

## CONFRONTED PATRIARCHY IN SYLVIA PLATH'S POEMS

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**Abstract:** The American literary canons, mainly those of the nineteen fifties and the nineteen sixties, had consistently portrayed women as subservient citizens. Women in the American culture had been put under men's domination and thus lost their identity and been unable to determine their own fate. They played roles long prescribed by men, both in the home and in their social milieu. As products of the era, a number of Sylvia Plath's poems depict confrontation against this phenomenon of patriarchy in which women have been inferior to and abused by men; they fight for freedom and to regain their true roles as women and human beings.

**Key words:** the American literary canons, patriarchy, Sylvia Plath's poems

The American nineteen fifties and sixties have witnessed the advent of literary works portraying women's struggle for liberation, the so-called Women's Movement, whose members turned out to be assertive activists struggling for the sake of their fellow woman citizens. The Women's Movement for liberation gained its momentum during these decades, and continued to color the literary works of all genres even in the ensuing years. In fact, such woman-related themes as feminism, women studies, and women's emancipation have dominated not only the American literary genres but those of the world as well beyond the turn of the second millennium.

In this article I try to explicate some of Sylvia Plath's poems depicting women trapped within a patriarchal culture and struggling against the "humiliating roles" prescribed by their counterparts. As a matter of fact, these women are seeking full identity craved by all women across the nation. This recurrent theme has made the poems so relevant to women's struggle, for the core problem for women in America was "identity problem," a problem that had long been suffered, even until the present time (Friedan, 1990).

The symbols that Plath uses in the poems, practically all of which are concerning dying, refer to women's position in a patriarchal cultural system and their struggle to become independent individuals. Through death women in the poems transform themselves into *ashes, red-haired demons, evaporating dew, sparkling stars, and pure acetylene* (Plath, 1965). Those are symbols of the embodiment of women's "new identities" as the free, powerful, beautiful, pure, and independent human beings. But whatever their forms are, the women's main source of endeavor in achieving their "identity" is their discontent resulting from the attributes of womanhood that ensnare them. The saturated condition of playing "voluntary servitude" finally evokes self-awareness that makes them burst out into rebellious women.

In the following sections I will elaborate how the female characters of the poems are made inferior, depersonalized, and oppressed but struggle until they eventually achieve freedom and sense of self.

#### **PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM IN SYLVIA PLATH'S POEMS**

Women's Liberation activists see "patriarchal social relations as the primary cause of women's oppression" (Andersen, 1993). They confirm that stereotypical female values are products of a patriarchal system which dominates the socio-cultural structure. Women are made inferior by this kind of culture; "they are acculturated into inferiority" (Ruthven, 1991). In every stage of her life a woman has to follow the customs established by the society. A baby girl, for instance, begins to be treated differently from a baby boy ever since she opens her eyes for the world for the very first time. "In American culture, baby boys are dressed in blue, girls in pink. Although the origins of this practice are not known, most parents comply with this cultural habit" (Andersen, 1993). Subsequently, as Chafe (1994) explains, a girl child "was urged to select girls' toys, and to be more restrained, sedentary, 'quiet and neat' than her brothers." Certainly, womanhood rules and limitations do not stop at a definite time. When a boy has grown up into an adult, the society lets him move on freely and be himself, but at the same time in her life a girl faces problems of "young womanhood" involving virginity and education. Then, when she becomes a wife she will always be shadowed by the "cult of true womanhood." A woman is deemed perfect when she completely possesses womanhood traits. She has to be able to perform womanly tasks which are defined as the hallmark of female pride and happiness. To be a real woman is to be a good wife and a good moth-

er. Domesticity and playing a feminine role is a woman's world. The woman's ideal place is in the home; they "... must boldly announce that no job is more exacting, more necessary, or more rewarding than that of a housewife and mother (ibid). The cultural habits that should be complied with will continue as long as women live. When they die the society will judge them whether they have been "perfect women" or not. These inherited cultural stereotypes of women in their social life, in fact, are claimed to have victimized American women. Friedan (1990) asserts that culture in America is unbalanced because it "...forces boys insofar as it can, to grow up, to endure the pains of growth, to educate themselves, to move on." Girls, however, are not "forced to grow up – to achieve somehow the core of self." Since their childhood women have had no opportunity to develop their "selves." This situation then becomes seriously destructive when women are ensnared in patriarchal womanhood ideas. They get trapped in the so-called "feminine mystique" (ibid). They usually become more dependent and passive under the life patterns imposed by the patriarchal society.

