Fever 103°

SUMMARY

Am I pure? I'm not sure what purity even is. The flames of hell, which are like tongues, are as dull as the three tongues of the triple-headed dog Cerberus,

who is fat and stupid, wheezing as he stands guard at the gates of hell. These flames are unable to lick clean

my feverish muscles, unable to purify me of my sins. The wood cries out as it catches on fire. There is the unforgettable smell

of a blown-out candle. Oh my love, the thick smoke coming from me is like Isadora Duncan's scarves; I'm scared that like her,

one of my scarves will get caught in a wheel and break my neck. Such sad, yellow smokes create their own environment. Unlike normal smoke, they don't rise

but instead go around the world choking those who are old or weak, choking a frail

baby as if its crib were in a sweltering greenhouse, choking also the dreadful orchid flower, as if it were being hanged like a criminal in its hanging garden.

These smokes are like an evil leopard! Radiation turned the leopard white, killing it in just one hour.

Sin is visible in the sweat of adulterers, eating into them like radioactive ash from the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The sin, the sin.

My darling, all night I'm switching from hot to cold, like I'm a lightbulb flickering on and off, my bed sheets growing heavy with sweat, like a pervert's kiss.

My fever has been going on for three days and three nights. I've drunk lemon water and chicken broth, but they just made me gag.

I'm simply too pure for you, my lover, or indeed for anyone else. Your body hurts me like the state of the world hurts God. I am like a lantern,

my head like a moon made out of Japanese paper, my skin covered in gold leaf, which is incredibly expensive and incredibly fragile.

Feel how hot I am—isn't it astonishing? I'm blazing as brightly as a light—isn't that also amazing? All on my own I'm like an enormous camellia flower, my skin flushing red, then returning to normal, again and again.

I feel like I'm going up and up, I think I'm going to ascend out of this state. Flecks of molten metal spit, and I feel pure love. I

am pure like an inflammable Virgin Mary, surrounded by roses,

by kisses, by angels, and whatever else these pink things mean.

Neither you, my love, nor this other man,

nor this one, nor this, can hold me down or come with me. I feel my different selves disappearing, like a prostitute's clothing, as I ascend to Paradise.

THEMES

PURITY AND SIN

"Fever 103°" describes a speaker caught in the hallucinogenic state of a high fever. She lies in bed, the heat coming in waves. These physical feelings are described using a series of metaphors that compare the speaker's state to that of someone condemned to hell because of their "sin"—in other words, because of their *impure* behavior. The poem traces the speaker's battle with her feelings of sinful impurity, which she eventually wins by achieving a form of transcendence, which she compares to ascension to "Paradise." The poem suggests that to reach this heavenly goal, it is necessary for the speaker to destroy her old self through a process of suffering.

The poem begins with a question: "Pure? What does it mean?" This shows the speaker's confusion at the precise nature of moral correctness. Rather than feeling pure, she feels infected by the opposite of purity: a vague but intense "sin," which condemns her to the hellish trials of fever. These trials, both physical and mental, are described by a series of images that evoke traditional depictions of hell, including the "tongues of [...] Cerberus," a monster who guards the Greek underworld, and "sullen smokes" that choke "the aged and the meek," which recall hellfire.

The poem compares this torment to modern as well as mythological suffering, in the allusion to "Hiroshima ash." It seems, then, that the speaker's undefined guilt may be historical, the guilt of an American for the suffering caused by the atomic bombs. Another source of her guilt might be sexual promiscuity, since when she is purified by the poem's end, she sheds "old whore petticoats."

The range of these infernal metaphors and their quick pace, coming one after the other, mimic the heatwaves of fever and the rapid workings of an obsessive mind. By the end of line 30 ("The sheets grow heavy as a lecher's kiss"), there seems to be no way to escape the cycle. However, a process of purification begins at line 31 ("Three days. Three nights."), as the speaker ascends from the depths of suffering to a sense of moral and religious purity. In part this process occurs because she comes to understand that suffering is necessary to atone for her guilt, and to be rid of her old self.

Just as her suffering was described in hellish imagery, her purification is described using heavenly metaphors. She says "I think I am going up" and that she is "a pure [...] Virgin" accompanied "by cherubim" (angels). She even compares herself to God, saying her lover's body "hurts" her "as the world hurts God." This emphasizes how exceptional she has become, positioning her above the rest of sinful mankind. All these images are profoundly individualistic, even egotistical. The speaker's purification does not resemble typical religious rituals, which take place as part of a community, but is instead an *individual* struggle, out of which she emerges as exceptional. She distinguishes herself from her lovers, rejecting both "you" and "him" in her ascension to "Paradise."

Precisely what this purifying process represents in literal terms is ambiguous. It is unlikely to be a return to health from sickness, since that would also require a return to society, from which the speaker separates herself. Perhaps it is the opposite: an acceptance of the fantastical, hallucinogenic effects of fever as a source of creative inspiration, which is traditionally considered a highly individualized process. The speaker may be indicating that having suffered and shed her old self, she's now free to be an independent artist, set apart from the rest of the world.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-7
- Lines 14-15
- Lines 15-22
- Lines 25-27
- Line 30
- Lines 31-54

LUST AND DESIRE

The language and imagery of "Fever 103°" are highly sexualized. It often seems as if the speaker's guilt is caused by her "sin" of promiscuity—she mentions another "him" in addition to her "love," for instance. However, over the course of the poem, its ideas about lust change from condemnation to an acceptance—or even celebration—of female sexuality. The poem seeks to reverse shaming and sexist attitudes toward women's sexuality, to the extent that by its end, lust (one of the mortal sins) is raised to "Paradise."

At first, the poem connects shame and female desire. The speaker begins by asking "Pure? What does it mean?" as if her feelings of lust make her so impure as to disqualify her from even knowing the *definition* of purity. The first explicit reference to love/lust is in the fourth stanza, where she cries out "Love, love" as if in desperation, seeming to seek a male lover to rescue her from her "fright." This fear is explained by her comparison of herself to Isadora Duncan, a dancer who died when her scarf became entangled in the wheels of a car, breaking her neck.

Duncan's last words were reputedly "Je vais à l'amour," ("I am going to love"), implying she was off to have an affair. These violent images of shame in response to the speaker's own sexuality culminate in the horrific description of "Radiation" which "[greases] the bodies of adulterers" like the burnt victims of Hiroshima. It is as if the speaker feels that shame is literally dissolving her body.

After line 31 ("Three days. Three nights."), the turning point in the speaker's move from impurity to purity, it initially seems as if her new purity is of the traditional, virginal type. Accordingly, it's described through conventionally religious imagery. For instance, the speaker says her body is "too pure for you or anyone," adding: "Your body / Hurts me as the world hurts God." Avoiding male penetration is what Christianity demands of "pure" women, and the reference to pain recalls the traditional idea that losing her virginity "hurts" a woman. Continuing this thread of purity, the speaker describes herself as separating from the world (including its earthly lusts) when she describes herself as a "Japanese paper" lantern floating away. The metaphor of the speaker's skin as "gold beaten" also alludes to Byzantine mosaics (a style of art born in the Eastern Roman Empire during the Middle Ages), which are almost always religious in nature.

However, these conservative descriptions are soon turned on their heads as the speaker assumes an increasingly self-confident sexuality. In line 40, she proclaims her "astound[ing]" "heat" to impress her lover and describes herself "Glowing and coming [...] flush on flush." "Coming" is slang for reaching orgasm and flushing is an automatic response to sexual arousal, so it's clear by this point that the speaker's new sense of purity is starting to combine with her sexuality rather than fighting against it. Heat is also associated with sexual desire, and it recurs throughout the last stanzas in regard to the speaker's lust. Her description of herself as an "acetylene / Virgin" is almost an oxymoron: acetylene is an inflammable gas, which is explosive when it comes into contact with fire.

Since heat represents lust, pairing acetylene with an emblem of chastity (the Virgin Mary) means radically redefining purity. The poem explodes the Virgin's chastity from her purity; the image suggests that a "pure" woman no longer depends on men ("Not you, nor him"), but is instead in charge of her own sexual appetites. By embracing her lust, the speaker is able to escape shame and ascend to her self-created "Paradise"—instead of being barred from the regressive Christian Paradise, which values only heterosexual marital relationships.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 7
- Lines 11-13
- Lines 23-27

- Lines 28-30
- Lines 34-54

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-7

Pure? What does ...
... sin, the sin.

"Fever 103°" begins with two linked rhetorical questions, in which the speaker questions the nature of purity. She suffers from a high fever throughout the poem, so one sense of the word "pure" here is "free of any contamination"—in other words, free of sickness. Taking "pure" in this sense, it is as if the speaker is asking whether or not she will ever be cured. However, the reference to "tongues of hell" in line 2 brings up a second meaning of "pure": "wholesome and untainted by immorality, especially of a sexual nature." The speaker, it seems, is overwhelmed with guilt at her own sins, fearing the punishment of hell, to the extent that she questions whether she even understands the word "pure" anymore.

