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# MIRRORS

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# MIRRORS

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

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ZACH ROSS

MIRRORS

Five Poems of Sylvia Plath  
For  
Soprano and Piano

FIVE POEMS OF SYLVIA PLATH

*WORDS*

Axes after whose stroke the wood rings,  
And the echoes!  
Echoes travelling  
Off from the centre like horses.  
The sap  
Wells like tears, like the  
Water striving  
To re-establish its mirror  
Over the rock  
That drops and turns,  
A white skull,  
Eaten by weedy greens.  
Years later I  
Encounter them on the road  
Words dry and riderless,  
The indefatigable hoof-taps.  
While  
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars  
Govern a life.

*ON LOOKING INTO THE EYES OF A DEMON LOVER*

Here are two pupils  
whose moons of black  
transform to cripples  
all who look:

each lovely lady  
who peers inside  
takes on the body  
of a toad.

Within these mirrors  
the world inverts:  
the fond admirer's  
burning darts

turn back to injure  
the thrusting hand  
and inflame to danger  
the scarlet wound.

I sought my image  
in the scorching glass,  
for what fire could damage  
a witch's face?

So I stared in that furnace  
where beauties char  
but found radiant Venus  
reflected there.

*MORNING SONG*

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.  
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry  
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.  
In a drafty museum, your nakedness  
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother  
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow  
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath  
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:  
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral  
In my Victorian nightgown.  
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try  
Your handful of notes; The clear vowels rise like balloons.

*CHILD*

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.  
I want to fill it with color and ducks,  
The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate —  
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,  
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,  
Pool in which images  
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous  
Wringing of hands, this dark  
Ceiling without a star.

*MIRROR*

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
What ever you see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful---  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.  
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

# Words

Zach Ross

**Aggressive** ♩ = 170

Piano *f*

*espress.*

S

6

*f* ax - es af - ter whose stro - ke the

Pno.

S

12

wood rings and the e-choes tra - ve-ling tra - ve-ling off from the

Pno.

12

*mf*

3

Languishing

♩ = 100

17 *molto rit.*

S  
cen - ter like hor - ses the sap wells with tears *mp* like the wa - ter stri - ving

Pno. *espress.* *p*

23 *cresc.*

S  
o - ver the rock to re - es - tab - lish — its mir -

Pno. *cresc.*

31

S  
ror — o - ver the rock

Pno. *f* **Aggressive**  
*a tempo*



Pno.

38 *espress.*  
*mf*

Apprehensive

S

44 *mp* The

Pno.

44 *sf* *slargando*

S

49 rock that drops and turns \_\_\_\_\_ eat - en by

Pno.

49 *p*

S 54 *mf* weed - y greens A

Pno. *mp*

S 59 white skull O - ver the *f* rock

Pno. *mf*

S 64 eat-en eat - en

Pno. *mf*

71

S

*mp* years la - ter I I en - coun - ter them

Pno.

*mp*

77

S

*p* on the road *f* Words dry and ri - der - less the

Pno.

*p*

83

S

*mf* in - de - fat - i - ga - ble hoof - taps *mp* while from a

Pno.

*mp* *tr* *rit.* *a tempo* *p*

90 *accel.*

S  
bot-tom of a pool fixed

Pno.

Aggressive

96

S  
stars gov - ern a life

Pno.

102

S  
*f* a life!

Pno.

102  $\text{♩} = 190$  *ff*

# On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover

Zach Ross

**Tenerezza**

*tempo comodo*

Piano

*mp*

Musical score for Piano, measures 1-3. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music features a melody in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand, both with flowing eighth and sixteenth notes.

Pno.

Musical score for Piano, measures 4-5. Measure 4 begins with a four-measure rest in the right hand, followed by a melodic phrase. Measure 5 contains two triplet figures in the right hand. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

S

*mf* here — are two pu - pils

Pno.

Musical score for Soprano and Piano, measures 6-8. Measure 6 features a six-measure rest for the Soprano. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet in the right hand. Measure 7 contains the vocal line with the lyrics "here — are two pu - pils" and a piano accompaniment starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 8 continues the vocal and piano accompaniment.

9

S

whose moons of black trans - form

Pno.

11

S

to crip - ples all who

Pno.

14

S

*f* look *mf* each

Pno.

*f*

16

S

love - ly la - - dy

Pno.

*mp*

3

17

S

— who peers in-side *mp* takes on the bo-dy of a toad two

Pno.

*p*

19

S

pu - pils of black

Pno.

On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover

S 20 *p* with - in these mir - rors the world in - verts

Pno. 20 *p*

S 21 the fond ad - mi - r - er's burn - ing darts

Pno. 21 RH LH LH RH

S 22 *mf* with - in these mir - rors the world in - verts

Pno. 22 *mf*



**Liberamente**

23 *rit.*

S

the fond ad - mi - r - er's burn - ing darts turn back to in - jure

Pno.

25

S

the thrust - ing hand and in - flame *mf* to dan - ger the

Pno.

27 *risoluto*

S scar - let wound *f* I \_\_\_\_\_ sought my im - age in the scorch - ing glass \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

29 *solenne*

S *ff* scorch - ing glass \_\_\_\_\_ for *mp* what fire could dam - age a witch - es' face?

Pno.

*8va*

*p*

33

S

Pno.

*rubato*

*pp*

35

S

Pno.