### **PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES IN SYLVIA PLATHS' POEMS**

Some of Sylvia Plath's poems portray women in the American patriarchal culture who undergo a condition of being repressed and rebel against male domination. In these poems the woman characters suffer from bondage and imprisonment and they have to accept the conditions uncomplainingly. In general, however, the woman speakers of the poems have dreams of being free, independent, self-determined individuals; and all of them embody their dreams through death. In the poem *Daddy*, the woman has succeeded in killing the men that dominate her life; while after dying, the woman in *Lady Lazarus* transfigures into a killing agent and eats the man who has treated her as a thing. In *Fever 103°* and in *Ariel* the women have transformed themselves into untouchable and unseen matters so that they become "superior" over men; and the woman in *Death & Co.* in her powerlessness and surrender to death still has a hope for a new self rebirth.

*Daddy* is one of Plath's poems depicting how women have been oppressed and searched for self-identity. Manifestation of man's domination over woman is described by the woman of the poem. For thirty years she has lived like a "foot," devoted to her "Panzerman" father as a maid. To describe her miserable condition she says that it is difficult for her to breathe freely or to sneeze at any

time she wants to; she even has no courage to speak to her oppressors, her father and her husband. "I have lived like a foot / For thirty years, poor and white, / Barely daring to breathe or Achoo." The expression of inability to communicate with man, "The tongue stuck in my jaw / It stuck in a barb wire snare," signifies that being dominated is being dependent upon the man that she should worship. The woman of the poem is a portrait of feebleness and powerlessness, whereas the man signifies power and prowess. Living like a "foot" indicates that women are inferior creatures who have to shoulder all kinds of infliction, for though a foot is the lowest part of the human body, it has the heaviest task: responsible for any burden that the body has. That is why, because of her attribution, the woman of the poem has to sacrifice her own life. She is a victim who gives her blood, her life, to her beloved husband who is a vampire," "The vampire who said he was you / And drank my blood for a year, / Seven years, if you want to know." On the contrary, albeit from the beginning to the end of the poem the description of the man's rank degrades: from God to Nazi, from Nazi to Swastika, from Swastika to teacher, from teacher to devil, and from devil to vampire, each has a different value and significance, and all of them refer to man's superiority. In *Daddy* the woman is metaphorically the Jew, while sexual dominance, cruelty, and authoritarianism of man are metaphorical of the Nazi's traits. The Nazi's sadistic treatment towards the Jewish people symbolizes male dominance and female oppression. Thus, the male dehumanizing treatment upon woman as an individual in the poem might fit in with the phenomenon of American patriarchy in the nineteen sixties which Friedan (1990) refers to as the woman of the "comfortable concentration camp."

Physically women live luxurious lives in that they can live with their husbands and children in their homes comfortably, but mentally they are oppressed and impoverished like the prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps. Friedan then goes on to say that "... the women who 'adjust' themselves as housewives, who grow up wanting to be 'just a housewife,' are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps. This statement refers to the notion that feminists basically claim that the cause of woman's unhappiness is when a woman is entirely tied to the home. Home is a place where the woman is indoctrinated to be indifferent to her "self" or even to be selfless, in which she is simply a part of the home itself. Her identity depends on her roles of being a good wife, a good mother, in short a good homemaker until she gains her own identity.

