control Porphyria is a sign of both jealousy and selfishness. As Harris & Darby (2010, 563) note, abnormal jealousy might even lead people to kill their loved ones, which is what I believe occurs in the lover’s case. Bataille (1986, 20) takes stand on the same issue by claiming that “[i]f the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her”. To my mind, this applies well to the lover’s behaviour. Bernard Richards (1988, 129) suggests that the lover decides to kill Porphyria because he wishes to arrest their relationship at its current stage. Richards adds that the dead Porphyria lacks the independency she had when she came to see her lover at her own choice. I agree with Richards on these points and argue that the following quote sums up the lover’s eagerness to possess Porphyria:

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. (36–41)

At this point I wish to yet again highlight one of Browning's word choices, namely the use of the word "found" in the quote above. To me the fact that the lover "found / A thing to do" (37–38) reveals that the killing was a spontaneous act. However, I am under the impression that Porphyria's forthcoming death had been under consideration with only the means left to be decided upon, as the lover "debated what to do" (35).

In my opinion, the lover's master-slave mentality culminates in the killing, after which he can finally feel superior to Porphyria and control her. Arguably, an indication of the couple's switched power relations is visible in the following notion by the lover: "I propped her head up as before, / Only, this time my shoulder bore / Her head" (49–51). This quote reveals that it is now he who places her head on his shoulder and not vice versa as in the beginning of the poem. Judging from the way the lover describes the killing, it was a thoroughly rationalised deed from his part. Much in the same way as the Duke in "My Last Duchess" the lover is using reason and argument to explain his actions and is simultaneously revealing his difficulty in accepting responsibility over his crime. He is inventing elaborate justifications for the brutal murder and is in fact convinced that he fulfilled Porphyria's sincere wish: "The smiling rosy little head, / So glad it has its utmost will" (52–53). Granted that now she is no longer pulled apart by opposite duties first to her family and then to her lover, his solution to her dilemma is nonetheless extreme.

However, it must be noted that the lover is not completely certain of the justification of his deed, as he needs to tell himself that "[n]o pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain" (41–42). Furthermore, I am under the impression that the portrayal and retelling of the events are meant to reassure him of the justification. Another indication of the lover's hesitation is the fact that he is seeking some kind of divine approval for his actions and is amazed by the fact that "God has not said a word!" (60). This could mean that the lover is finally starting to feel remorse and sees the full depth of his crime: Porphyria lies dead and the lover expects God to punish him or at least to take notice. As Goldie (2002, 231) aptly points out, the uncontrollable nature of jealousy is revealed in

the extreme actions people can perform, such as murdering the loved one. In my opinion, the lover tried to achieve two things by killing Porphyria: on the one hand he wanted to relieve himself of his jealousy and make sure that Porphyria belonged to him, but on the other hand he aimed at releasing Porphyria from her social dilemma.

In this chapter I have gathered evidence to support my argument that Porphyria's lover can be interpreted as a jealous and possessive individual. Evidence of this is collected in Table 2 below, in which I have applied Hauck's theory. As I have demonstrated, the lover has several characteristics in his personality that allow him to be categorised as a jealous and possessive person.

Table 2 Summary of the lover's jealous and possessive characteristics

Inferiority complex	Being lower in rank, the lover regards himself inferior to Porphyria.
The master-slave mentality	This mentality is exemplified by the fact that the lover wants Porphyria to abandon her former life entirely and devote herself to him. Unable to control Porphyria, the lover decides to strangle her and make sure that she belongs to him.
Self-defeating behaviour	The more the lover doubts Porphyria, the more she will seek other company.
Difficulty in accepting responsibility	The lover tries to justify his actions.
Selfishness and immaturity	The lover is unwilling to share Porphyria with anyone else, he wants to possess her and preserve their love forever.
Fearfulness	Confident and extrovert, Porphyria appears a threat to her lover who believes she is engaging in other romantic relationships as well.

