**“Porphyria’s Lover”: Summary**

“Porphyria’s Lover,” which first appeared in 1836, is one of the earliest and most shocking of Browning’s dramatic monologues. The speaker lives in a cottage in the countryside. His lover, a blooming young woman named Porphyria, comes in out of a storm and proceeds to make a fire and bring cheer to the cottage. She embraces the speaker, offering him her bare shoulder. He tells us that he does not speak to her. Instead, he says, she begins to tell him how she has momentarily overcome societal strictures to be with him. He realizes that she “worship[s]” him at this instant. Realizing that she will eventually give in to society’s pressures, and wanting to preserve the moment, he wraps her hair around her neck and strangles her. He then toys with her corpse, opening the eyes and propping the body up against his side. He sits with her body this way the entire night, the speaker remarking that God has not yet moved to punish him.

**“The Patriot: An Old Story”: Summary**

This poem is told by a rebel soldier on his way to be executed. As he walks down the road, people jeer, mock, and shout at him, hurtling stones and other things at him. He is treated as a traitor, a criminal. But as he walks, the speaker remembers that, one year ago to the day, he walked the same street, and the same people who now scorn him celebrated him for a soldier and a hero. In this poem, place or setting acts as the backdrop of painful memories. The speaker quite literally has to walk down memory lane, to his death.

The historical backdrop to this poem is the Risorgimento (or Uprising), a series of battles fought during the nineteenth century by revel fighters, who hoped for a unified Italy. Italy was still made up of city states, which were controlled by foreign powers (particularly Austria). The Risorgimento was ultimately unsuccessful. Both Browning and his wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, were in favour of a unified, independent Italy.

**“The Laboratory: *Ancien Regime*”:Summary**

This poem is loosely based on historical events involving events at the palace of Louis XIV of France (known also as the Sun King). The subtitle “*Ancien Regime”* places the events before the Revolution of 1789. The usual order of things was disrupted in the 1670s by a spate of poisonings, probably carried out by Marrie-Madeleine de Brinvilliers and her lover Sainte Croix. Sainte Croix died mixing a deadly potion, when his mask slipped from his face. The poem is narrated by a young woman to an apothecary, who is preparing her a poison with which to kill her rivals at a nearby royal court. She pushes him to complete the potion while she laments how her beloved is not only being unfaithful, but that he is fully aware that she knows of it. While her betrayers think she must be somewhere in grief, she is proud to be instead plotting their murder. She notes the ingredients he uses, paying particular attention to their texture and color. She hopes the poison will "taste sweetly" so she can poison the two ladies she has in her sights; she will have the last laugh by having them killed in a painful way that will also torment her beloved. When the poison is complete, she promises the apothecary both her fortune (her "jewels" and "gold") but also lets him kiss her. Finally, she is ready to go dancing at the king's and end her torment.

**“My Last Duchess”: Summary**

This poem is loosely based on historical events involving Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara, who lived in the 16th century. The Duke is the speaker of the poem, and tells us he is entertaining an emissary (official agent or messenger) who has come to negotiate the Duke’s marriage (he has recently been widowed) to the daughter of another powerful family. As he shows the visitor through his palace, he stops before a portrait of the late Duchess, apparently a young and lovely girl. The Duke begins reminiscing about the portrait sessions, then about the Duchess herself. His musings give way to a diatribe (a rant-like attack) on her disgraceful behavior: he claims she flirted with everyone and did not appreciate his “gift of a nine-hundred-years- old name.” As his monologue continues, the reader realizes with ever-more chilling certainty that the Duke in fact caused the Duchess’s early demise: when her behavior escalated, “[he] gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together.” Having made this disclosure, the Duke returns to the business at hand: arranging for another marriage, with another young girl. As the Duke and the emissary walk leave the painting behind, the Duke points out other notable artworks in his collection.