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## How Plath's Life Influenced Her Poetry

### **Introduction**

Sylvia Plath was one of the most celebrated female poets of the 20th century. Her works in literature had been widely spread all over the world by the time she committed suicide at the age of thirty years. She became the first poet in the world to win Posthumous Pulitzer Prize. Plath was a troubled and talented poet who was known by many for her confessional style of writing (Miller 381). While Plath was studying in Newnham, she met Ted Hughes, a poet who also changed her life tremendously. Her father died when she was eight years old, and this situation greatly influenced her life. Plath was affected by a failed marriage, battled with depression, and was influenced by the tragic death of her father which later impacted her writing that has portrayed her as the most cherished and celebrated poet in the world.

### **Relationship between Plath's Encounters and Her Literature**

Plath's background is significant in her literature. *Lady Lazarus*, for instance, is one of her publications that illustrate her ill motive of craving to commit suicide (Curley 214). The poem is often interpreted as an expression of her attempt to commit suicide and the impulses she experienced. The tone of *Lady Lazarus* ranges between scathing and menacing, and the extensive use of Holocaust imagery are the same just like the ones used in *Daddy*. The standard interpretation of her poem *Lady Lazarus* is an illustration of many failed suicide attempts. When

Plath states that she "has done it again", she implies that she has attempted committing suicide for the third time after the first one which was accidental and the second one which was a deliberate one (Miller 384).

After Plath was left by her husband for another woman, she fell into deep depression. She was mentally disturbed, and in the process of struggling with her mental illness, Plath published *The Bell Jar* which a collection of her life. It is obvious that the life circumstances controlled most of her literature works before she committed suicide in 1963 (Miller 384).

Her life can be explored through her stories and poetry. By aligning Path's poetry alongside the life events, one will be in a good position to understand her significance in the American history. Before attaining the age of eight years, she had a normal life. She grew up strongly in an affluent family, and the surrounding areas in which she grew in (such as Winthrop) appeared in her poem *Point Shirley*. Plath's paternal struggles are illustrated in *Daddy* and many other poems such as *The Beekeeper's Daughter* and the *Colossus*. For instance, in *Daddy* she writes that "I have always been scared of you." Indeed, the poet did not attend her father's funeral, and she only visited her father's nineteen years after he was buried. According to Miller (338), Sylvia Plath states that, "I have always been scared of you. With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygook. And your neat mustache. And your Aryan eye, bright blue."

Plath insists that she wanted to kill her father but instead she had died before she reached him. Her poem *Daddy* is an illustration of her relationship with her father which she came to regret later after understanding how important his father was in his life. In the poem, she remembers how at one point in life she wanted her father to return to the world after she had encountered a lot of challenges in her life (Curley 213).

Her poems attracted many readers who had the perception that she was obsessed with violent emotions, despair and committing suicide. Her poems explored her unresolved conflicts with her mother and father, her mental anguish, her own vision and her troubled marriage that ended in a divorce. Many critics have the perception that Plath "stripped away the polite veneer." This is because Plath lets her poems express primeval fears and elemental forces. In doing so, Sylvia Plath laid open the contradictions that divided the appearance of the society and illustrated the tensions that influenced American way of life. All the violence of her poetry reflected the violence of her imagination which came to its peak when she committed suicide at the age of thirty years old in 1963. Her poems offered themselves for transmuting agony, sacrifice, into gestures, heartbreak, and styles of life (Miller 383). This is to say that Plath portrayed to the world that self-absorption can be real and can be conveyed through art. According to her poems, it is true that the life events can be conveyed through art, and it takes human sacrifice such as death to accomplish some the things in life.

*Daddy* is a poem that talks about her troubled relationship with her own father and Plath's feeling of betrayal when the father died. It was during her years of undergraduate that she developed the idea of committing suicide after encountering many challenges in life. "It is as if my life was magically run by two electric currents: joyous positive and despairing negative— whichever is running at the moment dominates my life, floods it." The condition which she was suffering from was a bipolar disorder which had no medication during her times. At the age of nineteen she attempted suicide, but she was unsuccessful (Curley 214).

Sylvia Plath led her to self-destruction. Her creative energy, however, was a source of imaginative and creative power which led to the fact that many of her literature works are currently used in teaching psychology. Despite the fact that death was a side issue, Plath found it

difficult for her to avoid it in her poems, especially *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus*. Sylvia Plath's death was due to the fact that she gambled with life, not caring whether she lost or won, but eventually she lost (Miller 381). *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus* are the poems that reflect her life and the surrounding that she was living in. At times Plath tried to get rid of tension in her life by trying to be the tension herself. Additionally, she used history to describe herself and encounters with the people that surrounded her.

The most prevalent theme in *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus* is death. Her success in the field of poetry was determined by her works in the last months prior to her death. Of all the poems, *Lady Lazarus* stands to be the greatest one that conveyed her mental anguish and her suffering in life, since the events in the poem are similar to what transpired later. She committed suicide at the age of thirty years after having a troubled relationship with her husband (Jamieson 52). The poem *Lady Lazarus* illustrates to the readers that dying is an art which can be planned. The entire poem the *Lady Lazarus* sounds like it was written by a dead poet. It is very sad that Plath is being recognized more for her death rather than for her creative works of poetry.

## **Conclusion**

Sylvia Plath was a confessional poet who contributed greatly to American literature. The poems that she wrote reflected her mental anguish and her surroundings. Most of her stories are the things that she experienced in life such as her troubled marriage, her troubled relationship with her father etc. Plath was affected by a failed marriage, battled with depression, and was influenced by the tragic death of her father which later impacted her writing.

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