

Notes on 'The Applicant'

- This poem examines the ideals that society imposes on what true functions a wife and husband serve. Women are represented as fragile, docile and vacuous creatures, almost automated and mechanical versions of a person. Men are portrayed to desire and accept these qualities as being necessary parts of a good woman and wife.
- Plath refers to marriage as a man's 'last resort'. This devalues the idea of marriage as an institution.
- Plath uses humour and irony to comment on the state of marriage. Marriage is shown to be a practicality rather than a love relationship, hence the concept of an 'applicant' rather than a spouse or partner. This humour leads way to anger at the apathy and conformity of both men and women as part of this arrangement.
- Women in the poem are seen to have very restricted roles, keeping the husband happy, sewing and cooking. These are contextual representation of the housewives of the time, and the reason for Plath's resentment. A woman's only value is their capability for nurturing, and the security that they provide for a male. This is seen even through war, where women provide a secure and stable environment and "keep the home fires burning."
- The repetition of the pronoun "it" throughout the poem reduces the sense of the woman's identity, establishing her anonymity and silencing her perspective.
- The close connection between the capitalist economic system, the patriarchal family structure and the general depersonalisation of human relations is suggested by the use of job-seeking as a central metaphor in the poem. (from: Gale Literary Databases)