The Theme Of Death In The Works Of Christina Rossetti And Sylvia Plath

The Theme Of Death

The theme of death is a recurrent theme among poetry, capable to provide a wide spectrum of ideas used to present a message to the reader without facing fear. Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath are among the many poets who regularly feature the theme of death in their works.

Rossetti was a nineteenth-century poet. Sylvia Plath was a twentieth-century poet who was academically adept but struggled emotionally to keep herself alive. She tried to kill herself numerous times, but none was successful until she put her head in the oven and turned on the gas. After seven years of marriage Plath's partner had cheated on her, ultimately leading her to commit suicide. The unfortunate events in these poets' lives led them to write about the theme of death. Both poets use a variety of form, structural devices, figurative language and sound devices to compose their writing. In the poem Lady Lazarus by Plath, the speaker was longing for death and death was perceived as a way to solve all problems, while in Remember, Rossetti explores life and death and how death must come in either one way or another, and the way to remember those who passed away is to remember them.

Figurative Language

Rossetti and Plath both utilize the imageries of death to communicate their respective thoughts on death. The imagery of death and decomposition was featured throughout Lady Lazarus to describe the speaker. Plath compares herself to a "Nazi lampshade" which is made from the skins of dead Jews, to suggest that she is suffering as intensely as a victim of the Nazis. The gruesome comparison proposes that although Plath is physically still alive, she has been killed and torn apart by someone else. This is further justified when Plath equates her "right foot" to "a paperweight". The heaviness of her pain is like a physical paperweight, yet it also gives the idea that her right foot is as insignificant as a paperweight because Plath already died internally. A paperweight is not unique nor very meaningful, suggesting that Plath believes she has lost her significance in the crowd and is not loved or remembered by many people. Plath views herself as an unimportant person in the world, and her presence is expendable. In Remember, Rossetti uses visual imagery to illustrate the speaker has "gone far away" to the "silent land". The imagery helps to insinuate the irreparable distance between life and death. The "silent land" is where the dead live, yet it is "silent" because death is lonely and remote, and where nobody can ever meet again, also where the dead are separated from the world. Moreover, nobody has managed to come back from the "silent land" to tell the world about it, depicting that there is no return from death.

Both poems also use different devices to emphasize the traits of death. Remember, Rossetti continuously repeats the word "remember" and it is also featured as the title. The repetition acts as a refrain, emphasizing that the speaker wants the reader to remember her after death. However, it does not act as a call for people to stay away from death, instead has accepted the inevitable nature of death. As one "remember" leaves, another comes in emphasizing ho the

speaker wants the beloved to never forget about her. However the repetitiveness of “remembers” lose strength throughout the poem, as the speaker is losing her will to force her lover to remember her. The speaker is realizing that she can not force her lover to remember her after death and slowly gives up. In a similar way, the use of anaphoras are in Lady Lazarus to emphasize Plath’s wishes to die. Plath describes dying as an art and mentions that she “does it so it feels like hell” and she “does it so it feels real”. This is a way for Plath to prove that she has tried to commit suicide because she feels as though she is irrelevant in the world and should not still be living.

Structural Devices

Both poets utilise the form and structure of poem to exemplify the overall theme of the poem. Rossetti ironically used a Petrarchan sonnet to write Remember. Petrarchan sonnets are typically associated with poetry for love and praise, yet the poem is about remembrance and death. From line 1 to 8, the ABBA rhyme scheme reflects the retention of the speaker’s thoughts, the speaker strongly orders her loved one to remember her no matter how far death separates them. The speaker uses a controlled tone to attempt to gain control over the matter of losing her beloved. From line 9 to 14, it starts off with a patterned rhyme, CDD yet it is broken into a different pattern ECE. This emphasizes the shift in thoughts of the speaker. The volta helps to clarify the change in line of thoughts for the speaker. The speaker realizes that she will be forgotten by her lover either one way or another, so she allows him to “forget and smile” instead of “remembering and be sad”, conveying the selflessness of the speaker, sacrificing her own happiness after death for her beloved. It emphasizes the certainty of death, and that death is ultimately, inevitable. Plath makes use of enjambments to signify the nature of death. Plath correlates her own skin to “fine / Jew linen.” The lack of punctuation creates a sense of urgency for the reader, forcing them to move on. There is no break in between the lines, connoting that Plath believes she is suffering endlessly without any breaks. Jew linens were used to wrap Jesus and Lazarus before they were laid in the tomb, implying that Plath has already died internally, causing her to suffer even more. Although she is physically still breathing, her soul has died and the emptiness is torturing her soul. Plath also uses anaphora to evoke that Plath attempts suicide “so it feels like hell” or so “it feels real.” The anaphora creates a fast and biting rhythm, creating the sense as if Lady Lazarus is taunting us and Plath is trying to convince us to die with her. The reiterating of phrases illustrates her near death experiences, The effective use of the enjambment and anaphora further alludes to Plath’s overwhelming life, where the unfortunate events flows into her life one by one, and there is no pause, further urging her to have suicidal thoughts.