Sam Smart

Ms. Curmano

LA P.6

1 Feb. 2017

“Cut” TPCASTT

Cut

By Sylvia Plath

1 What a thrill -

My thumb instead of an onion.

The top quite gone

Except for a sort of hinge

5 Of skin,

A flap like a hat,

Dead white.

Then that red plush.

Little pilgrim,

10 The Indian's axed your scalp.

Your turkey wattle

Carpet rolls

Straight from the heart.

I step on it,

15 Clutching my bottle

Of pink fizz. A celebration, this is.

Out of a gap

A million soldiers run,

Redcoats, every one.

20 Whose side are they on?

O my

Homunculus, I am ill.

I have taken a pill to kill

25 The thin

Papery feeling.

Saboteur,

Kamikaze man -

The stain on your

30 Gauze Ku Klux Klan

Babushka

Darkens and tarnishes and when

The balled

Pulp of your heart

35 Confronts its small

Mill of silence

How you jump -

Trepanned veteran,

Dirty girl,

40 Thumb stump.

**Title:** The word “cut” suggests pain. Before reading this poem, I assumed the word either

referred to a physical cut from a knife or something similar, or else an emotional cut of betrayal.

The single word titles of most of Plath’s poems are intriguing because of the noun, which is

either the essence of the poem in a word or a completely different idea and mood than the poem

expresses.

**Paraphrase:** Stanza one describes the thrill of noticing a cut, and the details of a thumb sliced

open instead of an onion, ending abruptly and moving into stanza two, which describes the

wound more gruesomely with the colors of “dead white” and “red plush”(7-8). Stanza three

shows a seemingly rambling train of thought, referring to the cut thumb as a scalped pilgrim,

then moving into the metaphor of the dripping thumb as a fizzing bottle at a celebration, and

ending with the description of redcoated soldiers running from the wound. Stanza four asks

whose side these soldiers are on, then mentions that the narrator has “taken a pill to kill”(24). In

stanza five the thumb is described, then addressed as a saboteur and suicidal. Stanza six

describes the red stain on the gauze and mentions semblance to the Ku Klux Klan and a

babushka, then refers to a heart confronting silence, presumably still addressing the wound. In

the last stanza the subject is said to jump, and three things are mentioned - a “trepanned veteran,

dirty girl”, and “thump stump”(38-40).

**Connotation:**

Metaphor: “my bottle of pink fizz”(15-16). The many metaphors in this poem show the

narrator’s opinion of the wound by what it is referred to. In the beginning the thumb is

sympathized with, even celebrated, but later becomes a suicidal plotter in her mind.

Enjambment: “The balled Pulp of your heart Confronts its small Mill of silence”(33-36). The

intense enjambment in the latter half of the poem creates a frantic mood and shows the rambling

train of thought of the narrator.

Apostrophe: “Little pilgrim, The Indian’s axed your scalp”(9-10). The narrator addresses the

wounded finger many times throughout the poem with varying degrees of paranoia. This shows

some mental instability, as well as revealing the narrator’s dark thoughts through the images to

which the thumb is compared.

Personification: “How you jump”(37). The wound is treated as a character throughout the poem,

making the lack of other humans very obvious. When the thumb is personified to the point of

becoming the other character, the reader wonders why the narrator seems alone.

Rhyme: “A million soldiers run, Redcoats, every one”(18-19). The rhyme in the poem appears

very irregularly and can be overlooked, becoming more common in the second half. This could

be to draw attention to important statements, or to strengthen the shift in the narrator’s thoughts

by changing the poem’s pattern.

**Attitude/Tone:** The attitude in the poem begins with the feel of nonchalance, as the narrator

seems literally cut off from the situation. Words such as “thrill”(1), “quite”(3), “flap”(6),

“little”(9), “wattle”(11), and “fizz”(16) set a careless and breezy mood which is slightly

disconcerting while discussing a bloody finger. Later in the poem, however, the tone becomes

distinctly paraniod, panicked and even accusing. Words such as “kill”(24), “saboteur”(27),

“stain”(29), “Ku Klux Klan”(30), “darkens”(32) and “dirty”(39) are used to show a tone of

suspicion and a more morbid train of thought.

**Shift:** The shift in the poem is hard to detect with the narrator appearing mentally unstable, but

there is a change from neutral to negative at the beginning of stanza five, where the speaker

begins to wonder “Whose side are they on?”(20). From that point the metaphors become

considerably darker and the thumb becomes an enemy rather than something to be sympathized

with or celebrated, as shown by the shift in word choice.

**Title:** The title “Cut” seems to be referring to a literal injury, but the poem’s lack of other

characters hints that there may have been an emotional wound through the loss of someone as

well. If the narrator has recently lost a close friend or family member, the apostrophe of the

finger would be explained, as well as the paranoid sense that everything is against her.

**Theme:** The poem “Cut” by Sylvia Plath reveals that emotional wounds can be devastating to

one’s ability to trust.