*non rubato*

*p*

3

37

S

*mp* so I stared in that furn - ace

Pno.

*mf*

S

39

where beau - ties char - but

Pno.

Detailed description: This system covers measures 39 and 40. The vocal line (S) begins with a rest in measure 39, followed by a long note on 'char' that spans into measure 40, ending with a note on 'but'. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) consists of two staves. The right hand has a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs and a triplet in measure 40. The left hand has a bass line with a triplet in measure 40. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

S

41

found *f* ra - diant Ve - nus re - flect - ed

Pno.

Detailed description: This system covers measures 41 and 42. The vocal line (S) begins with a rest in measure 41, followed by a long note on 'Ve - nus' that spans into measure 42, ending with a note on 're - flect - ed'. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) consists of two staves. The right hand has a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs and a triplet in measure 42. The left hand has a bass line with a triplet in measure 42. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

44

S

there *ff* there! —

44

Pno.

*ff* *rit.* *mp*

Detailed description: This musical score page contains two systems of music. The first system is for the voice (S), starting at measure 44. It features a treble clef and a key signature of three flats. The vocal line begins with a long note on 'there', followed by a series of eighth notes leading to a final note on 'there!' which has a fermata and a '2.' below it. A dynamic marking of *ff* is placed under the vocal line. The second system is for the piano (Pno.), also starting at measure 44. It consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. A dynamic marking of *ff* is placed under the piano part. A *rit.* (ritardando) marking is placed above the piano part, and a *mp* (mezzo-piano) marking is placed below it. The piano part concludes with a fermata on the final note.

# Morning Song

Zach Ross

Distantly, Waking from Sleep

♩ = 45

Piano

Musical notation for the piano introduction, consisting of two staves in 4/4 time. The key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 45. The music begins with a whole rest on the treble staff, followed by a series of chords and melodic lines in both staves. A dynamic marking of *p* is present.

Pno.

Musical notation for the piano accompaniment, consisting of two staves in 4/4 time. It features a melodic line in the treble staff with two triplet markings (3) and a dynamic marking of *subito f*. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

S

Musical notation for the singer's part, consisting of a single staff in 4/4 time. It begins with a whole rest, followed by the lyrics "love set you". A dynamic marking of *a tempo* is present.

Pno.

Musical notation for the piano accompaniment, consisting of two staves in 4/4 time. It features a melodic line in the treble staff with a triplet marking (3) and a dynamic marking of *poco rit.* and *mp*. The bass staff provides harmonic support.

**S**  
*mf* go - ing go-ing like a fat gold watch. the

**Pno.**

**S**  
*f* mid - wife — slap - ped your foot - soles and your

**Pno.**  
*mf* *8<sup>va</sup>*

Detailed description: The image shows a page of a musical score for 'Morning Song'. It features two systems of music. The first system covers measures 5-6, and the second system covers measures 7-8. Each system has a vocal line for Soprano (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.) consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The vocal line includes lyrics: 'go - ing go-ing like a fat gold watch. the' in the first system, and 'mid - wife — slap - ped your foot - soles and your' in the second system. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the bass line and chords in the treble line. A *8<sup>va</sup>* marking is present in the second system's piano part.

9

S

bald — cry took its place a-mong the e - le-ments.

Pno.

11

S

*mp* our voi-ces e - cho

*animando*

Pno.

*p*



S

13

*f* mag-ni-fy-ing your arr-i - val \_\_\_\_\_ *mp* new sta - tue \_\_\_\_\_ in a

Pno.

*mf*

8<sup>va</sup>

5

*p*

3

S

15

draft-y mu - seum \_\_\_\_\_ *f* new sta - tue \_\_\_\_\_ in a draft-y - mu-seum your *pp*

*quasi calando*

Pno.

15

LH

18

S

na - ked-ness sha - dows our safe - ty *mp* we\_\_\_

Pno.

*pp*

*mp* LH 3

20

S

*spirito*

stand round blank - ly \_\_\_ as walls I'm

Pno.

*p*

3

22 *molto mosso accel.*

S *mf* no more your mo - ther than the

Pno. *accel. mp* 3

23

S cloud that dis-tills a mir - ror, a

Pno. 3

S

25

*rit.*

mir - ror

*mf*

*sospirando*

*a tempo*

a mir-ror to re-flect its

Pno.

25

*mf*

*rit.*

*a tempo*

S

27

own slow ef-face-ment at the wind's hand

Pno.

27

*8va*

29 *felice*

S *p* all night your moth breath *mf* flick - ers a - mong the flat pink

Pno. *p* *mp*

31

S *f* ro - ses I wake wake to

Pno. *f* *8va*

33

S

lis - ten and a far \_\_\_\_\_ sea *mp* mo-ves in my

Pno.

35

S

ear \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

3

*p*

37

S

*mp* one — cry and —

Pno.

*p*

3 3

38

S

I stum - ble from bed

Pno.

*subito f*

39

S

*scherezando*

*mf* cow hea - vy — and flor - al — in my vic -

Pno.

*mf*

40

S

tor - i - an night - gown

Pno.

*precipitanda, con splendore*

41

S

*f* your mouth o - pens clean as a cat the

Pno.

*f*

43

S

*mf* win - dow square whit - ens and swal - lows

Pno.

*mf*



44

S

its dull — stars and now you try your hand - ful of notes the

Pno.

*cresc.*

46

S

clear vowels rise **ff** like — ball -

Pno.