4.3 “The Laboratory”

Inspired by the life of Marie Madeleine Marguerite D’Aubray (1630–1676), a French seventeenth century noblewoman who was executed after poisoning numerous family members, “The Laboratory” is a sinister poem depicting a jealous woman preparing to kill her rivals in love. The poem is preceded by the epigraph “ancien régime”,⁵ indicating that the events are taking place in 18th century France prior to the French Revolution. “The Laboratory” seems to be one of Browning’s less famous works, judging from the fact that I struggled to find any information about it. In my opinion the poem’s most intriguing detail, which also separates it from the other two works analysed so far in this thesis, is the main character’s gender. In this dramatic monologue the speaker is a woman who is scheming to murder her loved one’s new mistresses. According to the speaker, the man she loves is not only being unfaithful but also doing so without even trying to conceal his betrayal, she comments that “[h]e is with her; and they know that I know / Where they are, what they do” (5–6). Otherwise very little is known about the beloved and, contrary to the other two poems in my study material, it is not the beloved who will end up dead.

The poem is set in French high society around the King’s court and the events are taking place in a laboratory where the speaker has secretly gone to meet an apothecary. For a payment, he has agreed to prepare the woman a poison which will kill her rivals. At first glance, the poem appears to be written as if she were talking to the apothecary, but reading into it shows that she may as well be thinking to herself. This is exemplified by the fact that at the beginning of the poem she tells the man to take his time, as she is “not in haste”, but as she thinks about the possibilities and power the poison will bring her she begins to hurry him. Through the speaker’s fervent and excited narration the reader gets a chance to enter into her mind, witnessing her raging jealousy and sense of betrayal. She is convinced that her beloved is enjoying himself with new female acquaintances and laughing

⁵ Ancien régime (French: “old order”) is a political and social system of France before the French Revolution 1789-1799. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/23266/ancien-regime)

at her misfortune. To restore her pride, she decides to take revenge on her former beloved by murdering his new mistresses Pauline and Elise at a ball hosted by the King (21–23). The overall tone of the poem is suspicious and even paranoid, which to my mind reveals that the speaker is emotionally distraught. Due to this it must be noted that her account of the situation might not be entirely reliable. Furthermore, there is no way of knowing for certain what has happened between the woman and her beloved. As a matter of fact, there is no evidence to be found in the poem that would support the presupposition that their relationship still exists. Based on my own interpretation I am inclined to conclude that the relationship has ended but the speaker cannot accept this and is therefore nurturing jealous thoughts of her former beloved. She even confesses that she wished to be able to kill her loved one's female companion with plain gaze when she saw the two of them together: "For only last night, as they whispered, I brought / My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought / Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall" (33–35). Unable to face the facts, the woman feels that her loved one is being unfaithful to her even though there is no obliging bond left between them. As is pointed out by Ben-Ze'ev (2010, 43), people may feel jealous of their lover even after the relationship has ended. Ben-Ze'ev adds that such individuals still see themselves as having a relationship with their former lover.

With reference to Hauck's theory (1981, 16), feelings of inferiority are among the most prevalent characteristic traits of jealous people. Arguably, the speaker in "The Laboratory" is also suffering from an inferiority complex which ultimately intensifies her jealousy. In my opinion this is revealed in the following quote in which the speaker compares herself with one of her beloved's new mistresses: "She's not little, no minion like me – / That's why she ensnared him" (29–30). The word "minion" suggests that the speaker is lower in rank than the other women. She is also insinuating that higher social status was the reason why her beloved fell to these women. In my opinion, the woman wants to prove that she is capable of murder in spite of her lower rank. Thus, she is enlivened not only by revenge but also by the power murder allows her to have. As stated

earlier, Hogan (2011, 220) claims that the primary reason for the murders often associated with jealousy is in fact not jealousy itself but humiliation. Consequently, I consider this mode of thinking suitable for the woman's case.

