
The Portrayal of Motherhood in Morning Song, a Poem by Sylvia Plath

Explore the ways in which Plath Presents Motherhood in 'Morning Song'

Sylvia Plath has written numerous poems portraying her views and feelings towards being a mother, some of which come across as unconventional and insensitive. Some critics argue this same opinion about her poem 'Morning Song', due to the way that she describes her own child in a very detached, distanced way. However, at the beginning of the poem this first seems untrue due to the way the child is described. For example, the title straight away has a very positive, chirpy and celebratory feel to it, suggesting her joy due to her baby's birth. The first word used in the poem is 'love', giving the reader the impression that alongside happiness, Plath felt a strong sense of affection towards her baby. The child is then described as a 'fat gold watch' which in some cases, has been argued to represent a plump, healthy infant or to suggest the preciousness and the value that this baby holds in Plath's eyes. The 'fat gold watch' could also be seen as a positive symbol towards time and the beginning of a new, precious life in a mother's mind.

However, despite the first positive impression that the reader might receive, the mood in the poem eventually changes. The baby appears to be named as an object more than once throughout the poem, being called a 'statue' and a 'watch', which are both heavy, cold inanimate objects suggesting that the child is a burden in Plath's life, or even something that consumes her time. A watch can also be seen as mechanical, implying that the relationship between baby and mother isn't natural or heartfelt, but forced and routine; which could be represented by the perfect 3-line structure of each stanza throughout. The idea of a 'drafty museum' as oppose to the comfort of a home gives us the sense of a cold, uncomfortable feeling, alongside of the vulnerability of the child's 'nakedness'. All of these ideas would leave the reader believing that Plath feels resentful towards her child as instead of bringing her happiness and joy, it has dragged her down and chilled her heart.

This is further shown by Plath's disownment and abandonment of the baby, when she states, 'I'm no more your mother'. Towards the end of the poem the tone becomes much more selfish as we see much more use of the word 'I' suggesting that to Plath, motherhood is about herself and not the baby. The phrase 'Effacement at the wind's hand' is also significant as it highlights Plath's fear of aging and losing her physical appearance, which she feels the baby is responsible for. The idea of a 'cloud that distils a mirror' represents the temporary, short-lived

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relationship between mother and child due to her lack of sentiment and detachment. In addition, towards the end of the poem there is punctuation that suggests a slow pace, possibly representing the feelings Plath has towards her child due to the weight it seems to hold her down with. In addition, the fact that the window square 'swallows its dull stars' could imply that the child has altered her perception of nature and the beauty it is supposed to have within it.

Many critics have argued that new mothers in the 1960's would differ from Plath in the sense that they displayed a great deal of happiness, satisfaction and joy from their new born babies whereas, Plath seemed to completely oppose this, due to the fact that she was purely honest about motherhood and the effect it has on the female brain and body. This was argued due to the fact that mothers at the time were deemed to be 'unfit' or 'not right' due to society's expectations of women being filled with immense joy after giving birth. All in all, its quite clear that Plath represented a brutally honest perception of how she interpreted motherhood throughout this poem.

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