**f** **ff**

3

**Volante Possible**

47

S

oons.

Pno.

*strepitoso* **sfz** *8va*

50

S

50

Pno.

V.S.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Morning Song" on page 13, starting at measure 50. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 50-51) features a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.). The vocal line consists of two measures with a whole rest in each. The piano accompaniment begins at measure 50 with a complex chordal texture in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand. The right hand part is characterized by dense chords and some grace notes. The left hand part features a series of eighth notes with a descending melodic contour. The second system (measures 52-53) continues the piano accompaniment, with the right hand part becoming more active and featuring more complex chordal structures. The left hand part continues with a similar melodic pattern. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 53. The tempo marking "V.S." is placed above the piano part in the second system.

# Child

Zach Ross

Amabile ♩ = 155

Piano

*mp*  
*a piacere*

This system contains the first four measures of the piece. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The tempo is marked as Amabile with a quarter note equal to 155 beats per minute. The dynamics are mezzo-piano (*mp*) and *a piacere*.

Pno.

*mf*

This system contains measures 5 through 8. The right hand continues the melodic line, and the left hand maintains the accompaniment. The dynamic is mezzo-forte (*mf*).

Pno.

*p* *sfz* *f*

This system contains measures 9 through 12. Measure 9 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 10 features a sforzando (*sfz*) dynamic. Measure 11 features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piece concludes in measure 12.

12

S

Pno.

*rit.*

*mp*

*p*

15

S

Pno.

*appassionato*

*mf* your

*mp*

18

S

Pno.

clear eye — is the one ab - so - lute - ly

3

S  
20  
beau - ti - ful — thing

Pno.  
20  
*p.* *mf*

S  
21  
*giojoso*  
*f* I want to fill it — with col - or — and — ducks the

Pno.  
21  
3

S

23

zoo of — the new *mp* whose name you

Pno.

23

*mp*

S

25

med - i - tate

Pno.

25

26

S *mf* a - pril - snow - drop in - di-an pipe

Pno. *mf*

28

S li - ttle stalk with - out a

Pno.

S

29

wrin - kle

Pno.

S

*enigmatico*

30

*sfz* pool in \_\_\_\_\_ which

Pno.

*sfz*



S

32

i - - - - - ma -

Pno.

S

33

ges

Pno.

34 **Allargando**

S *mf* should be grand and

Pno.

36 **Grave**

S *deciso* clas-si-cal *p* not this

Pno. *mp* *p* *pp* *a tempo*

S 39 *lusigando con vigore*  
troub-ling wring-ing of hands this dark ceil-ing this

Pno. 39 *pp*

S 42 *sfz* dark *f* ceil-ing *mp* with - out a star

Pno. 42 *perdendosi p ppp*

# Mirror

Zach Ross

Spettrale ♩ = 86

Piano

*p*

*mp*

The piano introduction consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked *p* and the second is marked *mp*. Both systems feature a complex, chromatic texture with many accidentals and ties. The key signature changes from one flat to two sharps between systems. The piece is in 4/4 time with a tempo of ♩ = 86.

*liberamente, soprannaturale*

S

*mf* I am sil - ver and ex - act I have no

Pno.

*mf*

The first system of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line (S) begins at measure 5 with the lyrics "I am silver and exact I have no". The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is marked *mf*. The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex, chromatic texture with many accidentals and ties.

S

*f* pre-con-cep - tions what - ev - er I see

Pno.

*p*

*f*

The second system of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line (S) begins at measure 9 with the lyrics "pre-con-ceptions what - ev - er I see". The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is marked *p* and *f*. The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex, chromatic texture with many accidentals and ties. There are triplets in the piano accompaniment.

S

13

*mf* I swall-ow imm - ed - i - ate - ly *mp* just as it

Pno.

*mp*

S

16

is un - mist-ed by love or dis - like

Pno.

*p* *mf*

S

20

6/4

Pno.

*subito p*

6/4

Adagio

22

S

*mf* I am not cruel

Pno.

*mp*

24

S

— on - ly truth - ful *p* the —

Pno.

*mf* *p*

28

S

eye *mf* of a lit - tle god *mp* four cor - nered

Pno.

*mf* *p*

S

33

— on - ly truth - ful

Pno.

33

*accel. (affrettando)*

*mf*

3

Pno.

37

**Capriccioso** ♩ = 185

*mp*

*mf*

S

40

*mf* most of the time I med - i - tate on the opp - o - site

Pno.

40

3

43

S

wall it is pink with speck - les I have looked

Pno.

*mp*

46

S

at it so long I think it's a part of my heart

Pno.

*f*

*ff*

49

S

*f* but

Pno.



S

51

it flick - ers

*mf* face - s and dark - ness sep - ar -

Pno.

51

*mp*

S

54

ate us o - ver and o - ver and now I am a lake

a wo - man

Pno.

54

*f*

*mf*

5

S

57

bends o - ver me search - ing my reach -

Pno.

57

*f*

\* to be played by quickly trilling between all three notes for the duration of the note

S 59 *mf* *rit.* *p*  
es for what she reall - y is

Pno. 59 *rit.* *p* *rall.*

Grazioso ♩. = 45

S 63 *p*  
then she turns to those li - ars the can - dles or the moon

Pno. 63 *mp* *p*

S

70 *sfz* *mf* *mp*

I see her back and re -

Pno.

