

Sylvia Plath poems

“Daddy” – her most famous poem. Influenced by the anger she felt toward her father. But the Daddy of this poem is not just a representation of her own father. Halfway through he transforms into Ted—a monster. She was not Jewish, but she often referred to herself as a Jew—a victim perhaps of her German father.

“Appropriately, the poem can be divided roughly in half with the first eight stanzas concerned exclusively with the father and the final eight gradually introducing the husband. In superficial ways the two male figures seem to be the same man, but the speaker has finally come to realize that the one she idolized is gone forever and the one who shares his image is actually a monster” (Sylvia the Vampire Slayer).

“References to the two men are mixed together beginning with the italicized ‘you’ of line 41. Analyzing the vampire metaphor makes this pattern quite understandable. When a person is confronted with a monster which resembles her father but is no longer him, she will undoubtedly be extremely confused. At times Plath’s speaker addresses the vampire as the new man it is, but she cannot help but fall into the habit of speaking to it as though it were the father it so closely resembles. With this metaphor ‘Plath now fiercely mocks her desire to fashion a surrogate for her dead father’ by portraying the semi-autobiographical speaker as unable to distinguish between the man she has spent seven years married to and the father who died....It is with the poem’s climax, the killing of the vampire, that Plath finally separates the figures of father and husband. Her speaker says the monster ‘drank my blood for a year,/Seven years if you want to know’. The period of seven years corresponds exactly to the duration of the poet’s marriage, thus identifying the vampire with the husband” (Sylvia the Vampire Slayer).

“Morning Song” – Mother’s love for newborn vs. darker thoughts and feelings the birth inspires. Meditations on her own death and mother’s inability to comprehend her child due to its almost inhuman otherness. Sentimentality vs. post partum. She does bond with the child in the end. The poem ends by reconnecting the mother and child in a shared song. “The infant has its cry and the mother her poem.” This poem addresses the question of the reestablishment of her self following the birth of her child. “The feelings she captures in this poem are not meant to suggest that the mother dislikes the infant but rather that she is confused by the mechanical quality surrounding it” (womenwriters.net).

“Insomniac” – Compare this to “The Addict” by Anne Sexton. Struggles with addiction.

“Lady Lazarus” – biblical story of Lazarus. Unlike the biblical story of Lazarus, in which a loving deity uses power for good, Plath’s version reveals a struggle for power with a cruel deity that ends in annihilation. “Even if Plath rebels against the oppressive patriarchal father [in this poem, Herr Doktor] her anger is reactive and she does not succeed at freeing herself from him” (Laura Frost). Being raised by a male figure produces a fight for power that is readily given up and ends in death, not freedom. Moreover, Lady Lazarus makes herself vulnerable even as she takes control and charges the crowd for the ‘eyeing of her scars.’ These wounds of vulnerability are symbols of

pain caused by her male-dominated life. They symbolize Plath's own scars from her father's death and husband's betrayal" (Laura Johnson Dahlke, "Plath's Lady Lazarus").

"A Birthday Present" – The gift she craves is death. The speaker is sincerely opposed to herself. She is just as casual when describing her cooking in the kitchen as when mentioning off-handedly her desires for death. When first confronted with the terrifying gift, her reaction is not to engage the subject directly, but to laugh at its arrival.... This is a violent poem, and the objects within it suffer a brutal and destructive treatment. By slowly letting the protective veil down and stepping into the action of the text, the speaker subjects herself to the violence of the poem in order to let herself be destroyed" (*Legend Quarterly* spring 2007).