However, the woman of the poem has not given up her human identity. After thirty years of suffering, her self-consciousness is finally aroused. She gets annoyed. Accordingly, to gain her “self,” she murders her oppressors by way of planting a piece of wooden stick in the center of the vampire’s chest, symbolically showing that she has combated man’s tyranny. Her love in domination, seven years of marriage and great respect for her father throughout her life, has disappeared. Though finally she has to die, she has succeeded in fighting against her deep-rooted conventional ideas of womanhood.

The suffering woman, who is a metaphorical Jew, and the dominating man, who is a metaphorical Nazi, are also implicitly mentioned in *Lady Lazarus*. But, the latter directly refers to the woman’s hatred of the male doctor who dominates her. *Lady Lazarus* is concerned with the troubles that a good woman should face to be reborn as a new self. The creation of a new self is a symbol of freedom from man’s domination. Consequently, the woman in *Lady Lazarus* is willing to suffer, to die one time every decade. To begin with, she tried to liberate herself from male control when she was very young. She calls this occurrence an “accident” because it was meant to attract people’s attention so that they would know that she had been treated unfairly. The second attempt was taken seriously because she was aware of her “self.” The two unsuccessful liberation efforts did not make her resign, for her “[d]ying,” a process of being reborn symbolizing her liberty from man, “[i]s an art,” something of high value. It is her “call” to confront and exterminate the powerful man, “Her Doktor,” who has depersonalized her to a lifeless being. In contrast, for the man the “thing” becomes worthwhile to observe and to investigate. The inhuman treatment of the woman as a thing is “a valuable work,” and she is the “opus.” The German article “Herr” to address a man in *Lady Lazarus* seems to be meant to stress the woman’s rebellion against man’s authoritative power. The woman of the poem is aware of man’s high patriarchal self-esteem; he will neither be looked down upon nor be ignored by a woman. As a result, commenting on his actions toward her, with the bitterest irony she says, “Do not think I underestimate your great concern.” The woman’s hatred towards man, however, is uncontrollable. Before taking revenge she vows to “Herr God,” “Herr Lucifer,” a way of addressing god to show her idea that god is male and that “he” is also a deity of evil spirit; and in order to defeat him she must become a demonic man destroyer. Deliberately or not, the breaking of conventional language is also done by women to show their rebellion against male superiority. It is the woman in *Lady Lazarus* who cynically reverses the expression of “Ladies and Gen-

tlemen,” an order of language formulae which is commonly used in English, into “Gentlemen, Ladies” to give primacy to the male such as the use of the formulae “Prince and Princess,” “husband and wife,” or “boys and girls,” which “... exist so as to confirm to the second sex in its secondary” (Ruthven, 1991).

The most conspicuous conclusion, which echoed among feminists in 1969, of marriage being “slavery for women” (Ruthven, 1991) is identical with an affirmation that when women get married they become bound and exploited beings. To reach freedom the woman in *Ariel* has passed through two stages of journey in her life. In the first stage the woman is “God’s lioness.” She sacrifices her life for motherly devotion. Then, after reaching the second stage she is the new spirit of “Godiva,” unveiled female rebelliousness. There is a shift from a symbol of a devout mother into a brave rebel. In the excitement of the morning ride, the woman comes to a rapture at losing herself; she is “White Godiva,” saying “I unpeel,” to indicate her self-liberation from woman attributes. Though the self-consciousness raising process in *Ariel* is not the same as what happened in *Daddy*, the cause propelling the emergence of the self-consciousness itself seems similar. Before becoming new selves both the women in *Ariel* and in *Daddy* have been trapped in “womanhood ideas” which force them to accept “voluntary servitude.” The woman in *Daddy* has served and worshipped men for many years, whereas the woman in *Ariel* has devoted her life to being a good mother for her child. Nonetheless, because of their consciousness these women finally succeed in breaking out of their “imprisonment.” The woman’s new self in *Ariel* has completely become an individual, a full human being who can determine for herself. She can now freely move to any place that she desires without having to care for her child. “And now I / Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas / The child’s cry // Melts in the wall.” Her new identity is no longer the “real woman” of the traditional role concept. So, the transformation of the woman’s spirit in *Ariel* from “God’s lioness” into “White Godiva” is a manifestation of her uprooted maternity spirit. This new spirit is loosely tied to womanhood affairs and is the free self who refuses things she does not want to do. Courage and perseverance are the main clues needed to liberate women from men’s domination, while suffering through struggle is a training for woman to be set free from the cultural stereotypes of a good wife. The exaggerated demand upon a wife is man’s sinfulness; it traps, poisons, and paralyzes a woman’s life. Such monstrous bondage is too foul, too harmful to be shouldered by a woman, like what the woman in *Fever 103?* said, “Your body / Hurts me as the world hurts God.” One of the deeply rooted feminine