S

76 *cresc.* *f*

flect — it faith - fully re - flect it faith - ful - ly

Pno.

*Enigmatic*

84

S

*p* she re-wards me with tears

Pno.

*mf*

89

S

and ag-it-ta-tion of hands *mf* I am im-por-tant to her

Pno.

*mf*

91 *poco rit.* **Allegro** ♩ = 116

S she comes and she goes each morn-ing it is her

Pno. *poco rit.* *mp*

93 *apprensivo, patetico*

S *f* face that re - pla - ces the dark - ness In

Pno.

95

S

*ff* me \_\_\_\_\_ she's drowned \_\_\_\_\_ a young girl \_\_\_\_\_ and in

Pno.

*f*

*8<sup>va</sup>*

97

S

me \_\_\_\_\_ *mp* an old wo-man ri-ses to - ward her

Pno.

3

Pno.

99

*perdendosi*

*p*

Pno.

101

*ppp*

*Spettrale*  
*a tempo*

*mp*

*ppp*

S

105

*mf* like a ter - ri - ble fish

Pno.

105

*mf*

*ppp*

110

S

an old wo man ri-ses toward her *f* in

Pno.

114

S

me she has drown - ed and in me she ri - ses

Pno.

*f* *mf*



117

S

day af - ter day *mp* like a ter - ri - ble

Pno.

117

*mp*

3

120

S

*p* fish

Pno.

120

*p*

3

124

Pno.

*pp*

## MIRRORS

The idea to musically interpret selections of poetry by Sylvia Plath came from a personal fascination with Plath's life and writing. Her childhood, education, artistic success, marriage, depression, motherhood, and decision to take her own life weave a curious tapestry that has left uncovered space for the conjecture and controversy of many who have studied her life and read her works. During the summer of 2013, I began to read through Plath's collection of poems in search for pieces that demonstrated potential for interpretation through musical composition. I eventually stumbled across a recurring device used in her poetry: the image of a mirror and the idea of reflection. I began to associate the mirror as a powerful symbol for Plath, a person who struggled deeply with self-identity. The symbol manifested from there as I applied the image to contexts in her poems: the mirror of her children-darkened yet saturated in love, rendering her own reflection; the mirror of her god-foggy and cracked, formed in her self and her memory; the mirror of her lover-reflecting the bits of her soul she gave unto him; the mirror of her art-truthful but not always clear, preserved in the writing she left behind.

These applications were most strongly generated from five poems which I eventually selected as the basis for the project. Those poems in the order I have used them are "Words," "On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover," "Morning Song," "Child," and "Mirror." Each of these poems presents the image of a reflection or mirror in a different context. This common poetic device unifies my presentation.

### ***Thematic Recurrence***

I have deliberately employed two musical conventions to emphasize the reflective image. The first is the recurrence of thematic material, inspired by Beethoven's 1816 cycle of six songs, *An Die Ferne Geliebte*. Beethoven reflects the theme from the first movement by utilizing it in the final movement following the development of the entire work. This not only heightens the importance of the original theme, but also creates the impression that all other material is subject to the primary theme. This impact is powerful in Beethoven's work. While I have used the device in an altered way, I believe it is also effective in my composition. Beethoven uses his thematic recurrence on a macro level, bookending the entire work with the primary theme. I have created five recurring themes and integrated each of them on a micro level, treating each song as its own reflective statement.

In "Words," "On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover," and "Mirror," the primary theme both introduces and concludes the movement, characterizing each poem as a symmetrical and conclusive stream. This is because they each represent a distinctive reflection of the protagonist that is contained within the individual poem and is not presented again in the cycle. In contrast, "Morning Song" and "Child" feature an integration of thematic recurrence that is not ultimate. The primary theme is presented in the middle of the piece and the concluding section of each movement is comprised of new material. This choice was made to illustrate the separate channel of the protagonist's child, who is the subject of both poems. Moreover, these two movements are linked by a piano interlude made up of

previously unstated material. This is the only instance of such a link in the cycle and was intentionally placed here to link movements three and four.

*Use of the twelve tone row*

The other musical convention I have employed that illustrates the image of the mirror is the creation and manipulation of a twelve tone row. The row that I have formed is a mirror itself as the intervallic distance between each member of the first group of six pitches is inverted to generate the second group of six pitches. Below, the tone row is extracted and presented for analysis. The numbers above denote the twelve tone categorization of each pitch. The numbers below indicate the intervallic distance between each pair of pitches. The dotted line in the middle designates the point at which the row inverts and becomes a reflection of itself.

The image shows a musical staff in 12/8 time with a treble clef. The notes of the twelve-tone row are: G4 (flat), A4 (flat), Bb4, C#4, D4 (flat), E4 (flat), F4, G4, Ab4, A4 (flat), Bb4, C#4. Above the staff, numbers 0, 4, 10, 6, 9, 2, 3, 8, 5, 1, 7, 11 are placed above each note. Below the staff, intervallic distance labels are placed between notes: M3, TT, M3, m3, P5, P4, M6, m6, TT, m6. A vertical red dotted line is positioned between the 6th and 7th notes (E4 (flat) and F4).

In each movement of the cycle, this tone row is presented at the moment that the image of the mirror is presented in the text. This works to coalesce each song in an

overarching trajectory and musically represents the important idea of reflection exhibited in each of Plath's poems.