Lines 2-5 contain an extended metaphor comparing fever's waves of heat with the "tongues of hell." "Tongues," in this sense, means flames. But as with line 1, there is a moral meaning to these words in addition to their literal meaning: hell delivers punishment to those who commit moral sins, and "tongues" can mean whips. The speaker's highly self-critical guilt, which she uses her own literal "tongue" to voice, is so wounding as to be comparable to being beaten with flaming whips in hell. But line 3 offers a further twist: rather than being razor sharp, as one would expect, these tongues are as "dull" (meaning blunt) as the tongues of the three-headed dog Cerberus, who guarded the gates to the underworld in Ancient Greek myth. This description implies that the speaker's guilt actually has little effect in purifying her of her sins. Epizeuxis in this section ("dull, dull"; "the sin, the sin") emphasizes the repetitive yet futile nature of the speaker's self-criticism and obsession with sin. The allusion to Cerberus, and the surprising description of a terrifying beast as "dull," "wheez[ing]", and "fat," serve to further heighten the sense of futility. It is as if the speaker is only just inside the gates of hell, exhausted but still not suffering enough—she needs to go further and to suffer more, if she is to achieve purification.

Lines 5-7 summarize these ideas of futility: "tongues" are "incapable" (meaning unable) of "licking clean" the speaker's "aguey tendon" (feverish muscles) or her "sin." Again thinking of "tongues" as referring to the speaker's own voice, these lines suggest that the speaker may be worried that even writing this poem won't do anything to cleanse her sin. Moreover, the fact that both "aguey tendon" and "the sin, the sin" are objects of the same verb phrase, "licking clean," further emphasizes the closeness between the physical sensations of sickness and the mental torment of guilt.

The most common metrical foot in these lines is the iamb (da-dum)—for instance, "The tongues of hell." But two exceptions, where two stressed syllables follow one another, break up this pattern. In both cases, the two stressed words fall on either side of a caesura: "dull, dull" and "dull, fat." Three of these four words are the same, so the shift in meter highlights the repetitive dullness of fever and of guilt, while "fat" likewise has connotations of slowness and ineffectiveness.

LINES 8-15

The tinder cries. ...
... their own element.

Line 8 continues the fiery imagery from earlier in the poem. Personification gives a vivid snapshot of "tinder" (which describes any small item used to start a fire) flaming into life with a cry of pain, expanding on the theme of punishment from the hellish extended metaphor of lines 2-7. Lines 9-10 add a second image to the crying tinder, this time linked to smell rather than hearing: a "snuffed candle." Candles traditionally symbolize knowledge, since they literally illuminate darkness in the same way that knowledge metaphorically illuminates ignorance. So the image of an extinguished candle is an image of ignorance that recalls the very first line of the poem, where the speaker is unable to define purity. What's more, in Christian churches candles are lit to commemorate the dead, whom the mourner hopes have ascended to heaven. Over the course of the poem, the speaker ascends to a kind of heaven from the hellish torment of guilt and fever, so by comparing herself here to a "snuffed candle," she makes clear the sheer depth of her damnation at this early stage.

Line 11 is the poem's first use of apostrophe, in which the speaker addresses her absent lover as "Love, love." That repeated word (another instance of epizeuxis) seems to slip into the word "low" in the middle of the line, as if she is slipping back into feverish delirium. If one sees the candle as representative of the speaker as her temperature spikes once more, then the description of "smokes roll[ing] from me" becomes more accessible. It expresses her fear that fever may ultimately cause her death, making her body smoke like a "snuffed candle" would.

However, as happens often throughout the poem, this metaphor has a moral as well as medical sense, which becomes clearer when one understands the comparison of the "smokes" to "Isadora's scarves" which "catch and anchor in the wheel." This is an allusion to Isadora Duncan, a Franco-American dancer who was killed when her scarf caught in the axle of a car she was riding in and broke her neck. She was riding with a mechanic, Benoît Falchetto, and according to Mary Desti, a friend who saw her off, her last words were "Je vais à l'amour" ("I am off to love"), implying she was having an affair with

Falchetto. Were this true, it would be far from the only scandalous act of Duncan's life: she was an atheist, bisexual, and a communist, once even bearing her breasts onstage while waving a red scarf and declaring: "This is red, so am I!" By comparing her own state to Duncan's death, which critics of the dancer argued was brought about due to her lustful and scandalous life, the speaker expresses her fear of being punished for her own sins— especially the mortal sin of lust, one of the poem's key themes.

Lines 14-15 sum up the extended metaphor of the "low smokes": they are "sullen," a personification that emphasizes the speaker's own sadness, and they "make their own element," meaning that they create a self-contained environment, isolating the speaker from others (presumably including her "love").

The meter of these lines is varied and unpredictable. Line 8 ("The tinder cries") contains two iambs (da-dum), line 9 ("The indelible smell") has two anapests (da-da-dum), which gives each of those lines two stressed syllables. But then, lines 11, 12, and 13 all have either 5 or 6 stressed syllables, hinting at the speaker's panicky racing thoughts. The unusual length of these three lines (from "Love, love" through "anchor in the wheel") may also reflect the long stretches of time that the speaker spends on thoughts of her own death, obsessing over them more than any other subject.

LINES 15-22

They will not ...
... Devilish leopard!

Lines 15-22 continue the extended metaphor of the "low smokes," which now broaden their reach, ensnaring not only the speaker but "trundl[ing] round the globe." The initial statement that "They will not rise" clarifies the fact that these are not made of literal smoke, which of course does rise, but are instead supernatural. Since rising is also associated with the ascent to heaven, being unable to rise hints at being condemned to hell. This is also why the smokes are "low": they are the smokes of hellfire.

The journey of the smoke around the world signifies that sinful behavior happens everywhere, and the list of vulnerable victims—"the aged and the meek / The weak [...] baby in its crib"—makes it clear that no one escapes, even people who seem innocent. There may be a biblical allusion in the use of the word "meek," referencing Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, where he said that "the meek shall inherit the earth." The most common interpretation of this biblical verse is that at the Last Judgement, when all of humanity is sent to either hell or heaven, the "meek" who have suffered domination and cruelty during their lifetime will be rewarded, while their rulers will be sent to hell. Plath's image, however, does not offer such a reward, but only the cruel punishment of choking to death. The choice of this penalty may itself be a subtle reference to the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews were murdered mainly by poison gas, and which began just 21 years before the poem was written. After such an atrocity in the heart of "civilized" Europe, widespread faith in traditional moralities and social structures was profoundly undermined; perhaps such skepticism is part of what the speaker is expressing in the hopelessness of these lines.

Lines 19-21 (starting with "Hothouse baby") introduce a strange new setting: a greenhouse. "Hothouse" is another term for a greenhouse, and a "hothouse baby" is an odd combination of the idea of greenhouses as nurturing with the threat posed to a baby by the heat of fever. This image seems to suggest that what one thinks of as nurturing can in fact be threatening, just as "civilization" proved itself to be barbaric. The "ghastly orchid" (an orchid is a type of flower) also connects to the idea of a greenhouse, since many varieties of orchid are difficult to cultivate except in controlled conditions. The fragility of these plants makes them valuable, but their beauty is dismissed by the speaker, who considers them "ghastly." She puns on the word "hanging," to associate orchids (which often hang in greenhouses) with executions by hanging. Perhaps this is an extension of the idea that civilization is as capable of committing awful crimes as it is of fostering beauty; after all, Germany produced prominent artists and musicians as well as the Nazis. The use of diacope within "Hanging its hanging garden" and the consonance of the repeated /h/ sounds in lines 19-21 ("Hothouse," ghastly," "hanging") mimic the gasps of someone "choking" to death.

Line 22 ("Devilish leopard!") returns to more personal ideas of sin: the leopard is traditionally a symbol of lust, as in canto 1 of Dante's *Inferno*. This new allusion seems to indicate that it is largely the speaker's guilt at her own sins that prompted the reflections of lines 15-21.

LINES 23-27

Radiation turned it ...
... sin. The sin.

In line 23, the colorful leopard has been burned "white" by "Radiation" and killed in just "one hour." The poem moves here from the speaker's personal sin of lust (which the leopard represents, as noted in the previous entry) back outward to public sins. These consist of another war crime, which this time is described overtly: the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The real-life effect of radiation on survivors of the attack was to burn areas of their skin, hence the "ash" that the speaker describes "eating in[to]" their bodies.

The comparison of these victims to simple "adulterers" seems grotesque at first, especially now when adultery (that is, having extramarital affairs) is no longer a crime. But in the Middle Ages, people who committed adultery were punished throughout Europe by being mutilated or killed, so like the victims of Hiroshima, survivors bore permanent scars. In the

case of Hiroshima, however, victims were not being punished for their own perceived sins; like the "aged and the meek" in line 17, most Hiroshima victims were innocent civilians, punished for the sins of others—that is, the lust for power and destruction that caused the war. In addition to its symbolic meaning, the "leopard" is also an aggressive predator; the aggressive lust for war led to millions of deaths in World War II, including many of the aggressors themselves, hence why the leopard itself is "killed."

The description of adulterers "Greasing" their bodies may refer to sweat (another implicitly sexual description), but continuing the theme of punishment, it could also refer to the inflammable liquids used to cover the bodies of those who were burned at the stake—which was one of the most common forms of execution for adultery.

Line 27 echoes line 7, with both using epizeuxis to stress the words "the sin." This is the poem's halfway point, and it represents the end of the speaker's painful focus on "sin." This transition is stressed further by the conclusiveness of the end-rhyme of "in" / "sin," as well as the use of caesura and end-stop, which slow down the line's pace and bring it to a firm close. From line 28 onward, the process of purification, of which these first 27 lines were the painful beginning, starts to succeed as the speaker ascends from hell towards heaven.