roles is a wife's task to serve her husband's needs, including his biological needs. This is exploitation; and the woman of the poem feels that she has played a prostitute's roles; she is an acceptor of a "lecher's kiss." Consequently, to get a new self a woman should be brave, opposing men and remain herself as a "woman," ready to suffer first. A new self is a "pure being," and to become a pure being, the woman of the poem has to die for "three days" as a manifestation of purification. In purifying herself she puts off all her attributes that she has. She puts off her "old whore petticoats." Nevertheless, these attributes are extremely difficult to be renounced, even the fires of hell are unable to cleanse them, for they are man's sins which are not only attached to her body, but also soaked deeply down into her muscle, blood, bone, and flesh, as well as into her mind. That is why, her accomplishment of detaching herself from the cultural patterns of womanhood that have dominated her life is very important. The journey to liberation is something momentous, resembling Christ's ascension to Heaven. The transformation from a real body to the "pure acetylene" in *Fever 103?* and to "the evaporating dew" in *Ariel* is the embodiment of woman's liberation. These forms signify that there is a space separating man and woman when the woman has become her "self." A full being of a woman is an independent individual who is out of the reach of man's power. Therefore, to be a liberated self also means to confront or to create a barrier against man's domination and exploitation.

The woman in *Death & Co.* is passive; she is the type of woman who clings subserviently to a female role. Her resignation to death as a total surrender can be regarded as the tragic state between hope and hopelessness. The embodiment of death represented by two male figures with two different natures symbolizes man's superiority; whoever they are and whatever qualities they have, they are unconquerable. Of the first male figure, the woman of the poem is a victim. She is his powerless prey, "I am red meat," because he is condor-like, a corpse-hunting predator. Of the second one, she is a love provider in that "He wants to be loved." To both figures the woman has sincerely dedicated her whole life. According to Friedan (1990), such a woman's condition is very dangerous because it can destroy her identity; similar to "those who 'adjusted' to the conditions of the camps and surrendered their human identity and went almost indifferently to their deaths." The lines "The dead bell, / "The dead bell. // Somebody's done for" in *Death & Co.* indicate that the woman of the poem has been in great despair. She has been exhausted, she cannot stand suffering any longer. However, though it is obscure, after "dying" she still has an expect-

tation of a free rebirth. With regards to the first figure, she is only a thing, a victim of man's authority. However, she insists "I am not his yet." Meanwhile, for the sake of love she gives her life to the second figure without any force, although she does not want to be his servant forever: "I do not stir." This expectation of being reborn as a true independent individual is a feminist's dream built upon self consciousness.

