

# Miss understood

Business



Complexity, in and of itself, is hard to understand because its definition varies by the individual. Something abstract for one person may be completely different for someone else because each is an individual with different values, opinions, and backgrounds.

Understanding these backgrounds, like understanding the context in a story, is an integral part of their message. Perspective is everything. In the case of Sylvia Plath, influences such as her relational ties, mental affliction, and feministic ideals must be explored because they bleed into her every pen stroke and allow her to weave parts of herself into her writing. Plath's social standing was unique because of her relationship with the men in her life. A certain dichotomy centered on her father explains this best.

Throughout her life and in her poetry there "...frequently contains both brutal and reverential images of her father as well as sea imagery and allusions to bees" (Marowski, ed 338). Her father who had an avid interest in entomology was especially fond of bees, and this became a recurring symbol for him in Plath's work. Plath's other paternal representation, the sea, began when her father moved the family to Winthrop, Massachusetts just east of Boston.

It is here that she became fascinated with the allure of the water but also its sheer force. The image of the ocean ideally demonstrates this inner conflict concerning her father. While she holds him in the highest regard as a symbol of respect, she also emphasizes his aggressive tendencies. Plath blames part of these tendencies on his German ancestry deeming him to be " Not god but a swastika/So black no sky could squeak through" yet the sentence

immediately after states that “ Every woman adores a Fascist” (“ Daddy” Web). Instead of patronizing him for his radical ways, she acknowledges the greatness in his evil. As a daughter, she feels his oppressive fatherhood.

As a woman, she admires his brutality in her own twisted way. A way that only Plath truly comprehends but one that makes her onlookers gape in awe. Her father only represents one side of the double-edged sword of the two men closest to her. On multiple occasions” The eventual failure of her marriage..

. and the ensuing struggles with severe depression that led to her suicide” were ideas that appear in her poetry towards the end of her life (Marowski, ed 338). She frequently describes her suitor as a manifestation of her father’s evil in another form, for she had “ made a model of [her father],/A man in black with a Meinkampf look/...

and [she] said I do I do” (“ Daddy” Web). The sick, twisted love she had for her father had to be entrusted to someone else. No one is more qualified for such a position than a beloved husband. This “ love” is what drives her further into an abyssal depression, and encourages even darker topics in her writing. So dark in fact, that her husband disposed of many of her late poems because of their sheer vulgarity.

Aside from her family, Plath remained relatively isolated her whole life. Her work did not acquire much acclaim until after her death. This loneliness rarely appears in her work, however, because Plath was content with seclusion. It is briefly alluded to in “ Dream with Clam Diggers” as the “ Blinds lowered on that hot morning. No change met her: garden terrace, all  
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summer” describes her lack of support while growing up (“ Dream with Clam Diggers” Web). The truly bothersome part is not that she was alone, but actually her fruitless efforts to gain the approval of the few people she had.

She hungered for attention becoming a “...modern Medea who gave everything and was nevertheless betrayed” (Perloff 341). Her persistence in trying maintain her relationships with others clawed at her mind. She began to lose sanity in exchange for outrage, and it ultimately drove her to take her own life.

Plath’s final act of desperation, suicide, had much to do with her emotional predisposition, particularly depression. Authors who are as deeply disturbed as Plath, demonstrate some sort of progress in their work. A steady downward spiral. The authors begin with one style until this style slowly corrupts to give way for a more melancholic art form. Quite the opposite is true for Plath.

Throughout her life, she always maintained a cynical outlook and “ Her ‘ development’ is really a sort of hallucination produced by our sense of the ending” (Bayley 341). Because her darkest poetry was all compiled and published at once, the reader develops an immediate opinion of who she was at the time of her death. In truth, her work was a product of deep pessimism that she acquired early in her adolescence. Even before she was diagnosed and “...

admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital and placed under the care of a psychiatrist” Plath had always been disturbed (Napierkowski, ed 116).

Depression only enhanced her tragedy; it is this tragedy that prompts

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chilling tremors upon hearing her name. Plath's social incompetence was another principal side effect of her mental health or lack thereof. Her life was more of a juggling act than anything else, and this is most apparent with her transition from school to real world married life. With a degree and countless academic merits, her future seemed promising, but she spiraled out of control soon after landing a job at Mademoiselle Magazine. Her subsequent marriage and diagnosis began to take a toll on her emotional esteem.

Her writing became increasingly negative and her poems at this point "...are really perceptive acts of vengeance on the way she has to live and the people she has to meet" (Bayley 341). She uses poetry as a scapegoat to channel her resentment of others and of herself.

There is much discussion surrounding her poem "Mirror" because of this very reason. One of her critics reasons that "...while the poem literally describes a mirror, it figuratively or symbolically describes poetry itself" (Johnson 121). All of her writing is based around her own life's trials and tribulations.

