

Sylvia Plath

- * Quite introverted as an adolescent ; difficult childhood.
- * Poems were unstoppable - writing 2 or 3 a day.
- * Violent imagery and obsession with death
- * In terms of creative effort, she is incomparable in literature history.
- * Themes : sensuous and emotional responses
 - "one should be able to control and manipulate experiences with an informed mind."
- * London as a literary influence
- * Background : German + Austrian. Brought up on Nth coast of Mass. on the coast. Image of the sea stayed with her, and is in poems.
- * Sylvia played nurse to her father, father had leg amputated and later died. This was when Sylvia said "I'll never speak to God again."
- * She loved her father's praise. Describes herself as a happy child until 9, when she became more realistic about the world, and its lack of magic.
- * Typewriter an extension of her body
- * Was given diaries from her mother, and she was an avid journaler.
- * Father died around the time WWII broke out. She metamorphosises the father figure into a mythological figure ; the link between private + public.
- * A lot of blame towards her mother, for bringing her into the world
- * language forms are very practised, you can tell she is counting syllables and is quite imitative
- * Auden + Yeats were clearly inspirational, as was Dylan Thomas
- * Ferociously ambitious student while at Smith college.
- * Tension between being a literary academic and being the red-blooded all American girl.
- * Loved going to all girls school, as there was no competition with boys.

- * Won guest editorship in Summer 1953 to mademoiselle magazine in New York City.
- * All of the tensions of her public life + private thoughts were brought to the fore when she was in New York
- * Had breakdown after NY experience, couldn't read couldn't concentrate. Began self-diagnosing from Freud's 'Abnormal Psychology'.
- "That was my last act of love" (after suicide attempt)
- * Everything was magnified - "always" or "never"
- * Sylvia's suicide was linked with a kind of arrogance and anger - a declaration of war. She was not a passive victim in any way.
- * Talked about suicide # as if it was just something she had done, and she loved to show her scars and talk about her life-force.
- * 1955 won full scholarship to study at Cambridge.
- * Enjoyed the experience of studying at Cambridge; loved studying the modernists - Woolfe; but said she would be better.
- * Tensions between who she wanted to be; poet, pin-up, academic.??
- * Feb 1956 met, and bit, Ted Hughes
- * Hughes taught her and helped her find her own voice, inspired her to look back on her own life and past. Felt she knew more about herself through him.
- * Bee's and beekeeping became important symbols for aesthetic and sexuality. Fertility.
- * Great love for her father, a product of migrant ambitions. She almost fabricated him in her works.
- * Finding your own voice as a writer is important, and Sylvia was initially enclosed in the father figure / lost father, which ~~also~~ did not allow for her own voice

* Relationship with Hughes, and their children, stripped her of her artificial - she had to be a real person.

* Back to USA in 1957 with Ted, Sylvia taught at Smith for a year.

* Back to England and a country house in Devon a year later. It was here that she finally found her own voice, and also where her marriage began to go wrong.

* 'The moon & the yew tree' first example of the old and new style of Sylvia merged together.

* In the 'Ariel' poems she is stripping the extras. There is still immense discipline, but there is also freedom. # ≠ everything matters, every word has a purpose: burning the peripherals.

* Stopped using her thesaurus and just let go; let go of the artificial selves, the delusions, but at the same time she struggled to let go.

* Saw all women as rivals, especially with regards to Ted Hughes.

* Sylvia as pathologically jealous, and lacked self criticism, had a blind spot to cause and effect

* Marriage breakdown led to extreme anger. She needed to be that destructive to get to the material in 'Ariel'

* 'Ariel' trying to make a new mythology of women, about facing your demons and facing what you feel - not what you believe you should feel.

* Shed all of the poetic conventions and forms that she used previously.

* 'Daddy' refers to getting the Daddy out of her; not a hate poem.

* Plath became increasingly frail and began to experience unexplained fevers.

* Feelings of loneliness were immense post-divorce. She was almost psychologically depressed; and abandoned by her friends as she was too hard work.

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→ Further viewing: Nick Mount on Sylvia Plath's Ariel (youtube 46:48)