

Research paper on sylvia plath gender sexuality and fatherlessness

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



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Introduction:

Sylvia Plath was definitely a personage of great tragedy yet she was also a person who imbued the feminism of her age and who could not cope with the depression which tormented her life which ended at the young age of 30.

She was a poet with a fierce sense of independence and originality but intrinsically very proud of her sexuality and prowess in that area. In fact her poetry can be rather lurid and direct at times showing the way forward for female sexual liberation accordingly. However the situation which really affected her life and eventual suicide was the lack of a father figure and this was also reflected in her turbulent marriage to the poet Ted Hughes.

The lack of a father figure which is also recalled in her poem The Colossus affected her life severely and through her into depression. Eventually she married the British poet Ted Hughes who was not very supportive of her depressive problems which eventually culminated in her suicide in 1963.

However Plath left a considerable body of work in all areas which demonstrated her great skill in the art of poetry and in the way she portrayed her common themes of gender, liberated sexuality and fatherlessness.

Poetry:

Plath left a considerable body of poetry in all fields and this was indeed a tribute to her outstanding talents. Perhaps the work for which she is best remembered is her collection of poems titled ' Ariel' and which was published posthumously after her death. This shows a striking way of dealing with issues rather reminiscent of the poetry of established authors such as Dylan Thomas and Seamus Heaney. In fact in the poem Lady Lazarus, Plath delves into the concept of death with great vigour and deep personal feeling, definitely aspects which show her at her lurid best whilst reflecting on the fear of death and eventual resurrection. Interestingly enough, the poems were edited by her mother who chose the work with great care and who focused on the poetry which was surreal and full of hidden messages. The themes of gender liberation, sexual prowess and fatherlessness occur constantly in this collection.

Other poems such as ' Tulips' and ' Daddy' also deal with the themes of nature and eventual death, the latter actually focusing on the loss of her father. In fact, Plath was deeply influenced by everyday occurrences in her life such as a phone call or a cut which happened whilst cooking. All these seemingly innocuous themes set her off thinking of death and her depression would take over. Her writing was also influenced by the surrealism of other poets such as W B Yeats and Robert Lowell whom Plath confessed to have been influenced by. Ariel was definitely an important ground breaker in the appreciation of Sylvia Plath's work which up till then had been rather left in the shadow of her more famous husband. However it was the absence of a father figure in her life which eventually pushed her over the edge.

In her poem ' Colossus', Plath focuses on the importance of the father figure which is lacking in her life and which demonstrates that her gender is something which puts her in the background when compared to her husband.

Another theme which has been discussed at length by critics is the gender liberation which surrounds most of Plath's poetry in Ariel and which lends this domesticity an almost nightmarish tinge. The way Plath describes these domestic incidents almost seems to imply that life in general is an unbearable drudge without much hope for improvement and which should eventually lead to death.

However there is no denying that mental illness played an intrinsically important part in Sylvia Plath's work and this was consistently the root of her many problems which almost never seemed to want to go away. The confessional delusion of her poetry imbued a deeply rooted sense of unhappiness in life even though she had children but these were invariably accompanied by post natal depression which permeated her life after their birth. Thus her poetry is imbued with an almost fatalistic sense of approaching death throughout and is also fully conversant with nature in which Plath seems to find continual solace.

Although Plath may not seem to be an intrinsic standard bearer for gender issues her criticism of the drudgery of domestic life may seem to be an implication that this may eventually kill someone off. Her long battle with depression and history of medication undoubtedly affected the way she wrote and analysts have also focused on certain aspects of her poetry which may not tally with real life situations. The themes of sexuality and gender

also crop up in *Colossus* as well as the lack of a father figure which she craved for during her short and tragic life. However there is no denying the great power of Sylvia Plath's poetry and other work which shows an astonishingly sensitive creative mind which sadly had to leave this earth far too early.

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