

Echoes of Yellow

The yellow paint peels back,
An honest attack.
Revealing layers of memory,
each flake a ghost of a man
whose presence haunts every crack.

His favourite colour stains
the corners and ceilings—
a sickly hue,
once innocent but now
tainted by cruelty,
where warmth became cold rage.

Walls and floors, every surface
bear his mark,
the house a shrine to his voice,
each room an echo chamber
of a man whose outward cheer
masked a darker edge,
his yellow hair a cruel disguise,
a false light hiding what lay inside.

Mirrors, covered in mourning cloths,
hide the pain of seeing
his face in mine.
“You’re so much like your father,”
they say,
a refrain that crawls under my skin like a thousand small bugs,
as if his essence is embedded
in my very flesh,
a second skin I simply cannot shed.

I loathe my skin, my bones,
my eyes, my feet—
all echo his name.
I tried to change everything,
using dye and piercings to hide his mark,

a desperate attempt
to erase his shadow.

Yet I remain unchanged,
still the same little girl,
forever linked to his memory.

I bled red while he was around,
not just when washing the dye from my hair,
but when scrubbing my cuts in the shower,
blood mixing with water, a painful blur.

I cried at the sound of his return,
tried to block him out,
but now his shouts linger,
haunting the corners of this prison.
Time stands still in this house,
a prison where comfort is a cruel joke.

They dismantled everything I loved,
stripping away every comfort,
the razor, once my silent friend,
now a stark reminder of despair,
its edge a metaphor for my anguish,
used nightly,
bandages wrapping my wounds
in a futile attempt to heal.
Only leaving me to resemble a mummy.

My mother drifts,
her denial a veil
over her eyes,
each day blending into the next,
a monotonous loop of faded joy
and lost sorrow.

She can't bear to look at me,
a living ghost of a past
she wishes to forget.
I remember her as a child of ten,

before fear took hold,
when she called me her little doll.
Now she avoids me,
as if I am a plague,
a reminder of the man
she once loved, that turned out to be the devil.

I can't sleep here,
so I retreat to the cellar,
where even silence
is filled with his harsh words
clawing at the walls.
I wonder if escape is possible—
nothing is quiet,
everything is overwhelmingly loud.

Time freezes in every room I enter,
childhood nightmares still swarm,
and I cling to my nightlight,
its soft glow is the only comfort
in this vast, empty house.

Each night, I dream of escape,
yet doubt shadows my hopes.
I long to freeze time,
to return to the safety of the womb,
where life was a gentle murmur
and certainty was all I knew.

To be reborn,
a resurrection of innocence,
a plea to undo the past
and find solace in the beginning
unmarked by pain.

In this house of echoes,
where days blend into nights,
I search for a fleeting moment
of warmth in the unknown.
Yet each night, I lie awake,

longing for the comfort
of a time long lost,
a future that never came.

In my sorrow,
I find a bitter solace
in the cold embrace of the razor—
my closest companion
in the dark,
a silent partner
in this theatre of despair.

Critical Commentary:

Writing 'Echoes of Yellow' was a deeply personal process, one that led me to confront the limitations of critique itself. How do you evaluate something that is more felt than thought? Like many of Sylvia Plath's confessional works, the poem resists neat analysis, and yet, as a literature student, I find myself in the strange position of trying to unpack it. In attempting this, I was equally inspired by Louis MacNeice's existential abstraction, particularly how his works meditate on space and memory, which mirrors my preoccupations in the poem.

The central image—yellow—dominates the poem's emotional and symbolic landscape. My use of yellow owes much to MacNeice's poem 'Autobiography', where he recalls his mother's yellow dress, a memory filled with warmth and nostalgia. I took that tender image and subverted it. In 'Echoes of Yellow', the colour takes on a more unsettling role, representing decay and cruelty rather than comfort. The peeling yellow paint speaks to a stripping away of layers—of family history, identity, and memory. This metaphor of disintegration, of something once warm now turning cold, runs throughout the poem. I wanted to show how objects and colours that might seem innocent, or even comforting, can be transformed by trauma—a technique Plath so often employs in her work, like the tulips that become suffocating or the mirror that traps rather than reflects.

While MacNeice uses the external world to create a tension between the physical and the metaphysical, I wanted to push this further, collapsing any distinction between the two. In my poem, the house and its walls are not separate from the speaker's emotional state; they are her emotional state. The phrase "his mark" is both literal and symbolic—the father's presence is oppressive not just within the home, but within the speaker's identity itself. I wanted to explore how our surroundings can mirror the internal, how trauma can become embedded in the very fabric of a place, of a self. This is something Plath does so well, particularly in *The Bell Jar*, where the external world constantly presses in on the protagonist's internal conflict.

The poem's structure was a deliberate choice, a way to reflect the speaker's fragmentation. The enjambment, the uneven rhythm—it all mirrors the way trauma breaks down any sense of continuity or coherence. I found myself drawn to MacNeice's experimental use of structure, where he lets form follow the philosophical questions raised in his poems. Nevertheless, in 'Echoes of Yellow,' the form is more emotionally driven. The irregularity, the

disjointedness, reflects the speaker's instability, her constant push and pull between confronting her trauma and trying to escape it.

What struck me most during the writing process was how central the idea of inheritance became to the poem. The mirrors, covered in mourning cloths, serve as a metaphor for the speaker's inability to look at herself, to face the weight of her family history. There is a deep sense of inherited pain here, something that becomes more explicit in the recurring phrase "You're so much like your father." It is a wound that keeps opening, much like Plath's exploration of identity and heredity in 'Daddy'. In my poem, the speaker's futile attempts to alter her appearance—dying her hair, getting piercings—reflect a deeper desire to escape this inheritance, but the poem suggests that these markers of identity are inescapable, that they run deeper than the surface.

The father figure in 'Echoes of Yellow' became a way for me to explore how oppressive forces in our lives can shape us in ways we do not fully understand. His 'yellow hair' is symbolic of this false light—outwardly bright, but corrupted beneath. It's a false image, much like the cheer he projects, which hides the darker truths of the past. This motif of appearance versus reality runs through the poem, destabilising any sense of security the speaker might find in her surroundings or herself.

The razor, introduced in the final stanza, was not an easy image to write. It is both a literal object and a painful metaphor for the speaker's anguish. In writing it, I was most influenced by Plath's raw honesty in poems like 'Lady Lazarus', where self-harm becomes a way of externalising deep emotional pain. I wanted the razor in my poem to embody this duality—it is both a symbol of the speaker's internal suffering and a reminder of the physical toll that trauma can take. The poem does not offer closure, because, for the speaker, there is no closure—just the nightlight she clings to, a small, flickering symbol of the hope she cannot quite grasp.

'Echoes of Yellow' is a poem about the inescapability of the past. The yellow paint on the walls, the mirrors, the father's presence—all of it speaks to how memory and trauma are interwoven with identity. There is no separating the speaker from her history, no neat resolution. I think that is why the poem's fragmented form works so well—it reflects the ongoing, unresolved nature of that struggle. Like MacNeice's poems, which often pose philosophical questions without offering easy answers, my poem resists a tidy conclusion. And like

Plath's confessional style, it lays bare the emotional complexity of a life marked by inherited pain.

Ultimately, writing this poem was an act of confronting those contradictions, of exploring how trauma reshapes even the most innocent of spaces and objects. It's a deeply personal piece, but also one that, I hope, speaks to universal themes of memory, identity, and the haunting presence of the past. 'Echoes of Yellow' is my attempt to capture the emotional truth of these experiences in a way that mirrors the intensity and complexity of the poets who inspired me, while also finding my voice within that tradition.