LINES 28-33

Darling, all night ...
... make me retch.

Line 28 begins with another example of apostrophe, in which the speaker addresses her "Darling" once more. This signals a return from the abstract imagery of the previous five stanzas to the more concrete realm of the speaker's own fever, which is anchored in both time ("all night") and place (in bed—"the sheets grow heavy"). Line 29 describes the fever's hot flushes coming and going, reusing the metaphor of the candle from lines 9-10 (or perhaps referring to an electric light), as she describes herself "flickering, off, on, off, on." As explained above, candles traditionally represent knowledge, so her going "off, on, off, on" also likely refers to her fading in and out of consciousness in the throes of her illness.

Line 30 features a simile comparing the heaviness of bedsheets to "a lecher's kiss." Their physical weight comes from the speaker's sweat, but there may also be a metaphorical implication here: if one says "I've got a weight on my shoulders" or "my soul is heavy," they mean that they're preoccupied with a moral problem, often because they feel guilty. Given that a "lecher" is an offensively lustful man, and that the poem has already described the speaker's guilty feelings over sex, this secondary meaning seems relevant here as well.

Line 31 introduces the poem's first example of *physical* purification, in addition to the painful *moral* purification of earlier stanzas. The speaker drinks "Lemon water" and "chicken / Water" (chicken broth) which make her "retch"; these bland drinks are typically given to those suffering fevers because they are mild and should be easy to digest. However, even these make the speaker throw up, showing just how fragile she is and suggesting that she is at a turning point of her condition. The use of diacope ("Three days. Three nights.") and epizeuxis ("Water, water") mimic the repetitiveness of having to drink again and again over the course of the illness.

The phrasing of "Three days. Three nights[,]" recalls the period of Lent, which lasts 40 days and 40 nights, and which commemorates Jesus's wanderings in the desert. During Lent each year, Christians atone for their sins by embracing bodily suffering in imitation of Christ. The speaker implicitly does the same here, realizing that she must suffer if she is to ascend out of her own hell into some form of "Paradise."

One additional feature to note about these two stanzas is the four end-stopped lines. Most of the poem is enjambed, so this unusual change breaks up its rhythm, signaling the way that the speaker is about to break out of her hellish state.

LINES 34-39

I am too ...
... and infinitely expensive.

By line 34 ("I am too pure for you or anyone"), the speaker has begun to come out the other side of her battle with sin. The three days and nights of her sickness seem to have been a final test, after which she can say to her "Darling" with confidence that now she is "too pure for [him] or anyone." With this statement she separates herself from the rest of humanity, a change reflected in the fact that the phrase "Your body" is on its own line, away from any contact with the speaker's body. The lover's body "Hurts" the speaker, which may be a reference to the pain often associated with losing one's virginity; this is compared to the pain experienced by God because of "the world"—in other words, because of the world's sins (lust being one such example). By withdrawing her body from sexual contact with her lover, the speaker fulfills Christianity's demands for a "pure" woman, thereby also coming closer to God.

The end of line 36 features another metaphor, in which the speaker compares herself to a "lantern." Unlike the earlier metaphor of the candle, which flickered "off, on, off, on" a lantern is kept from being so easily extinguished by a protective covering, here made of "Japanese paper." Japanese lanterns in particular are often hung outside homes and businesses to offer protection and light the way for pedestrians. This image of herself is far more expansive than a single thin, smoking candle; even though she is distinct from "anyone," like the "moon" in the sky above, her purity helps illuminate the world for those beneath her. The suspension at the end of line 36, signified by the two dashes, mimics the way light from a lantern might filter outwards, pointing the way forward.

The stanza's second metaphor of the speaker's skin as "gold beaten" further distinguishes her from ordinary people: gold is among the most highly prized of precious metals, affordable only by the few. The language here makes this even more clear: the speaker's skin is "Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive," and this description separates her from everyday life and instead associates her with the realm of the eternal, where gods reside. The metaphor also recalls Byzantine mosaics (a style of art born in the Eastern Roman Empire during the Middle Ages), which are almost always religious in nature, further adding to the earlier comparison between the speaker and God. Despite their delicacy and value, these mosaics decorated churches where ordinary people sought inspiration; similarly, despite the speaker's successful purification, which raises her above the rest of humankind, she still serves as an example for others to follow.

LINES 40-45

Does not my ...
... I love, I

With line 40 (starting "Does not my heat"), the tone of the poem becomes joyful for the first time. The two exclamations in line 40 show that the speaker is reveling in her "heat" and "light." Whereas earlier heat produced deadly smoke and was associated with guilt about lust, now it is celebrated for its potential to "astound." This reactivates the earlier symbolism of the candle, in which its light represents knowledge. At this point the speaker has attained a new sense of self-knowledge, overcoming the doubts first expressed in line 1 and achieving the purity she once seemed so far away from. This combination of heat and light may also represent creative inspiration: the speaker depicts herself as a self-created work of art (hence the references to "Japanese paper" and "gold beaten skin" in line 38), beautiful and imposing. She is also a "huge camellia" (a type of flower), suggesting that there's something completely innate about her radiance; though she had to suffer to get there, at this point she simply blooms naturally, "all by [her]self," like a flower would.

Line 42 employs polysyndeton to reconfigure the hot flushes of line 29, which were then described disgustingly in conjunction with "a lecher's kiss," as something that should now be celebrated. The repetition of "and" between "Glowing...coming...going" implies an unlimited reserve of energy: the speaker seems to be able to go on and on forever. Moreover, the assonance of the /o/ and /i/ sounds evokes astonished gasps, as well as gasps of sexual pleasure; it's clear that the speaker finds this new energy to be both surprising and ecstatic. It's possible there is a sexual pun on the words "Coming" and "going": both are slang terms for reaching orgasm (the latter outdated). This pun would stress the journey that the speaker has taken from feeling incredibly guilty about her sexuality, associating it with the sin of lust, to celebrating it in almost divine terms.

Ironically, the speaker begins her ascent out of fever and into a kind of paradise in lines 43-44 ("I think" through "I may rise"), immediately following her newfound confidence in her own sexuality. This connection between sexuality and salvation reverses traditional Christian notions of sin and lust, with which she struggled earlier in the poem. These lines use anaphora to emphasize the speaker's astonishment at her own transformation; they forcefully repeat her statement to herself that she thinks she is "going up," a counterpoint to line 1's self-doubt. Now she is not questioning her ascent but rather asserting it. To highlight this idea even further, line 45 again introduces a metaphor based on heat/fire: "beads of hot metal fly" from the speaker as she ascends, as if she has become so powerful that she is able to melt even solid metal.

LINES 46-50

Am a pure ...
... pink things mean!

Line 46 introduces the poem's most potent metaphor around heat and fire: the speaker calls herself "a pure acetylene / Virgin"; acetylene is an inflammable gas, which can explode if brought into contact with fire. Her confidence and purity are now such that she is no longer a lantern or candle, able to light only small spaces, but is instead liable to explode, setting large areas alight. "Acetylene / Virgin" is almost an oxymoron: the Virgin (likely referring to the Christian Virgin Mary) is a symbol of purity and chastity (meaning abstaining from sex), whereas heat represents lust. By pairing the two concepts, the poem seeks to radically redefine purity. The image of the "acetylene / Virgin" indicates that purity isn't the result of chastity; instead, purity is the *opposite* of chastity. That is, a truly pure woman is one who embraces the heat of her sexuality and lets it shine as an example of self-actualization and even the divine.

Lines 48-50 list items that accompany the speaker on her ascent: "roses," "kisses," "cherubim," and unidentified "pink things." The first and second of these are typical romantic symbols, emphasizing the speaker's new sexual confidence, whereas cherubim are angelic attendants to God, linking her once more with God himself, as in line 36 ("Hurts me as the world hurts God"). "Pink things" may simply refer to additional romantic items like roses and kisses, but given that pink is a stereotypically feminine color, this phrase may also be the speaker's way of reclaiming her own femininity for herself: these "things," whatever they are, attend on *her*; she does not serve them. The fact that she doesn't know what they "mean" also shows her new sense of freedom: she no longer feels the need to question herself relentlessly as she did earlier, and instead accepts (or even celebrates) her own lack of certainty.

LINES 51-54

Not you, nor ...

... To Paradise.

The final lines of the poem affirm the speaker's absolute independence. Notice how, in the previous list of things that accompany her on her ascent, she is not "attended" by her "Darling," whom she has been addressing the poem up to this point. And in lines 51 and 52, she rejects him even more explicitly: "Not you, nor him / "Nor him, nor him." The epizeuxis here emphasizes that no other man may join her either; now that she is pure, the speaker confidently claims "Paradise" for herself alone.

Lines 51-53 (From "Not you" to "whore petticoats") are broken up by caesuras, mimicking the "dissolving" of the speaker's old self; the lines are now broken apart, just like her old identity is. This dissolution is further symbolized by the phrase "old whore petticoats." Petticoats are an undergarment worn beneath dresses, and as the poem makes clear when it calls them "old," they were already starting to be considered old-fashioned by 1962, when "Fever 103°" was written. This old-fashioned garment brings to mind old-fashioned morals, such as chastity and guilt, which the speaker suffered under in the first half of the poem but has now rejected. Likewise, the word "whore," which means prostitute but is also an offensive slur for a promiscuous woman, becomes a way for the speaker to define her new identity on her own terms. Since she no longer feels guilt over her lust and instead revels in her newfound sexual confidence, the speaker rejects the word "whore" as if it were itself a petticoat, something old-fashioned and unnecessary. It is with this confidence that she makes her final bold reversal of traditional morals, claiming definitively in the final line that now, after all her suffering, she is on the way "To Paradise."

