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Analysis of Poem "Young" by Anne Sexton

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Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton and a Summary of "Young"

Young is a short poem, one of Anne Sexton's early attempts to express herself in verse. It focuses on transition and that special time everyone goes through - adolescence, puberty, those days, weeks, months when physical, mental and spiritual changes profoundly affect our relationships.

Anne Sexton published this poem in 1962 in a book titled *All My Pretty Ones*. Whilst not explicitly confessional, it gives hints and clues as to how the poet would progress later on in her career.

Combining strong imagery with figurative language, *Young* is a reflective poem and looks back to summer, which turns into all the summers, in the life of the speaker, not necessarily the poet herself.

So the poem is probably more fictional than factual, despite the fact that Sexton's

parents did not see eye to eye for long periods in their marriage. There are also fairytale elements drifting in and out as the poem progresses, the speaker seeking somehow to gain perspective on what must have been a surreal and disturbing time.

- With clever use of literary devices such as assonance and alliteration, plus metaphor, the poet in a single sentence creates this impermanent scene, a mix of biography and impression, and frames the small collage in an elongated paragraph.

Time is warped, loneliness becomes loveliness on a lawn at night and the cosmos is twinkling, quite alive in God's all-seeing mind. And there is the speaker, wondering what the hell it is all about, body changing as she looks at the house and the separate rooms of her parents, a myriad of natural things happening.

Young

A thousand doors ago
when I was a lonely kid
in a big house with four
garages and it was summer
as long as I could remember,
I lay on the lawn at night,
clover wrinkling under me,
the wise stars bedding over me,
my mother's window a funnel
of yellow heat running out,
my father's window, half shut,
an eye where sleepers pass,
and the boards of the house
were smooth and white as wax
and probably a million leaves
sailed on their strange stalks
as the crickets ticked together
and I, in my brand new body,
which was not a woman's yet,
told the stars my questions
and thought God could really see
the heat and the painted light,
elbows, knees, dreams, goodnight.

Analysis of Young

Anne Sexton's *Young* is a snapshot back in time to when the speaker was reaching

puberty, on the edge of adulthood, leaving childhood behind. For many this can be a traumatic transitional stage and this poem with its figurative language and metaphorical stance, combines the angst of teen-time with the philosophical questioning that goes alongside.

From the outset the imagery is unusual. The reader is taken back in time for sure but has to face the notion of a door, one thousand of them, not the conventional measurement of time.

- The door is all important. It relates to the house, the home, and is the classic symbol of the threshold. Behind the unopened door lies...what? Behind a thousand unopened doors lies....great opportunity? Or are the doors slammed in the speaker's face each time she wishes to step through, into new space?

The speaker creates a rather daunting atmosphere initially, for there is depicted a lonely, small figure in a big house, belonging to a family who are perhaps middle-class, well off, aspiring? There are four garages for goodness sake. That reflects potential material wealth at least.

And here is the child now horizontal on the lawn under a wealth of stars (bedding - a mirror image of the flowers in the garden perhaps) noting the exterior of the house on this warm summer night.

Mother's window acts as a funnel for the exchange of domestic heat with outside fresh air. No mention of the actual physical mother but the reader is encouraged to think that she is there in that room, generating heat.

In contrast the father's window is half-shut - notice that this implies pessimism - optimism would be a window half-open - and likened to an eye. Most unusual to turn a window into an eye unless you think about the eye being a window of the soul, enabling the reader to look momentarily into the character of the mother and father and their role in the house.

- They appear to have separate bedrooms which implies that their relationship isn't quite harmonious. Perhaps the child has cottoned on to this fact and is musing out there on the lawn, wondering what will become of her parents now that she too is changing, irreversibly.

Meanwhile Nature carries on its song and dance. The house and the parents might be on the verge of melt-down (note the reference to wax) but still the humble crickets sound off into the night. A million leaves are falling - it is fall, autumn - and there is the child slowly but surely transforming into an adult.

There is no stopping this profound process, it is completely natural but my word is it disturbing. How it affects one inside. The child is leaving and the adult is taking its

place. So many questions are left unanswered.

Perhaps the parents are too busy in their own worlds to attempt an answer. Perhaps the stars will hold the child's questions and answer them, one day, when she is fully adult. For after all, isn't God omnipotent, all-seeing, all-knowing?

Further Analysis of “Young”

Young is a single stanza free verse poem of 23 lines. The poem is one long sentence, clauses paused by an astute use of commas only. Each comma allows the reader just enough time to half pause, take a mini-breath and continue on through the twelve lines that are **enjambéd (enjambment)**, when a line unpunctuated carries on into the next without losing sense).

- The poem is a reflection on the profound changes the speaker experienced during a summer when they were reaching puberty.
- The tone of the poem is dreamy, a little surreal, and there is tension too when the respective windows of the mother and father are compared.
- Assonance and consonance help suggest the soft, warm summer season. Note the number of soft vowels (the o and the a being mostly long) and consonants (w and l).
- Alliteration is used to good effect. For example, *lay on the lawn, white as wax, sailed on their strange stalks*.
- Metaphor - time is 1000 doors ago, the door being a thing you open and close, that is locked and unlocked and lets you enter into a new space, beyond the threshold. The poet could have used the more straightforward - A thousand years ago - A thousand moons ago - but chose the word door which fits neatly into the environment of the house and home but is also this universal symbol of opportunity and progress.
- Meter (metre in UK). There is mixed meter but the iambic foot dominates many lines, for example the first:
 - A **thou** / sand **doors** / ago (iambic trimeter)
 - **told** the / **stars** my / **questions** (trochaic trimeter)

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