### ***Defining the Protagonist***

Before analyzing the work in further detail, it is important to state that this project is not an attempt to represent the life or character of Sylvia Plath. Much of Plath's poetry is in the confessional style that was pioneered during the mid/late 20<sup>th</sup> century and as such, there is an undeniable link between the author and much of her work. All the same, this project does not attempt to present each poem from Plath's perspective. The speaker in the work is consistent throughout each song but is ambiguous in definition, representing the original character of *Mirrors* and not Plath herself. The only exception to this consistency is the final song which is not from the perspective of the protagonist, but is from the perspective of a mirror which lives in the protagonist's house. In my interpretation of this poetry, the protagonist does take her own life before the fifth movement begins. This is a parallel with the death of Sylvia Plath but does not work to represent it. In fact, the protagonist must not necessarily die before the fifth movement, that transition could also be interpreted as the character simply giving up all hope. Regardless, it is the major transition in the work.

The cycle has been written to be presented from the perspective of a woman but that is the only restriction of interpretation I wish to inflict on the work. I would support the performance of this cycle by a man, transposed down an octave,

however, the range and tessitura of the vocal part would still be very challenging. Also, the references in the poetry to being a mother would offer an exigent layer to the interpretation that I fear would distract from the progression of the character and the poetic scheme.

### ***“Words”***

This aggressive opening to the cycle begins with an eight measure phrase that functions as a recurring theme shown in ex. 1. I created this phrase with the Baroque *ritornello* in mind, hoping to present a subject that would provide a foundation of tone from which the song could develop.

Aggressive ♩ = 170

Piano

6

S

ax - es af - ter whose stro - ke the

6

Pno.

ex. 1: “Words” m. 1 – 11.

This poem is distinctive from the others in that it presents exposition which sets up the protagonist and her plight. As the title suggests, this song refers to words which have impacted the protagonist in her life thus far. Words are first defined in the poem as “axes,” entities that have affected and hurt the protagonist. As she describes her response to the words as a “sap wells with tears,” the tempo slows and the first presentation of the tone row is prepared. This presentation is made in the left hand of the piano part in measures 29 – 32 as the vocalist sings “its mirror over the rock.” There is a certain shift in tonality when the row is presented, the harmony becomes unstable, illustrating the struggle of the protagonist to take back control of her life from the outside forces, the words, that have spawned ripples in her water. The first presentation of the tone row is shown in ex. 2.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 23 to 30. The vocal line (S) is in a soprano clef and contains the lyrics: "o - ver the rock to re - es - tab - lish - its mir -". The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is in a grand staff and features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment. The second system covers measures 31 to 37. The vocal line (S) contains the lyrics: "ror - o - ver the rock". The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is marked "Aggressive a tempo" and includes a dynamic marking "f". A fermata is placed over a chord in measure 32.

ex. 2: “Words” m. 23 – 37.

After this, the *ritornello* returns transitioning to a new poetic thought. In the following section, the protagonist contrastingly redefines words. She recalls images of grass “eating” the rock and a white skull and realizes that she is a temporal being living in a nature that seems to be infinitely powerful. This recollection leads to her redefinition of words. When the protagonist attempts to use words to her benefit, she finds them “dry and riderless,” that they have no influence on her destiny. She concludes, then, that her destiny is absolutely out of her control and that her anguish has served no further purpose besides hurting her. With the line “while from the bottom of a pool fixed stars govern a life,” the *ritornello* returns to conclude the song as is shown in ex. 3. To express the notion of being stuck in the same fate from beginning to end, I chose to first state the conclusive *ritornello* in the key a half step below the original. At measure 103, I then employ a phrase modulation back to the original key to represent the protagonist’s recognition of her static fate.

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system, measures 96-102, is marked "Aggressive". It features a vocal line (S) and piano accompaniment (Pno.). The vocal line has lyrics: "stars govern a life". The piano accompaniment is dense and rhythmic. The second system, measures 102-107, starts with a vocal line (S) and piano accompaniment (Pno.). The vocal line has lyrics: "a life!". The piano accompaniment includes a tempo marking "♩ = 190" and a dynamic marking "f".

ex. 3: “Words” m. 96 – 107.



***“On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover”***

The second song introduces a new character, the lover of the protagonist. The fatalism of “Words” seems to be forgotten as the introduction is composed to represent the protagonist’s infatuation with her lover. Measures 7 – 15 marks the entrance of the voice and definition of the statement of the primary theme that will eventually conclude the song. The poem is straightforward, describing the eyes and traits of the lover and providing subsequent insight to the protagonist’s character. From the entrance of the voice through measure 19, the poem is a direct warning about the lover. The lover’s eyes are described as if they have hypnotizing powers. The lover’s eyes cripple those who peer into them, turning lovely ladies into toads. Still, the protagonist is referring to this person as a lover and not as a pure villain. To illustrate this conflict, the harmony becomes increasingly unstable through measure 19.

In measure 20, the statement of the tone row is made in the vocal part using the text, “within these mirrors the world inverts, the fond admirer’s burning darts.” The row is presented here in a backwards mutation of itself, beginning with scale degree eleven and ending with scale degree zero. This decision was made in a conscious effort to allude to the inversion of the protagonist’s world presented at this point in the poem. The full statement of the backwards tone row is shown in ex. 4.

20  
S  
*p* with - in these mir - rors the world - in - verts

Pno.  
*p* RH LH

21  
S  
the fond ad - mi - r - er's burn - ing darts

Pno.  
RH LH LH

22  
S  
*mf* with - in these mir - rors the world - in - verts

Pno.  
*mf*

ex. 4: "On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover" m. 20 - 22.