SYMBOLS

FIRE

The symbol of fire recurs in different forms throughout the poem. Fire's two main qualities are heat and light. Light traditionally represents knowledge, since it dispels darkness in the same way as knowledge dispels ignorance. Heat can represent anger and destruction (as in the torturous "tongues of hell" and the painful cry of the "tinder"), but here it mainly represents lust and sexual desire.

This symbol becomes particularly prominent in lines 9-10, with the image of a "snuffed candle." Since candles are used to give off light and light represents knowledge, this image represents the extinguishing of knowledge. The resulting ignorance, represented by the "low smokes" that "roll" from the extinguished candle, is shown to lead to a variety of violent and cruel actions, including the "choking" of the "aged and the meek."

The later instances of fire as a symbol refer to the speaker herself. In line 36, she says "I am a lantern"; lanterns perform a similar function to candles, but this one is not extinguished, since by this point in the poem the speaker has ascended out of her feverish delirium and shed her feelings of guilt, becoming pure. Therefore she is able to serve as an example of self-knowledge, lighting the way for those around her, much as a lantern or "moon" would.

Lines 40 (starting "Does not my heat"), 42 (starting "Glowing and coming"), and 45-47 ("The beads" through "Virgin") focus on the speaker's heat, specifically how it has transformed from something hellish into something divine. "Beads of hot metal fly" from her, as if she is able to melt even solid metal. Then, in perhaps the most striking instance of the symbol of fire, she calls herself a "pure acetylene / Virgin"; acetylene is an inflammable gas, which can explode if brought into contact with fire. This moment is a symbolic indication that she has thrown off her guilt at lust and embraced her own sexual heat, proclaiming that it makes her as pure as the Virgin Mary.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "The tongues of hell"
- **Line 8:** "The tinder cries."
- **Lines 9-10:** "The indelible smell / Of a snuffed candle!"
- **Line 29:** "I have been flickering, off, on, off, on."
- **Lines 36-38:** " I am a lantern—— / My head a moon / Of Japanese paper,"
- **Line 40:** "Does not my heat astound you! And my light!"
- **Line 42:** "Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush."
- **Lines 45-47:** "The beads of hot metal fly, and I love, I / Am a pure acetylene / Virgin"

VIRGIN

A virgin literally means someone who has not had sex. However, given the religious imagery throughout the poem, the appearance of the word here almost certainly also refers to *the* Virgin, that is, to Mary, Jesus Christ's mother. In Catholicism, the veneration of Mary is second in importance only to the veneration due to God. She symbolizes the perfect woman, embodying all the traditional feminine virtues to the highest degree: these include motherhood, charity, obedience, patience, purity, and chastity.

The last of these is the most relevant for this poem: it refers to those who choose to abstain from sex. Traditionally chastity has been seen as inseparable from purity. It is therefore something of an oxymoron for the speaker to call herself a "pure acetylene / Virgin," given that acetylene, an inflammable gas, is part of the "heat" symbolism (see previous entry), and represents her embrace of her own sexual appetites. By combining the ideas of sexual heat and Marian purity in one phrase, the speaker seeks to redefine notions of purity: no longer does it require chastity, but instead a self-sufficient embrace of one's own sexuality.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 46-47:** "a pure acetylene / Virgin"

LEOPARD

The syntax of lines 20-22 ("The ghastly orchid ...") means that the "Devilish leopard" could refer to the orchid, as well as be an independent image. Both the flower and animal are colorful, and the description of the former "hanging its hanging garden" evokes execution by hanging, which chimes with the leopard's violent nature. In addition to these basic associations, traditionally the leopard has also represented lust, one of the speaker's main "sins." For instance in lines 31-36 of canto 1 of Dante's *Inferno*, the speaker comes across the animal while lost in a dark forest:

> Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
> una lonza leggera e presta molto,
> che di pel macolato era coverta;
> e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
> anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
> ch'i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.

(English: And here, almost at the start of the slope, was a leopard, agile and quick, covered with a spotted coat; he would not retreat before my face, instead he so impeded my path that I often turned round to return.) By placing this symbol among so much violent imagery, the speaker seems to be blaming her own lust, and even lust more generally, for the most murderous crimes.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 22:** "Devilish leopard!"

POETIC DEVICES

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The poem begins with two rhetorical questions: "Pure? What does it mean?" The first question is a condensed form of the implied question that the speaker asks throughout the first half of the poem—essentially, "Am I pure or not?" As the vivid descriptions of her hellish state make clear, the answer to this first question is very much no; she's tortured by the "tongues of hell" and obsessed with thoughts of "sin," both her own personal sin and the broader sins of a world full of war and cruelty.

The second question rhetorical question—"What does it mean?"—destabilizes the reader's image of the speaker even further; not only is she not pure, she does not even know what the word "pure" means. This initial confusion emphasizes just how far the speaker has to travel in her journey from guilt and "sin" to "Paradise." The poem as a whole traces her journey towards answering these two questions, so that by the end she is not only pure; she is "too pure for [...] anyone." Additionally, the use of rhetorical questions at the poem's start draws the reader into the speaker's confusion and anguish; by presenting questions that feel impossible to answer, the speaker subtly suggests that whether we like it or not, everyone in the world has to struggle with challenging questions of purity and sin, just as the speaker does here.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Pure? What does it mean?"

ALLUSION

There are several allusions in "Fever 103°." The first is to the mythical three-headed dog Cerberus, who guards the gates to hell in Greek mythology. But rather than describing Cerberus as the terrifying beast of legend, the speaker says he is "dull" and "fat," and that he "wheezes" as if unfit. This image of an unthreatening guard dog is appropriate because at this stage, the punishments of fever remain "Incapable" of purifying the speaker. She has a lot further to go, which means she must experience sharper pains, not just these "dull" ones.

The second and third instances of allusion are both to historical events: lines 11-13 reference Isadora Duncan, a dancer who was killed when her scarf got caught in the wheels of a car, breaking her neck. She was riding with a mechanic, Benoît Falchetto, and according to Mary Desti, a friend who saw her off, her last words were "Je vais à l'amour" ("I am off to love"), implying she was having an affair with Falchetto. If this is true, it would only have added to an already scandalous life: Duncan was an atheist, bisexual, and a communist, and she was sometimes criticized for not living a more conventional life. By comparing her present state to Duncan's death, the speaker demonstrates her fear that her own sins, especially the mortal sin of lust, might lead to her death as well.

"Hiroshima ash" is a reference to the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan in 1945, the last year of World War II. Well over 100,000 people died in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (another Japanese city), mostly civilians, and many of those who survived suffered ongoing physical trauma due to the radiation from the bombs (hence the description of the ash "eating in[to]" their skin. Because the people killed or wounded in these attacks were innocent, the allusion to their agony is a striking contrast to the sinful "adulterers." While the adulterers are an example of personal, individual sin, the Hiroshima survivors point to sin on the broad, global scale of war crimes. This allusion makes it clear that the speaker isn't just concerned with her own sin; the world's sin also preoccupies her.

The final three allusions are all religious. The speaker suffers for "Three days. Three nights[,]" like Jesus in the desert, who fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Christians still celebrate this period as Lent, doing penance and mortification (experiencing physical suffering by abstaining from food and drink) in order to atone for their sins. Likewise, the speaker undergoes purification by rejecting food and drink, "retch[ing]" from the "Lemon water, chicken / Water" she is given. In lines 46 and 47 she calls herself a "pure acetylene / Virgin," placing herself alongside Catholicism's highest example of virtuous womanhood, the Virgin Mary, as she ascends to heaven having become pure. Finally, she is attended "by cherubim," which are a kind of angel who serve God, demonstrating just how far she has come since the hellish opening of the poem.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-5:** "dull as the triple / Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus / Who wheezes at the gate."
- **Lines 11-13:** "the low smokes roll / From me like Isadora's scarves, I'm in a fright / One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel,"
- **Line 26:** "Like Hiroshima ash and eating in."
- **Line 31:** "Three days. Three nights."
- **Line 47:** "Virgin"
- **Line 49:** "by cherubim,"

METAPHOR

Metaphor is so abundant in "Fever 103°" that it's often difficult to say what's *literally* happening, since the figurative language obscures it. For this reason only the main instances of it are discussed in this entry; for further details, look at the relevant Line-by-Line entries.

The first major instance of metaphor is the image of the "tongues of hell" which are "Incapable / Of licking clean / The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin." "Tongues" means both flames and whips as well as the bodily organ, signifying that the speaker's self-inflicted punishments are, at this stage, ineffective at cleansing her of sin. "Tongue" could also refer to the speaker's own voice—or more specifically, to the poem itself. Given that meaning, it seems that the speaker is using metaphor to convey her worry that even writing this poem might not purify her.

