

Anne sexton and sylvia plath: minds of distortion and darkness essay sample

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath were both great minds, creative individuals, and some of the greatest poetic individuals of the twentieth century. Though Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath were great poets, they were also obsessed with death, darkness, and plagued with manic depression. They yearned for death, and both were able to achieve their life goal of dying. Their poetry is a direct result of their morbid minds and the strange obsessions they shared during their several years of friendship.

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton did not pull their style, creativity and ideas out of nowhere. Both Sexton and Plath suffered troubled childhoods, Plath's father died when she was only eight, creating a life long resentment, and Sexton's father was abusive and alcoholic. There are only one or two flaws to this "reason" if you will for why Sexton and Plath used such strange and dark ideas in their poetry. Sylvia Plath's father died when she was eight, she resented him and felt that he had betrayed her by leaving her on this earth without a father figure. Plath searched for relief from this and wanted to make her father into a person that she would have a reason to resent and dislike. For Plath this was a Nazi. Plath has many uses of Nazi allusions of the Holocaust, explaining the evil of Nazis, and uses them to describe her father. In "Lady Lazarus" Plath makes a reference to a "Nazi lampshade". This reference means that the Nazis made lampshades from the skin of dead Jews. Throughout many of these poems, if one knows about the "method to her madness" they would now that she is creating parallels between how horrible someone like her father was, to how horrible and Nazi was.

This same aspect is also seen in "Daddy". Along with these analogies she also pulls in many aspects of her strange obsession with the Holocaust. Plath names many different Nazi death camps, as well as use of other strange German words in reference to her father and her doctor. What I find to be a little odd is why Anne Sexton uses so many Nazi Allusions in her poetry. There is no obvious or somewhat secluded reason for why she used them in so much of her poetry. Anne Sexton wrote a poem entirely about Nazi's and the evil of people in the world, in the poem "After Auschwitz". From the conclusion I have drawn is that Anne Sexton shared the same strange obsession, and Plath may have instilled this idea on her, due to the fact that they were drawn together by death. Anne Sexton also uses this in two other poems "Daddy Warbucks" and "Godfather Death".

Another strange finding that I have taken notice to, are the style and ways that Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton committed suicide. Though they both killed themselves in entirely different ways, they were both alike in the sense that they wanted to die like Jews in the Holocaust. This takes their obsession to a whole other level. Plath as you may know gassed herself out in her kitchen by creating her own gas chamber, similar to the style that many Jews were killed in death camps like Auschwitz and Sobibor. This leads me to believe that this could be a potential reason for Anne Sexton writing the poem "After Auschwitz", since it was written after Sylvia Plath's death. It is true that before Plath died she left a document stating that she wanted to die like a Jew in the Holocaust. If one takes notice in "Lady Lazarus" she speaks of the Holocaust and incorporates it with her attempts at committing

suicide. This leads me to believe that Sexton copied this style in her own suicide. Not to say that Sexton does not have her own ideas, she was a quite diverse and started the style of “confessional” poetry.

But Sexton also killed herself in a way that a Jewish person would have died in early death camps. This is a fact known by little, and mostly only people either interested in the History of The Holocaust or obsessed with The Holocaust. Anne Sexton, as the story goes, got into her garage and asphyxiated herself by inhaling large amounts of carbon monoxide from her car. Though this seems like a very trite or cliché way to die, it was actually the way that Nazi’s killed Jews at Auschwitz and other prison camps before the use of Zyklon B and cyanide. Nazi officers would round up Jews in the back of box vans and would turn on the vans. While on route to the next location, these Jews would be killed because the vans used recirculating exhaust systems. If Anne Sexton was trying to leave clues and bits of pieces of information, she was very successful, unless this massive amount of information is just by coincidence (Which I do not think it is).

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton did not just have a fixation with death. Their fixation or obsession with death was what drew the two together and would in the end tear them apart. When Sylvia Plath met Anne Sexton at Robert Lowell’s writing classes in Boston, she thought of Sexton as a chain smoker with a problem, but when the two formally met they had totally different views on each other. They were drawn together and developed a strong friendship because of this that would last until the grave. During the final days of their lives, though 11 years apart, it was their fixation with death and

manic lows that pushed them to suicide. When Sylvia Plath died 11 years before Sexton, Sexton was disturbed. Anne Sexton felt that she took the death that was hers and she took it from her. The events in each other's lives dramatically affected the other. Sexton wanted to die when Plath did, but she held back and was told by her psychiatrist she had reasons of her own to live.

The greatest (as in large) similarity or parallel that Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath shared was that they were both victims of mental illnesses. Sexton and Plath suffered from Manic Depression, or known by some as being "bipolar". Sexton and Plath would experience manic highs in which they would be in the best of moods and have creative spurs and flourish as a person. But equally, when experiencing manic low, they would experience harsh depression and feelings of sorrow, hate, and wanting to die. It was on one of these manic lows that Sexton and Plath each committed suicide. Sexton and Plath put their experiences into their poetry and their actions as adults. Plath and Sexton would obsessively write poetry to help with their mental illnesses and often express their anger through that instead of actions of hatred and death. In Sexton's poem "Music Swims Back to Me" she describes what it was like for her to be institutionalized and how she remembers it. Her poetry is these direct effects of her childhood and mental illness.

What most people know about Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath is the normal biography about their works as poets, and about their death. What most people don't know are some of the strange actions and things that Plath and Sexton did as adults and children. Anne Sexton though a loving mother and

supportive parent, abused and beat her children while her husband was away in the navy. Sexton also had vast sexual relationships with several of her psychiatrists, which were meaningless love that would even make Sexton's depression worse. When Linda Gray Sexton was just 15 years old, she woke up on many a mornings with her mother "caressing" her and kissing her on the lips in attempts to make out with her.

Linda Gray Sexton was disgusted by her mother's continual incestuous acts and would vomit and was caused trauma by these events. Anne Sexton even attempted to have sexual relations and intercourse with her daughter. These things are disturbing to the average person, because Sexton has been molded by most lit books and encyclopedias as nice women that had some mental issues (Not to say that Sexton wasn't a nice person). Sexton and Plath had these problems, but weren't able to fix them. I believe some of Sexton's untreated problems were the result of how her doctor felt that a sexual relationship was more important than actually helping her deal with her manic depression.

Their mental conditions were not only a result a of manic depression, but some of their problems were a result from psychiatric analysis and electroconvulsive therapy at mental hospitals, such as McLean in Boston, where Plath and Sexton were both admitted. These psychiatric analyses and electroconvulsive therapy often left patients more distraught and would propel them toward suicide, Sexton and Plath are both prime examples. The odds were supposed to be high in treating patients, but Sexton and Plath were both in the small percentage affected.

Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath were two of the greatest and poetic minds of the twentieth Century. They were two of a kind; they shared strange obsessions, likes, dislikes, and the want and need for death. In the end, Sexton and Plath got what they wanted, but took it selfishly only thinking of what they wanted. Though they are gone, they will be remembered as the greatest “confessional” and “feminist” poets of all time.