The following section, marked *liberamente*, climaxes with the protagonist's decision to proceed with the pursuit of her lover. She justifies her decision by saying, "I sought my image in the scorching glass for what fire could damage a witches' face?" These confessions of masochistic tendencies pervade the poem as the protagonist acknowledges her attraction to the dark nature of her lover and acceptance of the dark nature of her own soul.

The introduction is presented again in measure 33 but is reincarnated using more dissonant harmony, representing the protagonist's declaration of her internal darkness. The conclusion of the song uses a transcription of the primary vocal theme and the aligning accompaniment but new text is presented, stating again the protagonist's decision to stare "in that furnace where beauties char." The poem closes as she declares to have "found radiant Venus reflected there" instead of the horrors that one might assume would follow the pursuit of a demon lover. This song offers a moment of relief from the anguish that suffuses the protagonist, yet still foreshadows the eventual triumph of this anguish over her life. After all, it is the demonic horrors of this lover, the experience of being charred that attract and consume the protagonist.

### ***"Morning Song"***

This is the first of two songs in which the protagonist addresses her child. "Morning Song" occurs as the protagonist wakes from sleep to the crying of her infant child. In measure 2, the piano paints this sound with the motive marked

*subito f*, which I have composed to sound like an infant's cry. This motive is shown in ex. 5.

The musical score for "Morning Song" measures 2-4 is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 2 and 3. The vocal line (S) is silent. The piano accompaniment (Pno.) features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line. A *subito f* dynamic marking is placed over a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The second system shows measures 3 and 4. The vocal line (S) enters with the lyrics "love set you". The piano accompaniment continues with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, marked *poco rit.*, and a steady eighth-note bass line. The tempo marking *a tempo* and dynamic marking *mp* are present in the second system.

ex. 5: "Morning Song" m. 2 - 4.

Similar to "On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover," the voice enters with a theme that will recur later in the song. However, this theme will be presented the second time in a different key and will not conclude the movement. This first phrase of the vocal part presents the protagonist's reflection on her child's birth. In my interpretation, the protagonist sings this entire song as she slowly rises from her bed and walks to her child's room to care for him/her. The song ends just before she picks up her child. At measure 12, a transition is made from the first to the second theme. Here, the poetry shifts to include the protagonist in her thoughts about her child. She sings, "our voices echo, magnifying your arrival." Though there is a clear

feeling of love expressed for her child, the protagonist also yields a growing disconnect and pessimistic view of their life. As the melody develops she sings, “new statue in a drafty museum / your nakedness shadows our safety / we stand round blankly as walls.” The nakedness and blankness of this thought is illustrated in the accompaniment by the gradual thinning of texture beginning in measure 14. This passage is shown in ex. 6.

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.).

**System 1 (Measures 13-14):**

- Measure 13:** The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piano part features a complex texture with sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and chords in the left hand.
- Measure 14:** The vocal line continues with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment begins to thin out, with a dynamic of piano (*p*). The texture is reduced to fewer notes, including a triplet in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

**System 2 (Measures 15-16):**

- Measure 15:** The vocal line continues with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a dynamic of piano (*p*). The texture remains thin, with a triplet in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.
- Measure 16:** The vocal line concludes with a dynamic of pianissimo (*pp*). The piano accompaniment features a dynamic of piano (*p*). The texture remains thin, with a triplet in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Additional markings include *quasi calando* above the vocal line in measure 16 and *LH* (Left Hand) below the piano line in measure 16.

18 S na - ked-ness sha - dows our safe - ty *mp* we —

18 Pno. *pp* *mp* LH 3

20 S *spirito* stand round blank - ly as walls I'm

20 Pno. *p* 3

ex. 6: "Morning Song" m. 13 – 21.

As the texture begins to coagulate again in measure 21, the presentation of the tone row is prepared. This presentation breaks the twelve tones into four groups of three and inverts each group in form. By this procedure, the scale degree pattern followed is 10, 4, 0 / 2, 9, 6 / 5, 8, 3 / 11, 7, 1. This frenzied arrangement is exacerbated by the *accelerando* and *molto mosso* markings that supplement the section. Each of these techniques is used here with intent to highlight the divergence

of mother and child expressed in the text. During this section, the protagonist sings, “I’m no more your mother than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow effacement at the wind’s hand.” This entire section is displayed in ex. 7.

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a vocal line (S) and a piano accompaniment (Pno.).

**System 1 (Measures 22-23):**

- Measure 22:** The vocal line begins with the lyrics "no more your mother than the". The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* for the voice and *mp* for the piano.
- Measure 23:** The vocal line continues with "cloud that dis-tills a mir - ror, a". The piano accompaniment continues with the triplet and bass line, with some melodic movement in the right hand.

**System 2 (Measures 24-25):**

- Measure 24:** The vocal line continues with "a". The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand.
- Measure 25:** The vocal line continues with "a". The piano accompaniment continues with the triplet and bass line, with some melodic movement in the right hand.

Tempo markings include *molto mosso* and *accel.* above the vocal line in measure 22.

Morning Song 7

**S**  
 25 *rit.* mir - ror *mf* a *sospirando* *a tempo* mir - ror to re - flect its

**Pno.**  
 25 *mf* *rit.* *a tempo*

**S**  
 27 own slow ef - face - ment at the wind's hand

**Pno.**  
 27 *8va*

ex. 7: "Morning Song" m. 22 - 28.