The mirror is just another symbol for her self-expression in the form of written word. Plath's depression completes its series of heinous acts with her ultimate fate: death. A myriad of Plath's poems have death-oriented innuendos and allusions to the death of her father or husband. It is obvious that Plath embraces death like a long lost sibling. Before her second and final attempt at ending her own life, she "

.. attempted suicide by overdosing on sleep pills" (Napierkowski, ed 116).

Interestingly enough, the use of sleep as a symbol of death is the central

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idea of “ Dream with Clam-Diggers.” Her adolescent counterpart is described as “ Walking eager toward the water, when there, one by one, /Clam-diggers rose up out of dark slime at her offense” (“ Dream with Clam Diggers” Web). The title itself is a reference to sleeping, but the fact that she drowns herself is parallel to drowning out her senses and mortality.

Even in a literal sense, consuming the pill requires a liquid (a reference to drowning). This is one of the geniuses of Plath: her ability to extract pieces of herself and weave them into her writing. This incredible talent of hers is nurtured by her mental and social strife, but without these traits, Plath would not have developed such passionate ideas about female perspective. The history of women can best be described as a macabre show. Literally, it is just a series of injustices and censorships.

For the longest time, a woman could not lift her arm without feeling a moment of indecision because what she had to say was not considered as important as the drunk degenerate sitting opposite her. It is simply because he is “ anatomically superior.” This notion that her opinion should be muzzled because when she hit puberty, it was not testosterone that ran through her veins, takes quite a toll on a person’s self-worth. The result is obsession. Fixation. Her aspirations change from intellectual synthesis to self-objectification.

A woman comes to think of herself as a symbol for aesthetic pleasure rather than a complex being with emotions, ideas and values. She becomes inanimate. She becomes a “...mirror [that] is in effect looking into itself, for

the image in the mirror is the woman, the object that itself is more mirror than person” (Freedman 123).

When a girl looks in the mirror, she does not see herself staring back. She sees teeth at gnarled angles, nails so unkempt that they can be used as bottle openers, and a complexion too littered with red growths to be accepted as a woman. A woman has to be flawless. This is objectification defined. Plath instead sees a utopia in which a “.

.. woman is not simply looking at the mirror to check her appearance: she is pursuing more profound information about her identity” (Johnson 122). This is supposed to be an unalienable right granted to “ every person” under the Constitution of the United States of America. However, to a woman, it is common knowledge that “ mankind” actually means: man-kind. Womankind, on the other hand, faces the possibility of something men could never fathom – maternity.

Motherhood is the most demanding and stressful job any human being could conjure up. This idea repulsed Plath. She was a firm believer in the fact that a woman should not” set themselves the fanatical task of always ‘ doing their best’ for the children and ‘ living only for them’...children.

.. loaded with ambitions that are never fulfilled” (Freedman 124). A woman who commits the entirety of herself to her offspring projects her own ambitions that she had to sacrifice onto the child. These expectations are very possibly too lofty, and in Plath’s opinion, women are undeserving of this level of disappointment.

Plath's own children were much of a disappointment for her. Although she did care for them, they were more of a disturbing reminder of the man who gave them to her. Almost like a "...

' little face carved in painted, red wood, the loved baby is an intolerable reminder of its unloving father" her children burdened her with thoughts of a man she had come to loathe (Perloff 340). Just as her husband was a reflection of her father, her children reflected their father. These influenced Plath's ideas of liberation from the shackles of self-torture. In this case, the bindings were her own kin. The idea of incarceration of women tops Plath's list of feministic principles.

Women's empowerment is of the utmost importance to Plath who herself felt the confines of oppression. In her poem " Ariel," she focuses purely on juxtaposing a horse ride with a woman's existence. Her potential is suppressed at first when she " Splits and passes, sister to/The brown arc/Of the neck I cannot catch" (" Ariel" Web). These are the stages of life when a woman acts submissively and caters to the whim of man. She cannot reach what they hope to attain because they are allowing themselves to be held back. Plath is one of the few women who came to this realization early in her life.

She was one of the even fewer who acted upon it. When she acknowledged herself as a human being rather than something subservient she became "... the arrow, /The dew that flies/Suicidal, at one with the drive" (" Ariel" Web).

No longer does the beast control the woman. She has taken the reins and becomes the master. Harbinger of her own destiny. A truly independent

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woman. This is her message: life will indefinitely move forward but it is a woman's job to usurp the kingdom of her existence and rule herself with an iron fist. Sylvia Plath's quirks and imperfections seem typical of a woman with neurosis but her dementia is more of a result of her tragic past rather than an affliction.

A darkness developed from her mental disposition, but it is from oppression that she acquired her feminist views. Because of these experiences, her poetry is perverse in nature but her perspective is pure and illuminates her writing with an eerie glow.