

# Sylvia plath research



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 during the peak of the great depression when unemployment soared over 20%. Although she was subject to a life filled with hardships and anguish, Sylvia allowed those hardships to shape her as a socially adept young woman. Plath excelled academically, and allowed her writing to be influenced by her rough past. After marrying a fellow poet Ted Hughs and having two children, she published hundreds of works that told of her tragic life and unreasonable thoughts.

Soon, poetry wasn't enough to keep Plath sane after an affair and divorce and she ended her life in 1963 after many failed attempts. Through and through, Sylvia Plath was a very bright, mid-20th century poet who will remain forever famous for her proficient achievements in writing, trying marriage, and history of abuse and suicide. Sylvia Plath hailed from Boston, Massachusetts. Her father, Otto, taught and meticulously studied biology at Boston University. Otto fell extremely ill in the late 1930's and ended up diagnosing himself with lung cancer.

He refused to seek medical advice for his condition because of the lack of advanced medicine. In 1940, after dealing with the horrible ailment for years, Otto was left with no choice but to visit a medical professional because of an advanced and crippling infection in his foot. The doctor visit was a shocking one that revealed Otto had actually been living and poorly cooperating with very advanced diabetes. Otto's leg had to be removed developing gangrene to prevent the infection from spreading, and he lived out the remainder of his days in the hospital in a disappointing condition.

Otto Plath passed away on the evening of November 5, 1940. After hearing the news of her beloved father's death, the mature 8 year-old proclaimed, “

"I'll never speak to God again". The death of her father was the inspiration for much of her later years of poetry. Sylvia Plath's mother, Aurelia, had a very complicated relationship with her daughter. Sylvia often claimed to hate her mother within her works of writing. Sylvia believed that, in a way, her father killed himself by not visiting the doctor when he should have this upset and dismayed her deeply.

Plath was very adept in the field of learning and understanding and had been two years ahead in school since she was small. After a move from the coast to inland Massachusetts with Aurelia's parents, Sylvia enrolled in her new school hoping that learning about familiar topics and being with children her own age would assist in numbing the pain of her recent life changes. Sylvia Plath continued to be very confused by her father's passing despite her simple schooling. She continued to write and publish her works and art in the school newspaper.

When high school rolled around, she entered a class with a very tough English teacher who challenged her brain in great ways. In 1949, Plath and another student from the rigorous English class wrote a response to an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* titled "A Reasonable Life in a Mad World". The article stated that man must rely on the ability to reason in order to further society. Plath's response argued that, "beyond reason, one needed to connect with and embrace inner divinity and spirituality to fully live". Finishing out high school, Plath always earned spectacular marks and gained recognition as a writer, artist and editor.

When Sylvia was a senior, her original story "And Summer Will Not Come Again" was published in *Seventeen* magazine. She also worked very hard to

publish her own poem nationally when " Bitter Strawberries" was placed in The Christian Science Monitor in 1950. Sylvia Plath only found success in her young writing career after hours of laborious writing and even more hours spend submitting her articles and short stories to various newspapers, magazines, and publishers. More often than not, Plath would receive a burning rejection, which would make her lose faith in herself as a writer.

She developed a cycle which consisted of stress, which often lead to illness. That illness would cause her to become more depressed, which would stress her out to a greater degree. This became an all too familiar slippery slope. Slowly, but surely, her wounds would heal when she did win a publication contest or come upon other means of success. In the later part of 1950 Sylvia enrolled in Smith College in North Hampton, Massachusetts. She continued to build up her reputation as a respected writer by publishing in large-circulation works such as Seventeen .

In 1952, she won Mademoiselle's college fiction contest with her short story " Sunday At The Mintons". Throughout her college years, Plath also searched for a soul mate almost to the extreme of being labeled promiscuous. Her most serious relationship throughout college was with Dick Norton. However, she also became victim to periodic waves of depression, insomnia and thoughts of suicide, as her sinister journal entry shows: " To annihilate the world by annihilation of one's self is the deluded height of desperate egoism. The simple way out of all the little brick dead ends we scratch our nails against....

