

Edge -Sylvia Plath

Poem

The woman is perfected.

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,

The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,

Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:

We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,

One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.

She has folded

Them back into her body as petals

Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed

From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,

Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and drag.

Summary

'Edge' by Sylvia Plath is a moving and dark poem that depicts the death of a woman who committed suicide after killing her children.

The poem is made up of a series of powerful images that get to the heart of depression and the treatment of women within historical and contemporary society. She depicts this woman as finally "perfected". She has reached a state where no one can touch her and she is just as placid and calm as men would like her to be.

Alongside her body are those of her two children. She took them into death with her in order to shuttle them back, metaphorically, into her body. The poem ends with images of menstruation, blood, death, and the moon.

Analysis

Lines 1-4

In the first lines of '*Edge*' the speaker begins by describing the nature of a dead woman. In her death, she is "perfected". She appears as she should've during life, with the "smile of accomplishment". This woman presents the appearance of "Greek necessity". She finally reaches some point of accomplishment. But, in a way, it is all an illusion.

The woman appears pleased with herself and as the poem goes along a reader should ask this is the case.

Lines 5-8

In the next two couplets of '*Edge*', the poet adds details to the image of the dead woman. These are lovely, evocative images, made even more impactful when one remembers that she is dead.

Her toga is perfectly placed. Plath states that her feet seem to say “We have come so far, it is over”. The distance she has traversed can be interpreted to mean life itself. She has lived as a woman in the world. She has faced the struggles that all women face and made it somewhere that she is finally beyond judgement and control.

Lines 9-12

It turns out, in lines nine through twelve, that she has killed her children along with herself. They are coiled next to her. Plath uses a powerful metaphor to compare them to serpents. They are “white” in their death and each is near her breast. This alludes to a loss of the warmth of motherhood, a life force, that is now gone along with all their lives.

These lines also raise questions about the role of these children. How one might ask, did the woman feel about her children?

Lines 13-16

In line thirteen of *‘Edge’*, the poet describes how the woman folded her children back into her body. They are no longer separate from her. In death, they return to her. Whatever existence they had perhaps related to the image of the serpents, she chose to remove them from it.

The poet uses a simile to compare this action to the petals of a rose closing up at night. The language in this line seems to allude to the female body. The “odors,” “flower,” and “bleeds” all relate to female menstruation as it is commonly spoken about in poetic works. These are beautiful images, but they are also painful. This woman’s life was not something to be celebrated. She sought to flee from it and only then has she found some peace.

Lines 17-20

The reference to the moon in line seventeen of *'Edge'* can also be connected to menstruation language in the previous couplet. In the last four lines, she speaks about the moon and its place in all this. It has been watching everything play out from her spot in the sky, but has "nothing to be sad about". She stares down at the earth regularly and has grown used to "this sort of thing".

The moon is often used as a symbol for women and therefore it makes sense that the moon would be used to this kind of suffering and loss. How many women before this one, and how many after, including Plath herself, committed suicide in order to escape oppression and depression?