The second metaphor is the implicit comparison between the speaker and the "snuffed candle," since she says that "low smokes roll" from her, as they would from a recently extinguished candle. This image emphasizes the speaker's lack of self-knowledge, since candles symbolize knowledge and this one has been blown out. The resulting ignorance is shown to be dangerous and a primary cause of violence in the "globe" as a whole, bringing suffering especially to "the aged and the meek." This image is discussed in further detail in the Symbol entry on Fire.

Two metaphorical flowers appear in the poem: the first is the "ghastly orchid" in line 20, the second the "huge camelia" to which the speaker compares herself. The orchid is a violent image: it's "Hanging its hanging garden in the air," an obscure phrase, but since it is near the allusion to Hiroshima, it might refer to another violent form of death—hanging. Perhaps it is of a piece with the "leopard," since both are exotic and colorful: the verb "killed" in line 24 is ambiguous and could apply to either, perhaps suggesting that both the flower and the animal are metaphors for beauty, which is destroyed by the violence of war. The camellia is a far more positive metaphor: it is "huge" and "glowing," which emphasizes the speaker's newfound confidence.

The speaker's next run of metaphors reinforces that same idea: she is "a lantern," her head "a moon," and her skin "gold beaten." In contrast to the extinguished candle, she now has enough self-knowledge in her purity that she can act as an inspiration to others, in the same way that lanterns and the moon give out light. She remains separate from ordinary impure people, however, just as "gold," which is "infinitely expensive," is distinct from ordinary metals.

At the end of the poem the speaker attains her final metaphorical form, that of an "acetylene / Virgin." This is an almost oxymoronic phrase, since acetylene, an inflammable gas, is explosive, associating it with heat, a symbol of sexual desire; a Virgin on the other hand is someone who has yet to have sex, and in this capitalized form, refers to the Virgin Mary. This metaphor thus shows the speaker's new stance towards purity: she implies that it's not based on the repression of sexual desire, but rather on the self-confident control of it by an individual woman herself.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "The tongues of hell"
- **Lines 5-7:** "Incapable / Of licking clean / The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin."
- **Lines 8-12:** "The tinder cries. / The indelible smell / Of a snuffed candle! / Love, love, the low smokes roll / From me"
- **Lines 12-13:** "I'm in a fright / One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel,"
- **Lines 15-25:** "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"
- **Line 29:** "I have been flickering, off, on, off, on."
- **Lines 36-39:** " I am a lantern—— / My head a moon / Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin / Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive."
- **Line 41:** "All by myself I am a huge camellia"

- **Line 45:** "The beads of hot metal fly,"
- **Lines 45-50:** "I / Am a pure acetylene / Virgin / Attended by roses, / By kisses, by cherubim, / By whatever these pink things mean!"
- **Lines 53-54:** "(My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats)—— / To Paradise."

EPIZEUXIS

Epizeuxis occurs at several points in the poem in order to emphasize particular sensations, actions, people, and ideas. The first sensation it emphasizes is the dullness, or bluntness, of the "tongues of hell." At this stage in the poem the speaker has yet to go through the sharper, more painful forms of suffering she needs to in order to purify herself. Closely following this first instance is the second: "The sin, the sin." These first two uses of epizeuxis lay out the two defining features of the poem's first half: the relationship between the speaker's "sin," which is primarily her lust, and her resulting punishment. In physical terms, this punishment is the suffering experienced during fever, and in psychological terms it is the speaker's brutal self-criticism and guilt.

The third example of epizeuxis, "Love, love," is the first time the speaker uses apostrophe to address her lover. In the fearful context of line 11 it has a desperate, pleading quality, as if she is calling out for help to someone who cannot hear her.

Line 27 repeats the same words as line 7 did, this time with periods separating them instead of commas: "The sin. The sin." This time, the immediate repetition signals that "the sin" with which the speaker has been obsessed up to this point is about to be redefined—and the full stops of the periods mark this sense of a limit being reached. This is the halfway point of the poem, and the following stanza is the start of the transition from hellish punishment, to purification, and finally ascension to "Paradise."

The next instance of epizeuxis, "Water, water," which makes her "retch," mimics this retching; the line almost sounds like coughing. This water helps the speaker recover from her fever and start to purify herself, and once she is "pure" in line 34, she only rarely uses epizeuxis, perhaps because she no longer feels bound by a few things that she constantly repeats, and instead is free. Indeed, the final instance of epizeuxis, in lines 51-52, serves to highlight her complete independence:

> Not you, nor him
> Nor him, nor him

This tripled phrase makes it very clear that she is not only rejecting her lover ("you"), but also every other man who might try to accompany her as she ascends to paradise. By saying "nor him" three times, the speaker gives the impression that she could go on pointing people out forever—that she intends to reject everyone else in the world and focus instead on her own newfound confidence and liberty.

Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "dull, dull"
- **Line 7:** "the sin, the sin."
- **Line 11:** "Love, love,"
- **Line 27:** "The sin. The sin."
- **Line 33:** "Water, water "
- **Lines 51-52:** "nor him / Nor him, nor him"

ASSONANCE

Assonance abounds in "Fever 103°," so this entry covers only the most important instances. In most cases, assonances serves to strengthen associations between seemingly different concepts and images and highlight the speaker's central preoccupations.

The first major repeated vowel sound is the short /u/ of "does," "tongues" and "dull"; this one also pops up a few more times in the poem's first five stanzas. Because it's clustered so densely toward the beginning of the poem, this short /u/ is therefore associated with the hellish imagery described in such detail in this part of the poem. Many of these words relate to fire: "tongues" can mean flames, "snuffed" means extinguished, and "sullen" refers to the smoke. By focusing so much on the /u/ sound at this early stage, Plath establishes how hard it is for the speaker to escape the hellish beginnings of her journey.

By far the most frequent use of assonance is the repetition of the short /i/ of "sin," which is present nearly from start to finish: it shows up first in line 1 ("it") and for the last time in line 53 ("dissolving"). The centrality of this sound showcases the importance of "sin" to the poem as a whole. At the beginning the speaker feels guilty over her sins, especially lust, and the words "tinder" and "indelible" relate once more to hell and its punishment of such sins: "tinder" is kindling to start a fire, which abounds in hell, and "indelible" means "unable to be removed," which, at this stage, is what the speaker believes about her sins.

Lines 19-24 (starting with "Hothouse baby" and ending with "in an hour") detail several vivid deaths, including a baby choking "in its crib," an "orchid / Hanging [...] in the air," and something (either the orchid or the leopard—it's not totally clear which) burned "white" by "Radiation" and "killed [...] in an hour." Then, there is an allusion to the bombing of Hiroshima, and the image of "ash [...] eating in[to]" the flesh of its victims. These images expand on the hellish associations of the earlier /i/ assonance, giving gory descriptions that wouldn't be out of place in a horror movie. They also return again and again to the word "in," stressing the importance of internal "sin" in causing such cruelties.

But later, after three stanzas in which it doesn't show up at all,

the final instances of assonance on the short /i/ focus on the speaker's ascent to "Paradise." Her golden "skin" is "Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive," and she is attended by "kisses, by cherubim" and by vague "pink things." By returning to this sound in words that have such a different a focus and tone—celebratory rather than hellish—Plath shows just how far her speaker has come from the sin-obsessed, guilt-ridden person of the poem's start. And now, the word around which she circulates is "I," which is repeated six times in only three lines. Whereas the focus on "sin" was also a focus on herself, her own identity now comes to the foreground through the change in the emphasized vowel, and it shows the speaker's newfound self-confidence, now that she has purified herself and escaped her hellish torment.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "does," "it"
- **Line 2:** "tongues "
- **Line 3:** "dull, dull," "triple"
- **Line 4:** "Tongues ," "dull"
- **Line 5:** "wheezes ," "gate. Incapable"
- **Line 6:** "clean"
- **Line 7:** "sin," "sin"
- **Line 8:** "tinder "
- **Line 9:** "indelible ," "smell"
- **Line 10:** "Of," "snuffed "
- **Line 11:** "Love, love," " low smokes roll"
- **Line 12:** "like," "Isadora's," "in," "fright"
- **Line 13:** "catch ," "anchor "
- **Line 14:** "Such ," "sullen "
- **Lines 16-17:** " globe / Choking"
- **Line 17:** "meek"
- **Line 18:** "weak"
- **Line 19:** " in its ," "crib"
- **Line 20:** "orchid"
- **Line 21:** "Hanging," "its," "hanging ," "in "
- **Line 22:** "Devilish "
- **Line 23:** "Radiation," "it "
- **Line 24:** "killed it in"
- **Line 25:** "Greasing "
- **Line 26:** "Hiroshima ," "ash," "and," "eating ," "in."
- **Line 27:** "sin," "sin"
- **Line 30:** "heavy ," "lecher's "
- **Line 34:** "too," "pure," "you"
- **Lines 38-39:** "skin / Infinitely delicate"
- **Line 39:** "infinitely expensive."
- **Line 41:** "by," " myself I"
- **Line 42:** "Glowing ," "going"
- **Line 43:** "I ," "think I ," "going "
- **Line 44:** "I think I ," "rise"
- **Line 45:** "fly," " I ," " I"
- **Line 49:** "kisses," "cherubim"
- **Line 50:** "these," "pink ," "things ," "mean"
- **Line 51:** "him"
- **Line 52:** "him," "him"
- **Line 53:** "dissolving"

ANAPHORA

Anaphora in "Fever 103°" comes only towards the very end of the poem. At this stage, the speaker has escaped her own personal hell; she has achieved purity and is starting her ascent to heaven. "I think I" is the first of these repeated phrases, and combined with the assonance on both short and long /i/ sounds, it stresses her joy in her own success. This stanza includes the poem's most forceful use of "I" (it shows up six times in three lines), emphasizing that the speaker is now taking charge of her own identity. At the same time, she seems almost shocked by her new knowledge and the joy that comes with it, as shown in the repeated "I think" rather than "I know."