I want to kill myself, to escape from responsibility, to crawl back abjectly into the womb. " One day Sylvia's mothers became aware of healing scars along

her daughters . When she asked about them, Sylvia admitted, “ I wanted to see if I had the guts” and explained “ I want to die! ” She was taken to see a psychiatrist within the next few days. Following many sessions and a diagnosis of severe depression, Plath was subject to the most modern means of treatment at the time, electroshock. Her first treatment began on July 29, and she developed insomnia and a harsh immunity to sleeping pills.

On August 24, 1953 Sylvia was left alone, and then smashed the family lockbox to take several of the sleeping pills that had been kept away from her. Sylvia then left a note that told her family that she went for a walk. After this, she entered a crawl space under the porch and ingested about 40 of the forbidden sleeping pills. When the Plath family learned of Sylvia’s absence, an all-out search was launched and the city and nation was made aware of the missing women. Days later, the story continued to circulate in newspapers, including the information about the sleeping pills that Sylvia’s mother had discovered.

Aurelia explained that her daughter had been upset over her inability to write as of late. Sylvia was finally found just a few days later when somebody heard moaning coming from her hiding place. She was rushed to a hospital in a pathetic half-coma state. Within a few months of electroshock treatment, Sylvia Plath was returned home and continued her study at Smith College. In April of 1954, Plath began to write poetry again after her long dry spell. She also began to bleach her hair a magnificent, platinum blonde to go with her “ new persona”.

The spring of 1954 was one to behold for Sylvia Plath. She was granted a \$1, 200 scholarship for her next year in attendance at Smith College; she also

was awarded a grant to attend a Harvard Summer School. She also won a prize to commend her talent for writing poetry, which greatly lifted her spirits. During the later months of the year at Harvard, she entered into a strange affair with a much older man. She continued to date the older man; even after she claimed that he raped her and almost caused her to bleed to death. This was the beginning of a long string of semi-abusive lovers.

Sylvia then sailed to England and attended classes at Cambridge while furthering her career and love life. The hectic schedule of hers eventually caused her chronic illnesses. Plath confessed in her diary that she saw most British men as "pallid, neurotic homosexuals" whom she had no interest in perusing. Sylvia spent the holiday season roaming Europe with an old American fling. Though she wanted the relationship between the two to strengthen and intensify, he felt the exact opposite-and was even seriously involved with another woman.

It was easy for the loss of a loved one like this to bring back the lonely memories of her late father, and Sylvia fell back into a deep depression. One night she attended a party in celebration of the launch of a Cambridge magazine. Along with many other poets, Ted Hughes was one of Plath's greatest inspirations. After arriving at the celebration, she laid eyes on a "big, dark hunky boy, the only one... huge enough for me," and had to know everything about him right away. Hughes and Plath finally met in person and seemed to have the same kind of feisty personality that would perfectly suit the other.

While walking back to the college in a daze from her recent rendezvous, a male friend who saw the couple together warned her of Hugh's seductive

ways, she disregarded. Ted Hughes had earlier written a short poem about a jaguar. In response, over the next days, Plath wrote a poem titled "Pursuit" in which a woman is being stalked and chased by a jungle cat. Sylvia spent much time with the "dreamy" Hughes throughout that spring and the two even started to discuss a marriage. Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes were secretly wed on June 16, 1956 in London as to not jeopardize Sylvia's grants and scholarships.

The new husband and wife spent that summer on the coasts of Italy and Spain enjoying their youth and happiness. They wrote, studied, swam, and enjoyed the small town. Sylvia wrote a great amount of upbeat poetry this summer, including: "Fiesta Melons", "Alicante Lullaby", "The Goring", "The Beggars", "Spider", "Rhyme", "Dream With Clam Diggers", and "Epitaph For Fire And Flower". Sylvia told a good friend (in secrecy) about an episode of rage that Hughes had in which he attempted to strangle her. She also stated that she wanted death to come upon her, but it did not.

This is when she started to question the seemingly perfect marriage. The next August, after returning to England from their various trips, Plath finally met her in-laws for the first time. The Hughes family was very interested in things like horoscopes and hypnosis. Sylvia found this way of living enthralling. Ted and Sylvia Hughes spent the summer of 1959 traveling and enjoying America on their drive to visit Sylvia's Aunt Frieda in California. Sylvia and Ted made a stop in Montana where a bear broke into their car and ransacked the area for food.

