

**Phoenix**

**Annotations**

**I sit, arched and poised, with the soft lips of an  
accomplished liar,  
Amongst a life void of passion, yet that I have  
diligently foaled;  
For which I try to nurture tentatively-- but  
motherhood burns like fire.**

We open with Edna complying to society's expectations, yet she is dishonest about her true desires. She has built an entire life for herself, but has little passion or drive for the duties expected of her. She doesn't find joy in being a mother, yet she still complies and does her motherly job. She feels unfulfilled; it hurts her. Fire becomes a common theme with things that want to intentionally or unintentionally hurt her, control her, or get in the way of her desires.

**The smoke is thickening, choking, and black;  
flames climb higher and higher.  
I seek salvation, a body to douse the inferno,  
someone to have and to hold;  
But my other half does not meet my gaze, does  
not give what I require.**

She becomes increasingly unhappy with her life and more notably with her marriage. She wants someone who loves her unconditionally and her current husband does not give her that stability. He doesn't see her as his equal: she is lesser than him, something for him to have ownership over. She yearns for more.

**My wandering body belongs to me, yet I bend  
towards the highest buyer:  
A trapped oriole who pays with his attentive  
mind and heart of gold.  
We sway with Sin, whispering sweet nothings,  
waltzing on a live wire.**

Unsatisfied with her marriage, she begins to explore her sexuality, deciding that she has full ownership over her happiness. She meets Robert, someone smart and kind who treats her well, yet is married too. And although the moments they share are nice, they are not meant to last. Their relationship is fleeting and dangerous. Their words of affection carry no weight. And they are actively cheating on their significant others.

**Perched on my shoulder, he pecks at my ears;**

***“desire, desire, desire.”***

**His kisses smell of ash and he migrates south,**

**for I have turned too cold.**

**I tuck loose feathers in my pockets and imagine**

**a flight I cannot acquire.**

**Society cups my face in his warm hands,**

**whispering: *“deny her!”***

**I turn away and shift and molt. A phoenix**

**cannot be controlled.**

**Womanhood. Motherhood. *“Defy her!”***

**The dust rolls off my feathers; once entangled,**

**I step out of the burnt briar.**

**Freedom beckons through the gales unfurling**

**my fingers; wings stretch and unfold.**

**A messenger bird returns to rest on my**

**shoulder, but I am whole without him; I am**

**entire.**

**Desire sings for me and I am her choir.**

**I crave and I grow, my wingspan too large to fit**

**in the mold.**

**I am independence, and I am sex, and I am a**

**flier.**

Robert sparks desire in Edna, but acknowledges the improbability of a happy ending for them, so he runs away to Mexico. Peck also has a double meaning; a bird striking at something with its beak, and a small kiss. While Robert fills her with some romantic happiness, their relationship is not perfect and still hurts her. I used orioles to represent Robert because they are birds that migrate to Mexico, and to also show his ability to leave the situation without consequences. He has a freedom she does not. She keeps his letter(s) (which the feathers are a metaphor for) and imagines having that same kind of freedom.

She no longer wants the life she has and wishes to be free from the expectations that society has placed on her. She turns her back on her roles and explores her interests. Her husband and peers wish for her to revert back to her old self and deny the pleasures she's discovered. She argues against the societal views on what it means to be a woman and a mother.

Her character changes as she realizes she is more than just a wife and mother. Fire signifies her past life and everything holding her back and hurting her, and through this pain she finds herself and is born anew. A phoenix signifies rebirth. From her hardships she finds a purpose. These supposed setbacks only compel her to find her own source of happiness. Robert also returns and confesses his love, but Edna has other things going on now.

Edna is more intune with her desires and she explores her sexuality further, realizing that she wants even more from life. She's breaking free from the typically roles of women for that specific time period. She's a multidimensional character figuring out that she has interests outside of simply caring constantly for others and doing what she's told. She is no longer a typical housewife.