After acting out their feminine roles, the women of Plath's poems discover nothing except discontent and the feelings of loss of self-identity. Their consciousness stirs them to listen to their inner voices in order to find their "selves." They perform a supernatural journey to death symbolizing their search for identity. Death gives them fulfillment. The process of creating a "self," a new identity, involves a hard struggle. A woman should suffer and sacrifice her life first, so that the achievement of freedom from man's tyrannical domination is rewarding. In *Daddy* the woman's freedom is celebrated by "the villagers," people who are concerned about her condition. They "are dancing and stamping on" her father's as well as her husband's dead bodies. The "new self" in *Fever 103?* says that she is praised and welcomed by "cherubim," angels in heaven, and "by kisses" because she is pure like Jesus Christ. She no longer cares about the "pink things," matters of feminine traits. Yet, by the loss the "woman's old spirit," the woman in *Ariel* stops conforming to the conventional role of femininity and she really enjoys being a "new self." Or at least, after dying, the woman in *Lady Lazarus* is still able to release her anger to men, and the woman in *Death & Co.* still has a promising hope of reaching her destination. The symbols used by Plath to illustrate the women in her poems cannot be separated from the acculturated women and their struggle for a full identity. On the one hand, before her self-consciousness is raised, the woman is the most miserable and oppressed servant for her father in *Daddy* and for the second male figure of death in *Death & Co.* She is a victim of her own husband in *Daddy* and in *Fever 103?*, and also of the male doctor in *Lady Lazarus* and the first male figure of death in *Death & Co.* The woman is symbolized by maternity emblems like "God's lioness" in *Ariel*. On the other hand, after her liberation the woman is an authoritarian individual. She can murder men and eat them. She is also the purest, unreachable superior being. It is clear that to gain their own "selves" women in Plath's poems should pass through a long suffering. The feelings of being discontented and of being despised in playing "feminine roles" make them angry. In feminists' interests it is understood that the woman's anger against oppression is called "healthy anger." That

is why the attempts of the women of the poems to reach individual independence are also feminists' struggle. Conscious of their being victims of male domination, women are able to admit their anger and use it as a starting point for change and growth. The women in the poems, having been trapped in their roles for so long, eventually achieve their freedom and their sense of self. They triumph over oppression. This achievement is significantly close to the feminists' final aim of the struggle: women must stop compromising with women's roles; they "must refuse to be nameless, depersonalized, and manipulated and live their own lives again according to a self chosen purpose" (Friedan 1990).

### CONCLUSION

The symbols that the poet uses in the poems not only describe women's position in a patriarchal culture, but also reflect women's desire for setting themselves free from their "womanhood attributes." They confront such patriarchal system in order to come off their "roles" in which they have been trapped for so long. Death in the poems symbolizes liberation. By dying the women in two of the poems (*Lady Lazarus* and *Death & Co.*) are able to decide what they want to do as they wish. Only through death can they achieve new selves. Meanwhile, in the other three (*Daddy*, *Ariel*, *Fever 103?*) death is the only way to break away from men's domination. So, literally, death in these poems is leaving life, and figuratively it is renouncing the "feminine mystique." The messages of the poems are very meaningful for the feminists because they refer to woman's constant and anguished search for identity, a typical feminist theme. The women of the poems implicitly declare "war" against men. Plath's poems do speak about this.

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## Appendix

### Sylvia Plath's Poems

#### Ariel

Stasis in darkness.  
Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,  
How one we grow,  
Pivot of heels and knees!--The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks----

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else

Hauls me through air----  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

White  
Godiva, I unpeel---  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I  
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.  
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.  
And I  
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies,  
Suicidal, at one with the drive  
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

### **Daddy**

You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white,  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time---  
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,  
Ghastly statue with one gray toe  
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic  
Where it pours bean green over blue  
In the waters off the beautiful Nauset.  
I used to pray to recover you.  
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town  
Scraped flat by the roller

Of wars, wars, wars.  
But the name of the town is common.  
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.  
So I never could tell where you  
Put your foot, your root,  
I never could talk to you.  
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.  
Ich, ich, ich, ich,  
I could hardly speak.  
I thought every German was you.  
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine,  
Chuffing me off like a Jew.  
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.  
I began to talk like a Jew.  
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna  
Are not very pure or true.  
With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck  
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack  
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been sacred of you,  
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.  
And your neat mustache  
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.  
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You----

Not God but a swastika  
So black no sky could squeak through.  
Every woman adores a Fascist,

