

The Rival Summary

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Summary

The Rival is Compared to the Moon, Beautiful but Destructive: The poem is about a person whom the speaker sees as a rival. We can assume that the speaker is Sylvia Plath herself. The rival could be her husband, Ted Hughes. The speaker directly talks to her rival. She compares the rival to the moon. Both look beautiful, but are also uncaring, distant, and destructive. The moon does not have its own light—it borrows light from the sun. The speaker says the rival is the same. He takes attention or glory from others. The moon looks like it is sad because of her (moon) **“O-mouth.”** But the rival has no feelings. He does not care.

The Speaker Feels Sad, Hurt, and Death: The speaker feels that the rival has the power to make everything lifeless, like turning into stone. It means the speaker feels sad and hurt around her rival. She feels like she is waking up in a tomb (mausoleum). It means the rival brings a feeling of death or emptiness. The rival is in the room, tapping on the table, searching for cigarettes. It implies the rival is indifferent and careless to the speaker. He seems to want to say something hateful, something the speaker cannot answer.

The Rival Never Stops Hurting Her: In the third stanza, the speaker once again compares her rival to the moon. She means that the rival is worse than the moon. The moon also treats people badly. But she (the moon) is powerless in the daylight. But the rival never stops making her feel bad. The rival's dissatisfaction and complaints come regularly, like letters through the mailslot. The letters appear harmless, **“white and blank.”** But they are actually like carbon monoxide gas. It is a deadly, suffocating gas that we cannot see or smell. It means the rival's dissatisfaction and complaints suffocate the speaker.

The Rival's Influence: No matter where the rival goes—even far away in Africa—the speaker cannot escape his influence. She feels that no day is free from the news of the rival. The rival is always thinking about her and affecting her life.

Overall, the poem is about rivalry. It shows how rivalry can bring resentment, jealousy, and pain. The poem makes the readers feel that they are reading about their own rivals.