**I stand, arched and poised, with the soft  
feathers of an accomplished flier.**

**Amongst a life full of passion, that I have  
finally foaled.**

**I nurture my wings tentatively – my soul burns  
like fire.**

**I rise higher and higher.**

**The sun is bright; my future could be bright if**

**I do not fold.**

**But the cruel air numbs my wings, and my bird  
body begins to tire.**

**I am a phoenix, yet the end grows nearer.**

**Who am I to defy fate? Is this as Society and  
Sin have foretold?**

**I feel myself floating, *no*, falling. Prepare the  
pyre.**

**I am simply a girl, I am simply a martyr.**

A rephrase of the first stanza to signify a change  
in Edna's character and how she feels now versus  
how she felt at the beginning.

She has the potential to be a complex and  
well-rounded person with her own abilities and  
talents, yet society limits her still and she cannot  
keep up with the emotional and mental toll.

Robert has run off again, her life is crumbling  
around her and she is starting to struggle to find  
her place in the world now that she's free. Her  
freedom has come with a cost that she's struggling  
to bear.

Edna is ahead of her time. The desires she yearns for  
are not obtainable within her period. There is no  
place for a woman like her in the world that she  
currently resides in. She was destined to meet her  
end at some point, for the lifestyle she was born into  
was not enough for her and the lifestyle she wanted  
was unattainable. But it shouldn't have been. Edna  
should have been able to live the life she wanted:  
she was just a girl who wanted more than what life  
was able to give her in that moment. She died  
because her beliefs did not coincide with the beliefs  
of society. Society's limitations on her killed her.

When at their end, a phoenix bursts and returns to  
fire and ash. Yet the cycle repeats and the phoenix is  
reborn. There were women before Edna and there  
will be women after her fighting for the same thing.

The phoenix came to represent the oppression of  
women and how over time, with each new  
generation, change was made. The phoenix  
symbolizes the never ending struggle for women's  
freedom and women's rights. The last two stanzas  
also allude to the story of Icarus.

**A Bird in his Teeth**

Annotations

**Wheels rattle against tracks paved along  
avenues illuminated bright  
By lamposts casting weary shadows across the  
path I must embark  
In order to escape my past; my plight.**

Italicized words indicate dialogue. As the streetcar brings Blanche to her destination, she reflects on the real reasoning behind her lost job and need to move away; her involvement with an underaged student and the suicide of her late husband.

**These ghostly shadows swell like smoke clouds  
and trail me like  
The burning end of a cigarette held firmly  
between fingers once thought soft and stark,  
But are now stained with the ruins of red,  
masked beneath gloves of white.**

The death of Allan Grey still haunts her, and regardless of the change in scenery and environment, she is still aware of her part in his untimely death. She feels guilty, and hides behind a southern belle facade, as indicated with the white gloves. The white gloves also symbolize a sense of youth and innocence she no longer has but continues to pretend that she does. The description of her hands also indicates her lack of youthfulness, and how events can age a person's interior and exterior self.

**My aching body trembles as my final  
destination reaches my line of sight,  
As if knowing I have grown too big to fit  
behind the innocence of youth; no longer  
unmarked.**

She is aware of the fact that her age will limit her in terms of finding a new husband. She cannot use her attractiveness as effectively anymore, and understands that as time progresses, it will be increasingly harder to settle down and find someone to care for her. The weight of her past makes her feel even older.

**My experience weighs heavy on my spine; my  
age makes blurry my sight.**

**Yet I must present a fresh image; begin a new  
chapter to write.**

**Quell the voices! Kill the ghosts! Put an end to  
this arc!**

**I adjust my mask and keep away from the  
light.**

***Sister, sister.* She preens and praises my arrival,  
eyes cradling constellations bright.**

**She knows no wrong, chittering and chattering,  
my little glowing lark.**

**With plumage soft and brown, towards her  
home we take flight.**

**Her beast bares his teeth, a subtle smirk  
disguised. *He is being polite.***

**I know his clenched jaw can open my yielding  
throat; can leave more than a mark.**

**I will think of this the next time he smiles. *He  
will bite.***

She understands that she must seem younger and innocent in order to appeal to potential bachelors and to keep her past hidden from her sister and her husband. She puts on a figurative mask to hide her age and secrets, and she stays out of the light to do so. She is focusing on starting a new life and forgetting about her old one.