Measure 29 marks the recurrence of the primary theme. A poetic transition is made also, reverting to focus on the child's existence. Measure 37 references the introduction of the song, this time setting text above the piano. This choice was made to coincide with the text, "one cry and I stumble from bed..." The same "cry motive" from ex. 5 is used again to transition to the new material that will conclude the piece. A brief moment of humor is then found in measures 39 and 40 as the protagonist reflects on her appearance. Cued by the "cry motive" she sings, "[one cry and I stumble from bed] how heavy and floral in my Victorian nightgown." Marked *scherzando*, these two measures transition to the final section of poetry. This concluding section returns again to the protagonist's rumination on her child's existence, this time concentrating on the sounds the child makes while crying. These sounds embody the strange synthesis of love and obscurity that distinguishes this poem because the child is crying, seemingly upset, yet the protagonist simultaneously perceives this outburst as representing the miraculous fact that her child is alive, and in turn that she is alive.

The decision to conclude this song with an abrupt, fanatical, and dissonant ending was made to demonstrate the protagonist's severe internal conflict as she finally comes in contact with her crying child. This transition is shown in ex. 8.

46

S

clear vowels rise *ff* like ball -

Pno.

*f* *ff*

3

47

S

oons.

8va

Pno.

*strepitoso sfz*

ex. 8: "Morning Song" m. 46 – 49.

This section also designates the first time the protagonist contemplates abandoning hope or taking her own life. By this point, she is depressed and confused by the love she feels for her child and the despondence she feels regarding her own existence. The half step correlation between the two chords used in this section symbolizes this clash of emotions.

*“Child”*

The penultimate song begins with a thirteen measure interlude that segues directly from the end of “Morning Song.” The contrast between this interlude and the conclusion of “Morning Song” is extreme. Though both sections are written in 7/8, this new section is not nearly as agitated and is much more harmonically consonant. Through the cadence at measure 13, this introduction section was written to express the passing of time that happens between “Morning Song” and “Child.” For the protagonist, her child has grown out of infancy and their relationship has developed. Still, she carries with her a darkness that will not fade completely. In measures 14 and 15, the primary theme of this movement is stated. The theme, shown in ex. 9, is only two measures and will recur later in the song. Similar to “Morning Song,” but unlike the other movements, this primary theme will not conclude the movement.

Lovingly ♩. = 40

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 12-14) shows the piano accompaniment with dynamics *rit.*, *mp*, and *p*. The second system (measures 15-17) shows the vocal line (S) and piano accompaniment (Pno.). The vocal line begins at measure 15 with the text "mf your" and is marked "appassionato". The piano accompaniment continues with a *mp* dynamic.

ex. 9: "Child" m. 12 -17.

The entrance of the voice in this movement presents text that demonstrates the protagonist's love for her child. In fact, as she sings, "your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing," it seems that her love for her child is greatest, if not the only love in her life. I have musically illustrated this by composing a phrase that is sweet and light yet still carries tension in the subtle moments of dissonance and irregularity of the mixed meter. This can also be seen in ex. 9.

Measures 21 through 29 designate the second poetic section of the song, wherein the primary two measure theme is presented again. Here, the protagonist shares the joyful images that have inspired her child before now. She begins this section singing, "I want to fill it [her child's eye] with color and ducks, the zoo of the

new." I have characterized this section by settling the music into a regular compound meter of 6/8 and by centering the melody in a definite key center. The melody in this section is written around the G and F# major chords which function as the flat six and dominant chords in B minor.

As this second section begins to draw to a climax in measures 28 and 29, I prepare the presentation of the tone row that begins in measure 30. This mutation of the tone row first presents the reverse order of the second set of six followed by the original order of the first set of six. In sets of scale degrees, this permutation is expressed by: 11, 7, 1, 5, 8, 3 / 0, 4, 10, 6, 9, 2. This presentation is symbolic of the reflection between mother and child in the poem. The first six pitches in the tone row mathematically generate the second six pitches, making the first six pitches the "parent" of the second six pitches, the "child." The text used for this presentation in the vocal melody, "pool in which images should be grand and classical," is a statement in which the protagonist refers again to her child's eye. The second six pitches, the "child" set are used first in this presentation as it is the eye of the child that inspires the protagonist to make this poetic statement. The "parent" set is then used as the protagonist gives her input to the phrase, what she believes the images "should be." The complete presentation of the tone row is shown below in ex. 10.

30 *enigmatico*

S

*sfz* pool in \_\_\_\_\_ which

Pno.

*sfz*

32

S

i - - - - - ma -

Pno.

33

S

ges \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

34  
S *mf* should be grand and

Pno.

36  
S *Grave* clas-si-cal *deciso* *p* not this

Pno. *mp* *p* *pp*

ex. 10: "Child" m. 30 -38.

