

Two Sisters of Persephone

Two girls there are: within the house

One sits; the other, without.

Daylong a duet of and light

Plays between these.

In her dark wainscoted room

The first works problems on

A mathematical machine.

Dry ticks mark time

As she calculates each sum.

At this barren enterprise

Rat-shrewd go her squinted eyes,

Root-pale her meager frame.

Comment [CL1]: Allusion to Greek mythology: Hade's wife. She is trapped in hell and takes the responsibility of being the messenger between the human realm and hell.

Comment [CL2]: Overall, this poem suggests the idea of two different girl with one being trapped and the other being able to freely move about and be carefree. This could relate to Plath talking about herself. She appear to be light, optimistic, successful, ambitious (like the second sister), but on the inside, she is like the first sister, feeling confined, mundane and bleak.

Comment [CL3]: The semi-colon sets the tone that one sister is different thn the other

Comment [CL4]: Suggest that these two sisters do not clash, but is instead in harmony since a duet in music means two voice accompanying each other to create a song.

Comment [CL5]: Suggest the nature of the two sisters: shade and light; the descriptions of the two sisters will fall into these two categories

Comment [CL6]: Again, instead of strong diction, the more trivial and less serious "plays" used, which shows that there are no real competition and animosity between the sisters.

Comment [CL7]: Diction: suggests that the first sister is "shade" from "a duet of shade and light" in the previous stanza

Comment [CL8]: Diction: wainscoted means wooden paneling, which may imply that she is sort of systematic and simple, as paneling is repetitive and mundane

Comment [CL9]: Sets the impression that she is confined and not in open space

Comment [CL10]: Suggests that she is not particularly enjoying herself; gives an impression of a lonely girl slaving away in a dark room.

Comment [CL11]: Emphasizes on repetitiveness and the systematic feel to her lifestyle and character

Comment [CL12]: Gives the idea of emotionless

Comment [CL13]: Ticks; an action that does not require thought; systematic and emotionless

Comment [CL14]: Same idea as "ticks"

Comment [CL15]: Together "dry ticks mark time" with "time" shows that she may be doing this repetitive work for a period of time, which accentuates the tediousness.

Comment [CL16]: Echoes the idea of "work problems on/A mathematical machine"

Comment [CL17]: Gives the impression that her task is repetitive, emotionless, bleak and lifeless

Comment [CL18]: Rats are generally not likeable animals, so the phrase "rat-shrewd" gives an ugly image of her appearance

Comment [CL19]: Looks unhealthy since she is pale and small

Comment [CL20]: Repetition of structure to emphasize the concept of repetitiveness and structure.

Bronzed as earth, the second lies,

Hearing ticks brown gold

Like pollen on bright air, Lulled

Near a bed of poppies

She sees how their red silk flare

Of petaled blood

Burns open to sun's blade

On that green altar

Freely become sun's bride, the latter

Grows quick with seed,

Grass-couched in her labor's pride,

She bears a king, Turned bitter

And sallow as any lemon,

The other, wry virgin to the last,

Goes graveward with flesh laid waste,

Worm-husbanded, yet no woman.

Comment [CL21]: Contrast to "root-pale" in the previous stanza to accentuate the second sister's vitality and healthiness due to her tan skin and the image of nature that is associated with her

Comment [CL22]: "Bright" contributes to the light, vibrant image of the second sister as mentioned in "a duet of shade and light". "Like pollen" emphasizes the carefree and free-floating nature.

Comment [CL23]: Lulled means softly attract. Soft, gentle and calm diction, which brings out the fair image of the second sister

Comment [CL24]: Break to a new stanza highlights a new idea

Comment [CL25]: Sexual connotation; the idea that the sun gives the flower the nutrients and the means to grow and bear fruit, which could be related to the second sister herself. This idea is reinforced in the next stanza with "sun's bride".

Comment [CL26]: "Grows quick with seed" is a metaphor for the second sister's pregnancy. The "seed" within her is growing quickly.

Comment [CL27]: "Labor's pride" contributes to the idea of pregnancy.

Comment [CL28]: Create the impression that the second sister is of great importance and has value since she is carrying "a king".

Comment [CL29]: "Bitter" and "sallow" reflects the first sister's unhealthy emotion and appearance. "Turned bitter and sallow as any lemon" can imply that she is always decaying because a lemon that is bitter and sallow is rotting.

Comment [CL30]: Sarcastic and unhappy about her being a virgin for life, unlike her sister

Comment [CL31]: Emphasize the idea of "graveward" with the image of a death corpse with "flesh" and "waste". The first sister can also be described as "waste" since she did not fulfill her duty as a woman.

Comment [CL32]: "Worm-husbanded" could mean that she is married to death; worms can be associated with the maggots that eat the rotting flesh of a corpse.

Comment [CL33]: "No woman", because she did not conceive and "no woman" could also mean that she is no longer alive.