Unlike her male counterparts in "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover", the speaker in "The Laboratory" does not try to find justification for her deed. Neither does she seem to have difficulties in accepting her responsibility for the crime. In fact, she bids the apothecary to "let death be felt and the proof remain" (38). To my mind, this comment reveals that the woman does not wish to escape punishment; as I see it, she acts out of vindictiveness and consequently wants her beloved to know it is she who has punished him by killing his new lovers. Another indication of her commitment to the sinister scheme is the fact that she enjoys watching the apothecary's work as he prepares the deadly poison. Paying attention to the ingredients and describing the process in minute detail, the woman clearly wants to have a part in the creation of the poison. She is even willing to watch the other woman die and commands the apothecary as follows: "Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose / It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close" (41–42). To my mind, the woman's behaviour indicates that she has been blinded by her jealousy and want of revenge.

In my opinion, there is evidence to be found in the poem that hints at the speaker's instable state of mind. For instance her narration is filled with repetition and expressions of manic excitement, strengthened by several exclamation marks as in the following:

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
 What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
 To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
 A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree-basket! (17–20)

The language she is using is both violent and angry, and her impatience starts to build as the preparation progresses. Her narration hastens into an almost breathless tone towards the end of the poem, the pace quickening as she becomes caught up in her fantasies of killing. Yet her moods are very changeable: at one point feverishly excited, she suddenly starts to hesitate and have doubts

about whether the poison will work or not. According to my interpretation, the woman's mental health has been shaken by her jealousy and she is no longer able to control her actions. Assuming that she has been equally jealous when still in a relationship with her beloved, she has undoubtedly scared him away with her behaviour.

As is pointed out by Goldie (2002, 237), jealousy does not necessarily involve possessiveness and when it comes to the speaker in "The Laboratory", I am inclined to agree with Goldie. Arguably, revenge is the most prominent emotion behind the woman's actions, as her only wish is to see her former beloved hurt and punished. Accordingly, there is no evidence to be found in the poem that would suggest that she wishes to be reunited with her beloved after the death of his new mistresses. So, I consider it appropriate to claim that she does not seek to possess her beloved, but only to cause him pain that he supposedly has deserved.

In this chapter I have analysed the main character in the poem "The Laboratory". Based on my own discoveries and interpretations, I conclude that she can be interpreted as a jealous individual, even though she does not manifest as many of Hauck's characteristics of jealous people as the Duke and Porphyria's lover. However, I would not readily associate possessiveness with her behaviour. Even if she cannot bear the thought of her beloved having new mistresses and consequently decides to kill them to teach him a lesson, I still do not see her as a person driven by an urge to possess. Table 3 on the following page gives an overview of the woman's jealous behaviour as I interpret it.

Table 3 Summary of the woman's jealous characteristics

Inferiority complex	The woman is lower in rank than her loved one's new mistresses.
The master-slave mentality	This mentality is not visible in the woman's behaviour, as she does not show signs of possessiveness.
Self-defeating behaviour	Assuming that the woman has been equally jealous when still in a relationship with her beloved, she has undoubtedly scared him away with her behaviour.
Difficulty in accepting responsibility	The woman does not display this characteristic. In fact, she is eager to make her crime known.
Selfishness and immaturity	This characteristic is very prominent in the woman's persona. She cannot bear the thought that her beloved has found new mistresses and consequently she decides to kill them to teach her beloved a lesson.
Fearfulness	There seems to be no fearfulness involved in the woman's jealousy.

5 Conclusions

In this thesis I have examined the occurrence of jealousy and possessiveness in the main characters of three selected poems by Robert Browning, namely “My Last Duchess”, “Porphyria’s Lover” and “The Laboratory”. The aim of this study has been to demonstrate that the main characters in the above mentioned poems can be interpreted as jealous and possessive individuals. The reason why I chose to use the concepts of jealousy and possessiveness as the basis of my analysis is that the social psychological phenomena they represent play a key role in these poems. Apart from showing my argument to be justifiable, my intention was to find out in what ways these poems depict jealousy and/or possessiveness. In order to be able to answer this question, I have collected textual evidence, such as word choices and metaphors, from the poems. I then studied this textual evidence with the help of psychoanalyst Paul A. Hauck’s (1981) theory. As a concrete tool for analysis, I used a list of common characteristics of jealous and possessive people which Hauck has compiled. In this chapter I will summarise briefly the most important results and discuss their meaning. Furthermore, I will evaluate the successfulness of the study and provide suggestions for future studies within the subject.