Stella speaks, the sisters reunite warmly. The mention of constellations is a nod to Stella's name while also giving her a childlike quality. Preening is a behavior done commonly by birds, which Stella is constantly compared to for her naivety and fragility. Larks also have brown feathers, and Stella is described as having brown hair. By comparing Stella to a bird and Stanley to a (bird)dog, as well as multiple types of beasts, I draw a greater contrast to their power dynamic and relationship. Having Stella described as 'glowing' hints to her pregnancy.

Here we meet Stanley, who is firstly introduced through the usage of "*Her* beast," indicating the fact that Stella and Stanley are married, and he is her burden to bear. When animals show their teeth, they're trying to look threatening; when people do it, it's a sign of politeness. The double meaning behind Stanley's smile acts as foreshadowing. Stanley and Blanche dislike each other from the beginning as Stella tries to bring them together. She is speaking in the first line. Blanche speaks in the last.

**She swims with danger, emerged within the  
depths of his blight.  
She cannot smell his disease, cannot tell a fish  
from a shark.  
His dorsal fin breaks the surface and she  
mistakes it for an embrace; an invite.**

**How unnatural this matrimony between  
predator and prey; *fight or flight*?  
Primal urges take hold – flint kisses steel and  
out births a spark.  
Bird and Beast. His nurturer: the hand to  
which he bites.**

**She settles for a stray dog who belongs to the  
streets. Toss him to the night.  
He pisses on what he believes is his to mark.  
Untamable. Rabid. A fire waiting to ignite.**

**I do not possess the foresight  
To predict the actions of a wild animal who  
perceives himself a monarch.  
His kingdom is chaos and he reigns with  
delight.**

Throughout the course of this poem, Stanley is compared to many different beasts, with a shark being one of them. Stella lives with Stanley and ignores his bad behavior (blight), or tries to justify it to some capacity. She has become conditioned to the way he treats her (cannot smell his disease), and allows him to push her around. The last line foreshadows Stanley hurting Stella.

This stanza addresses the unfair power balance between Stella and Stanley, indicating that they are not equal. They come from different backgrounds, Stella coming from money and Stanley coming from the working class. They are almost like two different species coexisting in the same habitat, yet they are married and expecting a child. The last line alludes to when Stanley strikes Stella. Drawing a comparison between a dog that bites the hand that feeds/nurtures him and the act of nurturing being something most notably by mothers showcases this more indepth.

Blanche sees Stella as having settled for Stanley, a lowlife, poor, ill-mannered beast. She suggests that Stella leaves him. I compare him to a stray dog, indicating his struggles with dominance, coming from a poor background, and his anger issues/uncontrollable aspects.

At this point Blanche fears Stanley and what he might be capable of. Stanley's need to be the dominating force of the household and his obsession with giving Blanche trouble are portrayed here.

**He overpowers me and I am too small to fight.**

*Are you afraid of the dark?*

**From his window sit the stars and we are  
bathed in moonlight.**

**A man promises protection, yet is a liar in his  
own right.**

*I am afraid of the dark.*

**I have made myself smaller; I am half my  
height.**

**Away I am taken. They ask if I am alright.**

**I look back to see a dog with a bird in his teeth.**

**He is the dark.**

**And though I am lost, I am the light.**

*And though I am lost, I am the light.*

Stanley takes advantage of Blanche. He is speaking in this stanza, taunting her. I characterize the dark as Stanley. The mention of stars symbolizes Stella and her inability to confront her husband. She is simply a bystander. Having them explained as being bathed in moonlight shows that Blanche cannot hide and has been unwillingly exposed and forced into the light.

To Blanche, men and husbands are supposed to offer protection and safety, yet her sister's husband has brutally hurt her in more ways than one. Stanley is no man, and has not fulfilled his duties as a husband. Blanche answers that she is, as Stanley has come to symbolize the dark. Afterwards, she begins to lose her wits and she begins hallucinating. She is not herself anymore.