The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
In the picture I have of you,  
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
But no less a devil for that, no not  
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.  
I was ten when they buried you.  
At twenty I tried to die  
And get back, back, back to you.  
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,  
And they stuck me together with glue.  
And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you,  
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.  
And I said I do, I do.  
So daddy, I'm finally through.  
The black telephone's off at the root,  
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two---  
The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know.  
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart  
And the villagers never liked you.  
They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.  
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

**Death & Co.**

Two, of course there are two.  
It seems perfectly natural now ---  
The one who never looks up, whose eyes are lidded  
And balled, like Blake's.  
Who exhibits

The birthmarks that are his trademark ---  
The scald scar of water,  
The nude  
Verdigris of the condor.  
I am red meat. His beak

Claps sidewise: I am not his yet.  
He tells me how badly I photograph.  
He tells me how sweet  
The babies look in their hospital  
Icebox, a simple

Frill at the neck  
Then the flutings of their Ionian  
Death-gowns.  
Then two little feet.  
He does not smile or smoke.

The other does that  
His hair long and plausible  
Bastard  
Masturbating a glitter  
He wants to be loved.

I do not stir.  
The frost makes a flower,  
The dew makes a star,  
The dead bell,  
The dead bell.

Somebody's done for.

**Fever 103°**

Pure? What does it mean?  
The tongues of hell  
Are dull, dull as the triple

Tongues of dull, fat Cerebus  
Who wheezes at the gate. Incapable  
Of licking clean

The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin.  
The tinder cries.  
The indelible smell

Of a snuffed candle!  
Love, love, the low smokes roll  
From me like Isadora's scarves, I'm in a fright

One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel.  
Such yellow sullen smokes  
Make their own element. They will not rise,

But trundle round the globe  
Choking the aged and the meek,  
The weak

Hothouse baby in its crib,  
The ghastly orchid  
Hanging its hanging garden in the air,

Devilish leopard!  
Radiation turned it white  
And killed it in an hour.

Greasing the bodies of adulterers  
Like Hiroshima ash and eating in.  
The sin. The sin.

Darling, all night  
I have been flickering, off, on, off, on.  
The sheets grow heavy as a lecher's kiss.

Three days. Three nights.  
Lemon water, chicken  
Water, water make me retch.

I am too pure for you or anyone.  
Your body  
Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern ---

My head a moon  
Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin  
Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive.

Does not my heat astound you. And my light.  
All by myself I am a huge camellia  
Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush.

I think I am going up,  
I think I may rise ---  
The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I

Am a pure acetylene  
Virgin  
Attended by roses,

By kisses, by cherubim,  
By whatever these pink things mean.  
Not you, nor him.

Not him, nor him  
(My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats) ---  
To Paradise.

**Lady Lazarus**

I have done it again.  
One year in every ten  
I manage it-----

A sort of walking miracle, my skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My right foot

A paperweight,  
My featureless, fine  
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin  
O my enemy.  
Do I terrify?-----

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?  
The sour breath  
Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh  
The grave cave ate will be  
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.  
I am only thirty.

And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.  
What a trash  
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.  
The Peanut-crunching crowd  
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand in foot -----  
The big strip tease.  
Gentleman , ladies

These are my hands  
My knees.  
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.  
The first time it happened I was ten.  
It was an accident.

The second time I meant  
To last it out and not come back at all.  
I rocked shut

As a seashell.  
They had to call and call  
And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else.  
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.  
I do it so it feels real.  
I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.  
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.  
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day  
To the same place, the same face, the same brute  
Amused shout:

'A miracle!'  
That knocks me out.  
There is a charge

For the eyeing my scars, there is a charge  
For the hearing of my heart---  
It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge  
For a word or a touch  
Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair on my clothes.  
So, so, Herr Doktor.  
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,  
I am your valuable,  
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.  
I turn and burn.  
Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash---  
You poke and stir.  
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there----

A cake of soap,  
A wedding ring,  
A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer  
Beware  
Beware.

Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air.