The next instance of anaphora repeats the word "by," listing the various things that go with the speaker on her ascent. These include "kisses," "cherubim" and "pink things." By using anaphora here, Plath emphasizes the sheer abundance of things attending the speaker, demonstrating that she is at the other end of the spectrum from earlier in the poem, when she couldn't even consume lemon water or chicken broth.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 43:** "I think I"
- **Line 44:** "I think I"
- **Line 49:** "By," " by"
- **Line 50:** "By "

DIACOPE

Diacope occurs throughout the poem, but far more towards the end. The only instances of it in the first half are in lines 3-4 ("dull") and line 21 ("hanging"). The first example adds to the use of epizeuxis in line 3 ("Are dull, dull"), further emphasizing the dullness, or bluntness, of the "tongues" (flames and whips, in addition to the more common meaning) which the speaker pictures as she punishes herself. The diacope further highlights that the pain she must go through to achieve purity is, as of yet, ineffective and needs to be increased.

The next example, "Hanging its hanging garden," is a gruesome pun: it refers literally to a hanging garden, a type of decorative display showcasing the orchid's beauty, but also to the violent practice of "hanging" someone, as in an execution or a lynching. This image draws a comparison between beauty and violence, and the use of diacope shows how these extremes can be two sides of the same coin.

The next three instances of diacope, in lines 29 and 31-33, all recount the speaker's repetitive process of purification. They draw attention to its cyclical nature: her flushes go "off, on, off,

on" over a period of "Three days. Three nights," and all she has to eat or drink is "water." Then, the repetition of "flush" in line 42 ("flush on flush") is a reconfiguration of this, as she is no longer stuck in a cycle but is instead ascending ("I think I am going up"), and the waves of hot flushes are not a circular torment but rather a signal of the start of this ascent.

The diacope of the words "hurts" and "infinitely" both reinforce the connection between the speaker and God (since God is often described as infinite). In particular, the two instances of each word reflect the fact that the speaker has two forms: her body and her purified soul, which ascends to heaven.

Finally, the last use of diacope comes in line 45 with "and **I** love, **I**[.]" This repetition again works in conjunction with epizeuxis, stressing the speaker's newfound self-confidence, which is signaled by the heightened importance of the word "I."

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "dull "
- **Line 4:** "dull"
- **Line 21:** "Hanging ," "hanging "
- **Line 29:** "off, on, off, on."
- **Line 31:** "Three ," "Three "
- **Line 32:** "water"
- **Line 33:** "Water"
- **Line 36:** "Hurts ," "hurts "
- **Line 39:** "Infinitely ," "infinitely "
- **Line 42:** "flush ," "flush"
- **Line 45:** " I," " I"

APOSTROPHE

The poem is addressed to an anonymous lover. The speaker refers to him directly several times, using apostrophe to do so. The first instance of this, "Love, love," also uses epizeuxis to give the phrase a pleading quality: it seems as if the speaker is desperate for her lover's help. The second example, "Darling, all night / I have been flickering," represents a progression towards independence. Instead of pleading for help, she now informs the lover of how her night has been.

By the time the last four instances of apostrophe appear, this progression has reached its climax and the speaker is now fully independent of her lover, claiming: "I am too pure for you or anyone." At this point, the speaker also recognizes the possibility that perhaps he was in some way responsible for her earlier suffering, stating: "Your body / Hurts me[.]" Her desire to "astound" him in line 40 evokes an older sense of the word, when it was frequently used to refer to human encounters with the divine. This is appropriate, given that the speaker has just compared herself to God and is on her way to Paradise. The final use of apostrophe ["Not you"] offers the most definitive rejection of her lover yet, slamming the door on him as she ascends alone, reveling in her newfound independence.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "Love, love, "
- **Line 28:** "Darling"
- **Line 34:** "you "
- **Line 35:** "Your body"
- **Line 40:** "you"
- **Line 51:** "Not you"

ENJAMBMENT

Many of the lines in "Fever 103°" are enjambed. Enjambment generally pulls the reader onto the next line, dragging after the speaker on her train of thought. This is why enjambment is used during the poem's many extended metaphors, such as the hellish opening lines that culminate in the image of "Cerberus / Who wheezes at the gate." In this case, it allows Plath to build and then undermine the reader's image of this fearsome place: one expects hell to be terrifying, and in myth Cerberus is a frightening guard dog, but here he is "dull, fat" and "wheezes" pathetically.

The next extended metaphor is that of the speaker emitting "low smokes," which spans from line 11 (starting "Love, love") to line 22 ("Devilish leopard!"). Half the lines here are enjambed, mimicking the ongoing spread of the smokes around the entire "globe," which, seemingly impossible to stop, choke "the aged and the meek." The speaker stresses their invincible momentum by using enjambment to carry the reader forcefully across stanza breaks, between the words "globe / Choking" and "weak / Hothouse." The next two instances ("white / And" and "adulterers / Like") reinforce this momentum with further images of violence. By using enjambment here, the poem stresses the continued effects of violent actions, even those which happened in the past, such as the bombing of Hiroshima. Radiation continued to affect survivors and the environment for years afterwards.

The enjambment over lines 28-29 ("night / I") and 32-33 ("chicken / Water") stresses the continuous nature of the speaker's hot flushes over the course of her illness, as well as the repetitive action of having to drink "Lemon water, chicken / Water" time after time.

The subsequent few uses of enjambment (up through "Glowing" in line 42) convey the series of metaphors used to describe the speaker's transformation. These include her head becoming a "moon," her skin "gold beaten," and her whole body transformed into "a huge camellia / Glowing[.]" These enjambments highlight the speaker's amazement and curiosity at her transformation, as well as the eagerness with which she seeks to explore her newfound purity.

Such eager enthusiasm continues in the final few enjambed lines, when the speaker takes her final form, as a "pure acetylene / Virgin / Attended" by "roses," "cherubim," and "pink

things." The last use of enjambment is her rejection of men—and perhaps of all other people— with "nor him / Nor him," the lack of an end-stop reflecting her new freedom.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "hell / Are "
- **Lines 3-4:** "triple / Tongues"
- **Lines 4-5:** "Cerberus / Who"
- **Lines 5-6:** "Incapable / Of "
- **Lines 9-10:** "smell / Of "
- **Lines 11-12:** " roll / From"
- **Lines 12-13:** " fright / One "
- **Lines 14-15:** "smokes / Make"
- **Lines 16-17:** "globe / Choking"
- **Lines 18-19:** "weak / Hothouse "
- **Lines 20-21:** "orchid / Hanging "
- **Lines 23-24:** "white / And "
- **Lines 25-26:** "adulterers / Like "
- **Lines 28-29:** "night / I"
- **Lines 32-33:** "chicken / Water"
- **Lines 35-36:** "body / Hurts "
- **Lines 37-38:** "moon / Of "
- **Lines 38-39:** " skin / Infinitely"
- **Lines 41-42:** "camellia / Glowing"
- **Lines 45-46:** "I / Am "
- **Line 46:** "acetylene"
- **Lines 47-48:** "Virgin / Attended"
- **Lines 51-52:** " him / Nor"

CAESURA

In contrast to the poem's use of enjambment, which allows one line to flow easily into the next, caesura breaks up and slows down the rhythm of the poem. This is immediately evident in the first three stanzas, which have six examples of caesura. Combined with enjambment, the caesuras create an irregular rhythm, mimicking the "tongues of hell" which are persistent, but ultimately "dull" and "Incapable / Of licking clean [...] the sin."

The next concentrated use of caesura comes from lines 27 ("The sin. The sin.") through line 33 ("Water, water make me retch.) These lines represent a kind of transition process, where the speaker finally purifies herself before ultimately ascending to heaven. This final stage in the purification process involves repeated hot flushes, which go "on, off, on, off" over the course of an unsteady night. The caesuras here make the lines mimic the speaker's interrupted sleep. The next group of caesuras appear in three consecutive lines, which detail the routine of having to wake up and drink "Lemon water, chicken / Water." The water causes the speaker to "retch"— she can't consume even this healing drink. The caesuras here not only mimic the repetitive nature of this cure, but also the fact that, like her sleep in the previous stanza, it is constantly interrupted and therefore cannot proceed smoothly.

The final group of caesuras appears in the section describing the speaker's ascent from the hell of her purification. Unlike the relatively concentrated caesuras discussed above, they're more spread out in these lines. They mainly convey the speaker's excitement, which rapidly moves from focusing on one thing to another as she celebrates her triumph. Moments like "Does not my heat astound you! And my light," "Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush," and "The beads of hot metal fly, and I love, I / Am a pure acetylene / Virgin" are all images of tremendous energy. By breaking them up with caesuras, the poem makes it sound as if the speaker is so overwhelmed with beautiful realizations that she doesn't know where to look.

