

Plath vs hughes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Representations are interpretations of an idea or concept in the real world. It is not reality itself, but statements about it that are constructed from personal ideas, values and beliefs. Representation is closely linked to the concept of perspective, as an individual point of view which shows a personal representation of an event, situation or personality. One person's perspective will never be the same as another's, thus when examining texts about famous personalities such as that of Sylvia Plath, we must remember that these texts are actually impressions shaped by the composer's subjective version of reality. The poem 'Fulbright Scholars' by Ted Hughes and Gordon Lameyer's photograph of Sylvia Plath, offer different representations to their responders.

Ted Hughes refers to Plath in all but two of the eighty-eight poems he wrote called 'Birthday Letters,' written by Hughes more than twenty years after Plath's death. Hughes describe it, as 'a gathering of the occasions on which I tried to open a direct, private, inner contact with my first wife, not thinking to make a poem, thinking mainly to evoke her presence to myself and to feel her there listening.' Lameyer on the other hand, captured Plath's outer facade. The photograph was taken two months after her second serious suicide attempt in 1955, before she ventured to Cambridge and met Hughes. Being a photograph, it offers a very limited version of the life of Plath; the image portrays her as a confident, happy and stable person. Indeed there is a sense of irony when looking at this photo in comparison to Hughes' poem 'Fulbright Scholars' which offers an insight into Plath on a deeper level as a woman with many insecurities and anxieties.

In Lameyer's photograph of Plath, she is the salient image that dominates the photo. From this text, a reader can draw a conclusion that she is conscious of her appearance. For example, here Plath has a direct gaze with the viewer that is intense and seductive, while her broad smile shows her innocent and amicable nature. Lameyer's photograph uses a reading path technique, using vector lines to take you on a journey with the image. The initial image a reader sees is Plath's face which then runs down her body past her back and through her arms and legs, thus the responder pays attention to the whole photograph and not just a specific feature.

The photograph was taken in 1955 and would have been controversial as Plath was wearing a two piece bikini. She is also contentiously revealing her bust which is against the gender stereotyping that existed in 1955. This image represents Plath with positive connotations in one way but if you actually knew the real background of Lameyer's subject matter you would begin to question his perspective entirely.

In Hughes poem, he uses a derogative and cynical tone in his portrayal of Sylvia Plath. This is conveyed through imagery such as "your exaggerated American Grin for the cameras". He has also used a double perspective in his poem to further highlight this facade. Throughout the poem, Hughes speaks of his initial impressions of Plath as well as his perspective as an older man looking back on his youth. These differing perspectives are juxtaposed in lines such as "Your Veronica Lake bang" and "Not what it hid". It is through Hughes mature perspective of Plath, that his poetry positions the reader to see beneath the surface to find Plath as a very insecure person with many anxieties.

He is, in a sense, preparing the reader for the subsequent poems by warning the responder that appearances often don't tell the complete story. In Hughes' poem 'The Shot', we gain a deeper insight into Plath's inner insecurities. He uses the sustained metaphor of a bullet throughout the poem to not only highlight Plath's instability but also her destructive and unpredictable tendencies. This is effectively conveyed through imagery such as 'gold jacketed', 'solid silver' and 'trajectory perfect'.

Hughes also uses the sustained metaphor of God in the opening stanza to highlight Plath's obsession for direction and meaning in life. Her search for a God further links back to the negative impact her father's death had on her childhood, and thus provides a responder with some justification for her inner torments. Hughes perspective of Plath is of someone who is frightened by her surroundings and fears that people might judge her in a negative way. On the other hand Gordon Lameyers perspective of Plath is of a confident, happy and vivacious young woman. Plath is shown as having no fears of the outside world and is happy to go against the status quo of her times. Both of these opinions differ in their point of views hence Hughes and Lameyer offer conflicting, yet relevant perspectives for the interpretation of their respective audiences.