### MORNING SONG BY SYLVIA PLATH - COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

#### Context:

Sylvia Plath's Morning Song is a poem that explores the emotional complexity of motherhood. Written after the birth of her first child, the poem reflects both the wonder and the disconnection that can accompany the early stages of parenthood. Plath uses vivid imagery and symbolic language to convey the distance and uncertainty the speaker feels toward her newborn child, while also capturing moments of awe and love. The poem highlights themes of birth, identity, the passage of time, and the ambivalence of motherhood, balancing tenderness with detachment.

# STANZA BY STANZA ANALYSIS

#### Lines 1-3:

"Love set you going like a fat gold watch. / The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry / Took its place among the elements." The poem begins with a striking simile, comparing the newborn to a "fat gold watch." This image conveys both the preciousness and the mechanical nature of life's beginning. The idea of the child being "set going" suggests that birth is both a natural and inevitable process, as though life begins in an automatic, impersonal way. The "fat gold watch" also suggests the passage of time, symbolizing how the baby's arrival marks the start of a new phase in the mother's life. The midwife's slap and the baby's "bald cry" signal the child's entry into the world, and Plath describes the cry as "taking its place among the elements," linking the baby's arrival to the natural world, as though it has become part of the larger, universal forces of life.

### Lines 4-6:

"Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue. / In a drafty museum, your nakedness / Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls." In these lines, Plath uses the metaphor of a "new statue" to describe the baby, emphasizing its stillness and vulnerability. The image of the baby as a statue evokes a sense of fragility and objectification, as though the child is an art piece to be observed rather than an active part of life. The "drafty museum" adds to the sense of coldness and detachment, suggesting that the speaker feels distant from the child, overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for something so delicate. The child's "nakedness" is a stark contrast to the parents' sense of safety, and the parents themselves are described as "blankly as walls," implying that they are emotionally distant, unsure of how to interact with the child in this moment of vulnerability.

#### Lines 7-9:

"I'm no more your mother / Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow / Effacement at the wind's hand." The speaker expresses a sense of detachment from her identity as a mother, claiming that she feels "no more your mother" than a cloud. The metaphor of the cloud "distilling a mirror" suggests the speaker's fleeting, ephemeral connection to the child, as though her role as a mother is transient and uncertain. The idea of the cloud reflecting "its own slow effacement" implies that the speaker feels herself disappearing or losing her sense of self in the face of this new responsibility. The wind's influence over the cloud symbolizes the external forces that shape the speaker's identity, suggesting that motherhood is something imposed upon her, rather than something she feels inherently connected to.

### Lines 10-12:

"All night your moth-breath / Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen: / A far sea moves in my ear." In these lines, Plath contrasts the fragility of the baby's "moth-breath" with the image of "flat pink roses," which evoke a sense of artificiality and stasis. The baby's breath is described as flickering, emphasizing its delicate and transient nature. The speaker wakes to listen to the baby's breathing, but her attention shifts to the metaphorical "far sea," suggesting that while she is physically present, her mind is distant, perhaps preoccupied with her own thoughts or anxieties. The "far sea" evokes the vastness of the unknown, reflecting the speaker's feelings of isolation and the overwhelming nature of motherhood.

### Lines 13-14:

"One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral / In my Victorian nightgown." The baby's cry prompts the speaker to "stumble from bed," highlighting her physical exhaustion and the instinctual, almost automatic response to the child's needs. The phrase "cow-heavy" conveys the speaker's sense of physical burden, possibly referring to the weight of pregnancy or breastfeeding, as well as the general fatigue of new motherhood. The "Victorian nightgown" adds a historical and domestic dimension to the poem, evoking a sense of confinement or traditional expectations of motherhood. The nightgown also contrasts with the child's newness, suggesting that the speaker feels weighed down by the roles and duties associated with being a mother.