The strain of the Hughes' marriage became evident when Sylvia wrote the poem "The Fifty-Ninth Bear" in which a bear breaks into the couple's car

and mauled Sylvia's husband to death. That December, after Plath discovered that she was pregnant, she and Ted made way for England. After living with Ted's parents for a short while, Plath and Hughes moved into a small apartment in London in the winter of 1960. Ted and Sylvia Hughes continued to write in the nine months of her pregnancy and Plath even published a book. Sylvia Hughes gave birth to Frieda Hughes at seven pounds and four ounces.

Her baby girl was named after her beloved aunt. On January 17, 1962 Sylvia birthed a nine pound eleven ounce boy named Nicholas. She noticed how disappointed Ted seemed to be with the boy and he became very distant in the weeks following the birth. Plath, as an early release, began to write in the very tired hours of the morning. The Spring after her son's birth, she wrote "Little Fugue", "An Appearance", "Crossing the Water", "Among the Narcissi", and "Pheasant". Two poems were written following a visit from David and Assia, a couple which lived in a neighboring apartment.

During their visit, Sylvia became very distraught at how openly Ted and Assia seemed to flirt. She said nothing, but rather wrote. After returning home from an outing with her mother one morning, Sylvia entered her home to the phone ringing and rushed to answer it. Ted, in a panic, also rushed to the phone but fell down the stairs. When Sylvia picked up, she heard a woman attempting to change her tone of voice, but Sylvia easily recognized the voice. It was Assia. After Ted spoke very few words and hung up, Plath ripped the phone wire from its socket. She knew all too well what that call meant.



The reason for Ted's strange outings had also become clear. As the dull London winter dragged on, Sylvia's depression only worsened. On the morning of February 11, 1963, she headed downstairs and, after sealing the entry ways in her kitchen, she knelt over the gas stove and turned it on. Her body was discovered by the nurse who was scheduled to check up on her that day. The depression had won. Only six months before her suicide, she wrote in her journal of feeling "outcast on a cold star, unable to feel anything but an awful helpless numbness. I look down into the warm, earthy world."

Into a nest of lovers' beds, baby cribs, meal tables, all the solid commerce of life in this earth, and feel apart, enclosed in a wall of glass." Plath was laid to rest on February 16 in the Hughes family cemetery in Heptonstall. Since Hughs and Plath were still technically married, Ted became the heir to her estate. Just one month before Sylvia Plath's (or technically Hugh's) suicide, the novel "The Bell Jar" was published. The thinly veiled auto biography describes and seemingly happy and intelligent Esther, who writes for a living, attends various parties, and receives many gifts from her publisher.

Esther, however, is horribly upset and unhappy in her current life. Esther wonders why women are, from birth, predestined to be a miserable housewife. The struggling writer wonders why men are free to experiment without tarnishing their reputation like women do when they express sexual freedom. This novel has been described as a feminist coming-of-age story that "uses a chronological and necessarily episodic structure to keep Esther at the center of all action. Other characters are fragmentary, subordinate to Esther and her developing consciousness, and are shown only through their

effects on her as central character. (Gale Cengage). There is also evidence to support that the book is not realistic fiction, but an auto biography. “[The Bell Jar] is...also highly autobiographical, and at the same time, since it represents the views of a girl enduring a bout of mental illness, dishonest. Plath never solved the problem of providing the reader with clues to the objective reality of episodes reported through the consciousness of a deranged narrator. ” (Phoebe Lou-Adams). Plath’s poetry was written in a usually very dark manner due to her father’s death and husband’s affairs.

Her history of being unhappy and promiscuous also contributed to her sinister style of writing. Sylvia Plath’s strides in the field of literature, difficult marriage, and tragic suicide have impacted the lives of many and open up the eyes of America to what really insanity is. She will be remembered for her neurotic genius yet level headed facade. Her poetry was dark and very reflective upon her horrid life but is valued today as a national treasure. “ Is there no way out of my mind? ” pleaded Plath. Apparently there is a way out-through death.