In lines 49 ("By kisses, by cherubim") and 51-53 (from "Not you" through "whore petticoats"), the speaker uses several more caesuras as she embraces aspects of her new identity and casts off aspects of her past. The list of things that will go with her as she ascends continues her excitement at acquiring a new status, while the last three caesuras show equal excitement at being able to shed her old status. She gets rid of her associations with other people by listing all the men who can't come with her—"Nor him, nor him"—and, finally, lets go of her guilt over sin and lust by "dissolving, old whore petticoats."

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Pure? What "
- **Line 3:** "dull, dull "
- **Line 4:** "dull, fat "
- **Line 5:** "gate. Incapable"
- **Line 7:** "tendon, the sin, the"
- **Line 11:** "Love, love, the "
- **Line 12:** "scarves, I'm"
- **Line 15:** "element. They"
- **Line 27:** " sin. The"
- **Line 28:** "Darling, all"
- **Line 29:** " flickering, off, on, off, on"
- **Line 31:** " days. Three"
- **Lines 32-33:** "water, chicken / Water, water "
- **Line 36:** "God. I "
- **Line 38:** "paper, my "
- **Line 40:** "you! And "
- **Line 42:** "going, flush"
- **Line 45:** "fly, and," "love, I"
- **Line 49:** "kisses, by"
- **Line 51:** "you, nor"
- **Line 52:** "him, nor"
- **Line 53:** "dissolving, old "

CONSONANCE

Consonance occurs throughout the poem, sometimes in the form of alliteration, creating a network of associations based around repeated sounds.

The first of these is the repetition of the /t/ sound ("tongues," "triple," "tinder," etc.) that's concentrated at the beginning of the poem. This harsh noise is used to evoke hellish imagery, such as the triple-headed dog Cerberus, the flames/whips of punishment (both of which are meanings of the word "tongue"), and bodily wounds (the speaker's hurt "tendon"). At the same time, there's also a soft /l/ sound repeating in these same lines ("hell," "triple," "licking," etc.) that indicates that while this punishment is harsh, it's still too "dull"; it will need to get even more painful before the speaker is truly purified.

Another sound repeated throughout is the sibilant /s/ and /sh/ ("Isadora's scarves," "sullen smokes," "sheets," etc.). Since it's much softer than the hard /t/, one might expect the poem to use the sibilant sounds to describe the speaker's romantic feelings for her "Darling." However, the only such words which could reasonably be called romantic are "sheets" and "kiss," and both have their expected meanings undermined by being part of a grotesque image of a sweaty bed, which is compared to a "lecher's kiss." The other /s/ and /sh/ sounds go even further in making this expected softness feel ironic: all of them refer to death, violence, or sin. "Hiroshima ash," in particular, is striking for the contrast between the beauty of the phrase and the horror of the event it describes.

The next example of consonance that laces the entire poem is the hard /k/ sound: "Incapable," "Choking, "camellia," etc. This sound catches in the throat like a cough, as if one cannot get out the words to express oneself. It is most frequently used in moments when the speaker expresses such moments of difficulty, when things don't go as she hopes—hence its first use in the word "Incapable." The "meek" and "weak" are the first victims of tragedy, unable to escape harm even though they're innocent, and the word "Choking" mimics such inability: someone choking is unable to speak. Only in the last two instances of consonance on the /k/ sound ("camellia" and "coming") does this change. The speaker becomes a colorful, assertive flower, going where she pleases; she is no longer weak or inhibited, and the changed use of consonance reflects this shift.

A final important recurring sound is the hard /d/, which is most concentrated in lines 22 through 25:

> Devilish leopard!
> Radiation turned it white
> And killed it in an hour.
> Greasing the bodies of adulterers

This is the darkest section of the poem, describing the appalling tragedy of Hiroshima with almost hallucinatory imagery. Though the speaker doesn't actually use the word "death," the hard /d/ sound indicates that it lies behind all the words in this section. Nearly all the words featuring the /d/ sound relate to death, even the "bodies of adulterers," since the idea of bodies evokes an image of corpses, and adultery was for hundreds of years (and remains in some parts of the world) a crime punishable by death.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “tongues ,” “hell”
- **Line 3:** “dull,” “dull,” “triple”
- **Line 4:** “Tongues ,” “dull,” “fat ”
- **Line 5:** “at,” “gate,” “Incapable”
- **Line 6:** “licking,” “clean”
- **Line 7:** “tendon”
- **Line 8:** “tinder ”
- **Line 9:** “indelible smell”
- **Line 10:** “candle”
- **Line 11:** “Love, love,,” “low ,” “smokes,” “roll”
- **Line 12:** “like,” “Isadora’s scarves,,” “fright”
- **Line 13:** “scarf ,” “will,” “catch ,” “anchor ,” “wheel”
- **Line 14:** “Such ,” “yellow,” “sullen smokes”
- **Line 15:** “Make ,” “element,” “will”
- **Line 16:** “trundle round,” “globe”
- **Line 17:** “Choking ,” “meek”
- **Line 18:** “weak”
- **Line 19:** “Hothouse,” “crib”
- **Line 20:** “ghastly orchid”
- **Line 21:** “Hanging,” “hanging,” “garden”
- **Line 22:** “Devilish ,” “leopard”
- **Line 23:** “Radiation ,” “turned”
- **Line 24:** “And ,” “killed ”
- **Line 25:** “bodies ,” “adulterers”
- **Line 26:** “Hiroshima ash ,” “in”
- **Line 27:** “sin,” “sin”
- **Line 28:** “night”
- **Line 29:** “been,” “flickering, off,” “on,” “off,” “on”
- **Line 30:** “sheets ,” “lecher’s,” “kiss”
- **Line 33:** “make me”
- **Line 36:** “Hurts ,” “hurts ”
- **Line 37:** “head ”
- **Line 38:** “beaten skin”
- **Line 39:** “Infinitely,” “infinitely”
- **Line 41:** “camellia”
- **Line 42:** “Glowing ,” “coming ,” “going”
- **Line 43:** “am ,” “going ”
- **Line 44:** “may ”
- **Line 45:** “metal ”
- **Line 50:** “these ,” “things ”
- **Line 53:** “selves dissolving,” “petticoats”
- **Line 54:** “Paradise”

VOCABULARY

Pure (Line 1, Line 34, Line 46) - The first word of the poem refers both to the literal fever suffered by the speaker and to

her moral dilemma. The first meaning is "free from any contamination"—in other words, no longer sick. The second meaning is "untainted by immorality, especially that of a sexual nature."

Tongues (Line 2, Line 4) - In addition to the typical meaning, which refers to the organ in the mouth used for speaking, "tongues" can also mean "whips" or "flames."

Cerberus (Line 4) - Cerberus was the three-headed dog who guarded the gates to the underworld in Greek mythology. Traditionally depicted as a fearsome monster, here he is instead "dull, fat" and "wheezes."

Aguey (Line 7) - *Aguey* means "feverish."

Tinder (Line 8) - Tinder is any type of kindling, such as wood or paper, which is used to light a fire.

Indelible (Line 9) - *Indelible* has similar literal and figurative meanings: it refers to any physical mark that cannot be removed, but also to anything, including events or sensations, that cannot be forgotten.

Isadora's Scarves (Line 12) - This is an allusion to Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), a Franco-American dancer who was known for her scandalous life. She was killed when her scarves caught in the axle of a car, possibly when she was on her way to conduct an affair with the car's owner.

Element (Line 15) - *Element* here means "environment." The smokes are so all-consuming that they create a self-contained realm that chokes everyone inside it.

Trundle (Line 16) - *Trundle* is a verb typically used to describe the slow, heavy movements of a vehicle such as a cart.

Meek (Line 17) - *Meek* means quiet, gentle, and submissive. Here, it is also an allusion to the biblical Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said that "the meek shall inherit the earth." This is usually taken to mean that although meek people are dominated by those more powerful than them during their lives, at the Last Judgement, when God descends to earth to decide once and for all who goes to heaven and who goes to hell, they will be rewarded.

Hothouse (Line 19) - A hothouse is a greenhouse, in which plants are grown. Though the term "hothouse" often carries with it the connotation that the plants growing in it are especially delicate.

Ghastly (Line 20) - This can refer to something frightening and horrific, and it can also mean very ill or unwell.

Orchid (Line 20) - Orchids are an exotic family of plants, known for their colorful and attractively shaped flowers. Many varieties are rare and difficult to cultivate, making them prized by botanists.

Hiroshima (Line 26) - This refers to the atomic bombing of the Japanese city of Hiroshima in 1945 by the United States military.

Lecher (Line 30) - A lecher is a pejorative term for a man who shows excessive levels of sexual desire.

Camellia (Line 41) - Camellias are a genus of plants known for their beautiful flowers. Most varieties are pink or purple.

Flush (Line 42) - A flush, like a blush, is the reddening of a person's face, perhaps as a result of illness or a strong emotion such as embarrassment.

Acetylene (Line 46) - Acetylene is a gas that is highly flammable and is mainly used as a fuel or as a chemical building block. It is very unstable in its pure form and can easily catch fire when exposed to heat.

Cherubim (Line 49) - *Cherubim* is the plural of cherub, a type of heavenly being, like an angel, that attends on the Christian God.