### Lines 15-16:

■ "Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square / Whitens and swallows its dull stars." The baby's mouth is described as opening "clean as a cat's," suggesting the precision and simplicity of the baby's cries. The comparison to a cat implies instinct and purity, highlighting the primal nature of the child's need for nourishment and care. As the baby cries, the outside world changes, with the "window square" whitening as dawn approaches, symbolizing the passage of time. The image of the window "swallowing its dull stars" suggests the end of the night and the beginning of a new day, which mirrors the speaker's ongoing transition into motherhood.

### Lines 17-18:

"And now you try / Your handful of notes; The clear vowels rise like balloons." The final lines of the poem shift in tone, as the baby begins to "try" their voice, producing a "handful of notes." These sounds are described as "clear vowels," suggesting the baby's innocence and the purity of their attempts to communicate. The vowels "rise like balloons," evoking a sense of lightness and joy, in contrast to the earlier heaviness and uncertainty in the poem. This ending suggests that while motherhood may be challenging and disorienting, there is also beauty and wonder in watching the child grow and develop.

### Key Themes

### The Complexity of Motherhood

- The poem explores the ambivalence of motherhood, capturing both the love and the sense of distance the speaker feels toward her child. Plath's speaker expresses feelings of inadequacy and disconnection, as well as the physical and emotional burdens that come with caring for a newborn.
- Quotes:
- "I'm no more your mother / Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow / Effacement at the wind's hand."
- This line encapsulates the speaker's feelings of detachment and the struggle to connect with her new identity as a mother.
- "One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral / In my Victorian nightgown."
- This image conveys the exhaustion and weight of motherhood, both physical and emotional.

### The Passage of Time and the Role of Nature

- Throughout the poem, Plath uses imagery of time and nature to symbolize the passage of life and the inevitability of change. The baby's arrival marks a new phase in the speaker's life, and the imagery of the clock, the stars, and the sea highlights the cyclical nature of time and motherhood.
- Quotes:
- "Love set you going like a fat gold watch."
- This simile compares the child's birth to the ticking of a watch, symbolizing the beginning of a new chapter in the speaker's life and the passage of time.
- "The window square / Whitens and swallows its dull stars."
- This image represents the end of night and the beginning of a new day, symbolizing the ongoing transition into motherhood and the passage of time.

### The Fragility of Life and the Search for Identity

■ The poem touches on the fragility of both the child and the speaker's sense of self. The baby's "moth-breath" and "handful of notes" emphasize the delicacy of new life, while the speaker's feelings of detachment and self-effacement reflect her struggle to reconcile her new identity as a mother with her previous sense of self.

## Mood of the Poem

The mood of Morning Song is a complex blend of awe, detachment, and quiet wonder. While there is a sense of distance between the speaker and the child, the poem also captures moments of beauty and tenderness. The tone shifts from uncertainty and exhaustion to a softer, more reflective mood as the speaker observes the child's development, suggesting that motherhood, though challenging, brings its own rewards.

### LITERARY DEVICES

### Metaphor

Plath uses several metaphors throughout the poem, such as comparing the baby to a "fat gold watch" to symbolize the passage of time and the start of a new life. The speaker's detachment is also conveyed through metaphors like the cloud "distilling a mirror."

### **Imagery**

Vivid imagery pervades the poem, particularly in the descriptions of the baby's breath, the stars, and the dawn. Plath uses natural imagery to emphasize the fragility and beauty of life, as well as the inevitability of change.

### Simile

■ Similes such as "clean as a cat's" and "like balloons" highlight the precision and innocence of the baby's actions, while also emphasizing the speaker's observation of the child's development.

#### Personification

■ The personification of the window, which "whitens and swallows its dull stars," adds a sense of transition and change, mirroring the speaker's ongoing adaptation to motherhood.

### Conclusion

Sylvia Plath's Morning Song is a nuanced exploration of motherhood, capturing the ambivalence, distance, and awe that accompany the early stages of parenthood. Through vivid imagery and symbolic language, Plath reflects on the passage of time, the fragility of life, and the complexities of identity. The poem's shifting tone-from detachment and uncertainty to tenderness and quiet wonder-suggests that while motherhood may bring challenges, it also offers moments of beauty and connection. Morning Song stands as a poignant meditation on the emotional and physical realities of becoming a mother.