To begin with, the analysis of the poems shows that it is possible to interpret the main characters in the three poems as suffering from jealousy and possessiveness. With reference to Hauck’s list of typical characteristics, it must be noted that the female speaker in “The Laboratory” is less prototypical in her jealousy than her male counterparts in the other two poems. This is exemplified in Table 4 on the following page.

Table 4 The distribution of jealousy characteristics in the three main characters

Characteristics	The Duke	The lover	The woman
Inferiority complex	X	X	X
The master-slave mentality	X	X	
Self-defeating behaviour	X	X	X
Difficulty in accepting responsibility	X	X	
Selfishness and immaturity	X	X	X
Fearfulness	X	X	

According to my interpretation, the Duke and the lover both embody each of the characteristics on Hauck's list, yet in different measures. Arguably, the Duke's inferiority complex is something that needs to be read between the lines, whereas the lover's lack of self-confidence is more noticeable. Describing herself as a "minion", the woman in "The Laboratory" also confesses her feelings of inferiority. In my opinion, this particular characteristic seems to play a major role in the trio's jealousy-driven behaviour: the Duke's urge to control his wife was a direct consequence of a hidden insecurity, the lover felt unable to satisfy Porphyria's needs and consequently was afraid of losing her, and the woman was convinced that her beloved fell for his new mistresses because of their higher social status.

Even though I share Hauck's view of jealousy entailing possessiveness as a general rule, I do not believe that this applies to the woman in "The Laboratory". As I have stated earlier, the driving force behind her actions is revenge and not the desire to possess her beloved, even though she seems equally upset about her loved one's other social relations as the Duke and Porphyria's lover do. In my opinion, seeking revenge is what makes the woman's behaviour different from her male counterparts and explains why she does not embody as many of the typical characteristics as they do. Then again, she may have manifested all the characteristics when still together with her beloved.

Granted that Browning's fascination for psychological motifs has been recognised, there is a shortage of in-depth analyses of his portrayal of jealousy and possessiveness. Given his success as a poet, this is somewhat surprising. Consequently, I aimed at filling a noticeable gap in the research field with this thesis, and I believe I succeeded in generating more knowledge of Browning's poetry. Yet there remains a demand for more exhaustive studies within the subject, of which I have only scratched the surface. Hauck's list of characteristics, which I used as a tool in my analysis of the poems, proved to be well applicable to the needs of this study. Initially, I was apprehensive of using the list as I was afraid that it might steer my analysis too much. As it happens, the list gave my thesis a much-needed structure without threatening to overpower my own analysis. With the help of my results I have been able to fulfill the aim that was set for this study.

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Appendix

“My Last Duchess” (1842)

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
 “Frà Pandolf” by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say, “Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much,” or “Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat:” such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace – all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked
 Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark” – and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 – E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Available at http://www.portablepoetry.com/poems/robert_browning/my_last_duchess.html
 [Accessed 15 February 2013]

“Porphyria’s Lover” (1842)

The rain set early in to-night,
 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 to-night'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!

Available at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175584> [Accessed 15 February 2013]

“The Laboratory” (1844)
 ANCIEN RÉGIME

I

NOW that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
 May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
 As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
 Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

II

He is with her; and they know that I know
 Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
 While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
 Empty church, to pray God in, for them! – I am here.

III

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
 Pound at thy powder, – I am not in haste!
 Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
 Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

IV

That in the mortar – you call it a gum?
 Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
 And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
 Sure to taste sweetly, – is that poison too?

V

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
 What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
 To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
 A signet, a fan-mount, a filligree-basket!

VI

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
 And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
 But to light a pastille, and Elise, with her head
 And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

VII

Quick – is it finished? The colour's too grim!
 Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
 Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
 And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me—
 That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
 The soul from those masculine eyes, – say, “no!”
 To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
 My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
 Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall,
 Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does not all!

X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain!
Let death be felt and the proof remain;
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face!

XI

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee—
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it – next moment I dance at the King's!

Available at http://allpoetry.com/poem/8438937-The_Laboratory-Ancien_R%C3%A9gime-by-Robert_Browning [Accessed 15 February 2013]