Petticoats (Line 53) - A petticoat is a woman's undergarment worn beneath a skirt or dress. By the time the poem was written in 1962, they were already considered old-fashioned.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Fever 103°" does not follow any traditional poetic form. However, it cannot really be called an example of true free verse because it is composed entirely of tercets (three-line stanzas). These may represent the period of three days and nights over which the speaker's purification takes place. This is also a biblical allusion to the period of Lent, which lasts 40 days and 40 nights, a time during which Christians purify themselves of their sins by fasting. Such rituals, which are reenacted every year, mimic the speaker's repeated "flickering, off, on, off, on" and her trying to drink "Lemon water, chicken / Water" again and again. By constructing the poem out of tercets, Plath gives it a ritualistic, cyclical structure, making the reader mimic the speaker's experience through the act of reading.

METER

Despite its very regular form (it's written entirely in tercets), the poem lacks a consistent meter. Most of the feet are iambs (da-dum), but each line has a variable number of poetic feet. Most of the lines are rather short, but Plath often interrupts a series of short lines with a line containing a higher number of stressed syllables.

For instance, take lines 10-12:

> Of a snuffed | candle!
> Love, love, the low smokes roll
> From me | like Is- | ador- | a's scarves, | I'm in | a fright

There is no pattern here; line 10 consists of an anapest (da-da-dum) followed by a trochee (dum-da), for a total of two stressed syllables. Line 11 has *five* stresses and only one

unstressed syllable. Line 12 is the only clearly ordered one here, an example of iambic hexameter (six feet in a line). This chaotic meter mimics the speaker's unbalanced state: she is sick with fever and is beset by hallucinogenic images, many of which are gruesome and disturbing.

Even when the speaker reaches a state of purity at the end of the poem, the meter remains inconsistent. Take lines 43-45:

> I think | I am go- | ing up,
> I think | I may rise——
> The beads | of hot | metal | fly, and I | love, I

The number of stresses varies (three, then two, then five), and so does the type of feet, even within each line. Take the last one, which is somewhat awkward to scan at all: it begins with two iambs, then has a trochee, then a dactyl (dum-da-da), and finally another trochee. The reason for this continued lack of order may be that the speaker's purified state is the opposite of what one expects of people traditionally deemed "pure," such as nuns and monks. These people are expected to be sober, organized, and rigid—but the speaker is enthusiastically embracing exactly the opposite way of living. Her redefinition of purity is wild: she compares herself to "acetylene," an explosive gas, and aims to "astound," and the poem's chaotic meter reflects this radical new perspective.

RHYME SCHEME

"Fever 103°" follows no regular rhyme scheme. There are only two end-rhymes in the whole poem: "meek / weak" and "in / sin." In the first case this makes sense, as both the "meek" and the "weak" are grouped together as victims of the choking "smokes." In the second instance the rhyme serves to end the sub-section of the poem that focuses on images relating to violence and death, summing them up all together as "sin." There are also some instances of internal rhyme here and there (such as "too pure for you" and a slant rhyme in "All by myself"), which subtly highlight some of the key turns in the speaker's racing thoughts.

Overall, the lack of much rhyme (like the lack of regular meter) reinforces the poem's sense of chaos and disorder. At first, this chaos seems violent and hellish, but as the poem progresses, the speaker slowly concludes that purity can be chaotic, too—indeed, her most striking image of herself is of a radiant, unstable "acetylene / Virgin" who might explode at any moment.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Fever 103°" is likely a woman, which is indicated in the poem by her discussion of her male lovers and her petticoats, which are traditionally a feminine item of clothing. Her comparison of herself to Isadora Duncan and her description of herself as a camellia also support this interpretation, since Duncan was a famously independent woman and flowers (like camellias) are often used as symbols of female sexuality. However, while this guide uses female pronouns for the speaker, it's important to note that the poem doesn't explicitly state that the speaker is a woman, and while the speaker's experience may mirror some aspects of Plath's own life, the poem isn't necessarily autobiographical.

Likewise, the poem doesn't reveal many details about the speaker herself or what her life is like. The main thing that's clear is that she suffers from a high fever, which causes hallucinations—in medical terms, 103° is generally considered the temperature at which this starts to occur. She has a lover, whom she refers to as "Love," "Darling" and "you" at different points, and it is implied in lines 51-52 ("Nor him / Nor him, nor him") that she has or had relationships with other men.

The only other thing about the speaker that's clear from the poem itself is that she is obsessed with ideas around her "sins," especially lust, and that this causes her immensely painful guilt. Going through this pain is not, however, something to be avoided, but rather a necessary process that she undergoes in order to purify herself. The fever of the title is in this sense a metaphor: just as physically recovering from a high fever often involves throwing up, sweating, and digesting lots of fluids, all of which are processes that *get rid* of things from inside the body, so the speaker's *moral* purification depends on acknowledging and getting rid of her guilt. By the end of the poem she has succeeded, having shed her old self and become someone new. She is in a state of bliss, described as ascending "To Paradise."

SETTING

There are very few clues as to the poem's setting. Most words relating to setting are part of elaborate metaphors, such as the "gate" to hell, the "Hothouse," and the "hanging garden." The only phrase that can definitively be said to locate the poem in a literal sense comes in line 30: "The sheets grow heavy as a lecher's kiss." This confirms that the speaker is in bed, sweating as she recovers from her fever.

In a broader sense, the setting could be said to be largely within the speaker's own mind, as her thoughts race first through hellish imagery of sin and punishment and then, later, to joyful and celebratory visions of her own radical salvation. This journey, though imaginary, takes both speaker and reader around the world and back in time, visiting such varied locations as Hiroshima after the atomic bombing and even "Paradise" itself.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Fever 103°" was written in 1962 but published posthumously in the collection *Ariel* (1965), after Plath died by suicide in 1963. At this point in her career, she was relatively well-known, in part because she was the wife of poet Ted Hughes, whom she had met at Cambridge and who at this point was widely celebrated. She had herself only published one previous book of poetry, *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960). Plath would only achieve her worldwide renown many years after her death.

"Fever 103°" is an example of confessional poetry, a style that emerged in the U.S. during the 1950s. Confessional poetry focuses on deeply personal phenomena, including private or even taboo subjects such as mental illness, self-harm, sexuality, and suicide. Other practitioners of confessional poetry include Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and Anne Sexton. In this sense, this poem is typical of Plath's work; poems such as "Daddy," "I Want, I Want," and "Medusa" touch on similarly personal subjects.

However, the distinctive hallucinogenic imagery of this poem is not as present in *The Colossus*. The almost abstract quality of this and many other poems in *Ariel* was a development that may have been a result of Plath's writing habits; in the last months of 1962 she wrote in frantic bursts, completing at least 26 of the poems that later made up the collection, including "Fever 103°." It was a period of isolation for Plath, as she was left at home to look after her two children (who were often sick) in a house without a telephone, whose pipes had frozen during one of the coldest winters in 100 years. She suffered from a final deep depression (a condition that had afflicted her all her life) before dying by suicide in February 1963. The disturbing imagery and sense of domestic entrapment in "Fever 103°" may relate to Plath's life and feelings at the time, but the poem itself doesn't identify Plath as the speaker or indicate that it's intended to be autobiographical.

After Plath's death, there was a controversy surrounding the publication of *Ariel*. Ted Hughes published the collection but disregarded his wife's original plan, deleting 12 poems, adding others not intended for the book, and re-ordering them. In 2004 an edition was published that follows Plath's original plan.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a typical example of confessional poetry, "Fever 103°" focuses on the personal over the historical. There is only one reference in the poem with which to date it, to the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, and reading it for the first time without any context, one could reasonably assume that it could have been written at any point since then. The speaker's journey, from guilt at her own sexual desires to a celebration of them, could be seen as a result of the advances of feminism during the first half of the 20th century. However, the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s had yet to get into full swing, and the poem's openness on this subject is more a result of confessional poets being ahead of the curve, rather than a reflection of the spirit of the times.

The poem's frequent references to acts of extreme violence (such as Hiroshima and the possible allusion to the Holocaust in the image of the "aged and the meek" "Choking") place it within the broad range of artistic responses to the horrors of World War Two. The war ended only 17 years before the poem was written, and its effects were still being felt throughout Britain, where Plath composed it. The country was in an economic slump from debts accrued fighting the war, much of its infrastructure was still devastated, and rationing had only ended in 1954. Although this poem is a highly personal work, through it Plath nevertheless shows herself to be concerned with and affected by the worst aspects of recent history.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Sylvia Plath's Life and Work — A detailed yet accessible introduction to Plath's life and career. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath)
- Reconstructing Plath's Original Vision for Ariel — Plath's own daughter discusses the controversy over Ted Hughes's version of Ariel, and how Plath's own version was reconstructed. (https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/foreword-to-ariel-the-restored-edition)
- Sylvia Plath reading "Fever 103°" — Listen to the author read the poem for the BBC. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO0SREXcSUs)
- Interview with Plath and Hughes — A rare recorded interview with the two poets. (https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/07/16/sylvia-plath-ted-hughes-bbc-interview-1961/)
- Carol Ann Duffy on Sylvia Plath — The UK's former poet laureate describes her relationship with Plath's work. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/nov/02/sylvia-plath-poems-chosen-carol-ann-duffy)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SYLVIA PLATH POEMS

- Daddy
- Lady Lazarus
- Mad Girl's Love Song
- The Applicant
- The Arrival of the Bee Box

HOW TO CITE

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