At measure 36, the concluding section of the song begins. Marked *grave*, the mood shifts drastically as the protagonist finally reveals the dark instigation of the song. With the text, "not this troubling wringing of hands, this dark ceiling without a star," the protagonist reveals that the poem has been a response to the troubling sadness of her child. In my interpretation, the protagonist realizes as she begins to sing this line that her child is troubled based on a model of her mother's own

sadness. This brings about an extended ending in which the text “this dark ceiling” is repeated. The decision to repeat this text was made in order to show the protagonist’s battle against her depression, her insurmountable dark ceiling. Setting this repeated text high in the singer’s range and contrasting its *forte* marking from the *piano* marking in the accompaniment, I attempted to illustrate the insurmountable ceiling as the word “ceiling” was sung. The final text of the song, “without a star,” is sung softly, as the protagonist gives up hope. This is the final moment of the work in which the protagonist still exists. The concluding section is shown in ex. 11 for reference.

39 S *lusigando con vigore*  
troub - ling wring - ing of hands this dark ceil - ing this

Pno. LH 8va *pp*

42 S *ff* dark *f* ceil - ing *mp* with - out a star

Pno. *perdendosi* *p* *ppp*

ex. 11: “Child” m. 39 – 44.



***“Mirror”***

The final movement of the cycle is the only movement not from the perspective of the protagonist. This song is the expression of the protagonist’s mirror who is unaware of her absence. To separate this piece from the others, I introduce the all twelve tones immediately in the piano part. The first two measures contain each of the twelve pitches as shown in ex. 12.

Spettrale ♩ = 86

Piano

*p*

*mp*

ex. 12: “Mirror” m. 1 - 4.

In measure 5, the voice enters with a freely composed melody, and the first text sung is the mirror describing its own virtues and characteristics. Measure 22 is the next significant marker as it denotes the end of the primary theme. Also, measure 22 contains the complete, original presentation of the tone row in the right hand of the piano part. This presentation is shown in ex. 13.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Soprano (S) and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part begins at measure 22 with a whole rest. In measure 23, the tempo is marked 'Adagio' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The lyrics 'I am not cruel' are written under the notes. The Piano part starts at measure 22 with a complex, arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand and a more melodic line in the right hand. The dynamic is 'mp'. The key signature changes from B-flat major to A major in measure 23.

ex. 13: "Mirror" m. 22 – 23.

In measure 23, a transition is made to tonality based in A major, padding the mirror's first mention of pseudo-sentiment, a poetic construct tailored for this work that reappears throughout the song. This is expressed as the mirror sings, "I am not cruel, only truthful." There is not a direct sentiment given in this line, which preserves the mirror's objectiveness, but the negation of cruelty insinuates the mirror's human-like desire not to be cruel.

Measure 29 marks a return to atonality on the text "four cornered." Shown in ex. 14, quartal harmony is employed at this moment as a gesture of text painting and to transition smoothly from tonality to atonality.

28  
S  
eye *mf* of a lit - tle god *mp* four cor - nered

28  
Pno.  
*mf* *p*

33  
S  
on - ly truth - ful

33  
Pno.  
*accel. (affrettando)* *mf*

3

ex. 14: "Mirror" m. 28 - 36.

In measure 37, a chain reaction of recurring material is initiated beginning with an variation on material from the interlude that opens "Child." Marked *capriccioso*, this section develops into a frenzied flashback that ends with the mirror remembering the concentrated stare of the protagonist, in older age, "searching my reaches for what she really is."

In measure 63, material from “Words” is used as the mirror recalls the protagonist looking hastily into “those liars the candles or the moon” before accepting the mirrors faithful reflection. A tone row permutation then transitions to the next section and reference. This presentation states the second six pitches forwards followed by the reversed statement of the first six pitches. This can be seen as an inversion of the process used in ex. 10 from “Child.” This permutation is displayed below in measures 85 – 87 of ex. 15.

*ex. 15: “Mirror” m. 84 – 87.*

Next, the tone row from “On Looking Into the Eyes of a Demon Lover” is used briefly, setting new text that describes the protagonist’s reaction to the mirror’s faithful reflection. In this section, the mirror sings, “she rewards me with tears, an agitation of hands...”

Quickly, the music transitions to the primary theme from “Morning Song” as the mirror sings the text, “each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.” In a poetic reflection, the tears of the protagonist take the place of the tears of her child. It is now her cries that inspire the mirror to reflection. A complete statement of the “Morning Song” theme is made with the progression of the “Mirror” poem text superimposed before the music shifts again now to the concluding piano part from “Child.”

No text is set over this section, but the *perdendosi* finale from “Child” serves here as a transition back to the primary theme that began “Mirror.” In this final phrase of the cycle, the mirror sings, “in me she has drowned and in me she rises day after day like a terrible fish.” The cycle ends with the presentation of the tone row shown in ex. 13.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

This song cycle was composed over the course of six months of work and study with Dr. Chih-Long Hu at East Tennessee State University. The project has forced me to use new compositional techniques and has led me to new discoveries concerning melody writing, the possibilities of art song, and use of controlled harmony and the piano. Also, I have all but wringed out nearly every musical symbol I can think of to represent a mirror. As a reflection of the poetry I selected, I think the project has been very successful. I wanted to create a work that told a story, and by combining Plath’s poems in a unique chronology, I feel I have created a

powerful protagonist and a composition that speaks poignantly back to myself. Though the protagonist in the cycle cannot overcome her internal discourse and darkness, her love and sincerity is reflected in her child, her mirror, and ultimately, her song. More than anything, I hope that by experiencing this work, one who needed it could realize that giving up hope only leads to irreversible anguish and that the only way to crawl from darkness in this life is to hold steadfast to love and truth. I have ascertained many things throughout composing this piece, but this is the most crucial thing I have come to understand and I believe it to be my purpose in this work.