

Metaphors

Sylvia Plath

*I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.*

Theme:

The poem is built on metaphors. The main theme is motherhood.

Analysis:

The first metaphor is "I'm a riddle". A riddle is a question that is difficult to understand. The word "riddle" implies that the speaker is very mysterious and difficult to understand.

The second metaphor is "I'm an elephant". It implies that she is huge.

The third metaphor is "a ponderous house". The poet here symbolically uses the word "house" as it is a place where people take shelter. It also means that she walks slowly and heavily.

The fourth metaphor is a melon. This implies that she is round as a melon walking slowly with thin legs. Her appearance is not attractive as there is no proportion. Her legs are not proportioned

according to her legs. She is not satisfied as she is fat. For that reason, she used a negative metaphor, “an elephant”. Ivory is expensive and is also connected to the elephant. So, the choice of ivory is perfect. There is a positive side to the negative metaphor. She is addressing the positive side of herself, which is the baby. Moreover, the shape “O” is like a melon. From that we learn that she is pregnant. She is talking about her expected baby. Her choice of the red fruit is appropriate as the content of a melon is red. Even the ivory goes with the elephant and the fine timbers go with the house.

In the sixth metaphor, she compares herself to a loaf of bread that is rising. The use of the gerund is appropriate. It refers to the growth of her baby inside her belly. The use of “yeast” is metaphoric. She is disgusting herself and the word itself goes with the things that grow.

In the seventh metaphor, she refers to herself as “money’s new-minted in this fat purse”. Her choice of the word “purse” is perfect as it gives a meaning of containing something. Money is what is being hosted while the purse is the host.

In the eighth metaphor, she says, “I’m a means”. The poet refers herself to a way that she is being used to be pregnant.

In the ninth metaphor, she says that she is a “stage”. It has two meanings. It refers to a step or a stage in a theatre. It is like something that is acted on you.

The nine syllables of the riddle signify the nine months of pregnancy.

In the tenth metaphor, she refers to herself and says that she is “a cow in calf”. She compares herself to a cow; she will be used to give birth and then milk her baby. She is afraid about whether the baby will be a male or a female. The word “riddle” makes us think how she looks like. She is like a “bag of green apple” which refers to her stomach. The word “green” implies youth.

Consequently, it is clear that she is afraid. It is a new experience to her. From her description, we get the idea that she is in the middle of her pregnancy. The choice of the metaphors implies that she does not like the way she looks while pregnant. It is a very clever piece of writing.