At this point Stella doesn't believe her when Blanche tells her about Stanley, and she is sent away to a mental facility. 'They' in question refers to the doctor and staff who come to fetch her. As they're leaving, it's signified that Stella is stuck in an unhappy marriage with an abusive husband who will never let her go. He is the villain of this story.

I am deciding that the ending of the story can be perceived in many different ways with one way being that Blanche has escaped Stanley. Stella is stuck with him. Though she has become delusional, Blanche essentially gets her way in a sense: she has a man(the doctor)/or people who will care for her (or at least she thinks they will). And though it might not be the way she thinks or wants, she is free of hiding and has obtained her goal. Stanley is now the dark– he must deal with the consequences of letting his emotions get the better of him and pushing his partner away as Blanche had done when she was personified as dark. With the last two lines, I am trying to portray that while Blanche has lost her mind, she has shown her sister the truth and now it's up to Stella to decide what she wants to do with her future and the future of her child – who is also a boy.

Blanche is speaking in the last line and from her point of view, has the last say.

**Poems typed out normally without annotations:**

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Amongst a life void of passion, yet that I have diligently foaled;  
For which I try to nurture tentatively – but motherhood burns like fire.

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I seek salvation, a body to douse the inferno, someone to have and to hold;  
But my other half does not meet my gaze, does not give what I require.

My wandering body belongs to me, yet I bend towards the highest buyer:  
A trapped oriole who pays with his attentive mind and heart of gold.  
We sway with Sin, whispering sweet nothings, waltzing on a live wire.

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His kisses smell of ash and he migrates south, for I have turned too cold.  
I tuck loose feathers in my pockets and imagine a flight I cannot acquire.

Society cups my face in his warm hands, whispering: “*deny her!*”  
I turn away and shift and molt. A phoenix cannot be controlled.  
Womanhood. Motherhood. “*Defy her!*”



The dust rolls off my feathers; once entangled, I step out of the burnt briar.  
Freedom beckons through the gales unfurling my fingers; wings stretch and unfold.  
A messenger bird returns to rest on my shoulder, but I am whole without him; I am entire.

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I crave and I grow, my wingspan too large to fit in the mold.

I am independence, and I am sex, and I am a flier.

I stand, arched and poised, with the soft feathers of an accomplished flier.

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I nurture my wings tentatively – my soul burns like fire.

I rise higher and higher.

Like the sun, warm rays illuminating the sky, my future could be bright if I do not fold.

But the cruel air numbs my wings, and my bird body begins to tire.

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Who am I to defy fate? Is this as Society and Sin have foretold?

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In order to escape my past; my plight.

These ghostly shadows swell like smoke clouds and trail me like  
The burning end of a cigarette held firmly between fingers once thought soft and stark,  
But are now stained with the ruins of red, masked beneath gloves of white.

My aching body trembles as my final destination reaches my line of sight,  
As if knowing I have grown too big to fit behind the innocence of youth; no longer unmarked.  
My experience weighs heavy on my spine; my age makes blurry my sight.

Yet I must present a fresh image; begin a new chapter to write.  
Quell the voices! Kill the ghosts! Put an end to this arc!  
I adjust my mask and keep away from the light.

*Sister, sister.* She preens and praises my arrival, eyes cradling constellations bright.  
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Primal urges take hold – flint kisses steel and out births a spark.

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To predict the actions of a wild animal who perceives himself as a monarch.

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And though I am lost, I am the light.

*And though I am lost, I am the light.*

For the final draft of this project, I decided on the villanelle poem based on its form and style. After fiddling around with multiple types of poems and their forms, I found that the villanelle style worked best for me. The rhyme scheme adds a level of difficulty that makes the end process more rewarding. The limitations set by this form force me to control the flow of the poem in a way that I think reads the nicest and generates the greatest success. Through these poems, I reflect on my initial thoughts and feelings about the main characters and showcase the level of understanding that I have for their inner workings. Based on the text, I chose to further develop the main characters and wrote them as to how I perceived the narrative to be, focusing on themes I found important to the stories and characters. I found that the books gave a limited view of the characters, so I chose to expand on their inner dialogue and feelings to give a different perspective of said characters.