

# Gender inequality in Sylvia Plath's poems

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Abstract:

This paper explores Sylvia Plath's poems. Sylvia Plath belongs to a period where women were dominated by men. It was a patriarchal society where women were not given permission not even to share their opinion. Sylvia thought of how women are under the power of men and feel suffocated and wanted to come out of men's control. Most of Sylvia's poems contain aggression in a male dominated society. She wanted women to be in progressive society. Sylvia Plath was considered to be the most powerful confessional poet. Most of the poems of Sylvia Plath portray gender roles. The reason behind her writings about gender roles was because of her father's death and her divorce from her husband. Bawer said that "Plath was the mouthpiece of a movement embodying an independent woman oppressed by man in her whole life". Her writings do not talk about her position as a single mother rather talk for all the women who are forced into a domestic setting. Her writings depict the mindset of the society during that time.

Keywords: Gender roles, suicide, negativity, male - female relationship, perspectives

Sylvia Plath was born on 27 October 1932 in Massachusetts to a European immigrant parents. Sylvia Plath wrote a number of poems under different themes but she mainly develops three themes she confesses through her poems, she writes about the overwhelming male influence and about births. The overwhelming male influence was felt from her dead father. She was devastated by that loss. She compares his death to a suicide. Throughout her life Sylvia suffered under depression because of her emotional state, and this led her to go under shock therapy which drove her to greater emotional strife.

We come to know from the poems of Sylvia Plath that she has not agreed with the concept that considers womanhood as a source of enjoyment and as a reproduction machine. She considers a woman to be much more than that, she is a living entity and an individual as a whole. She should be treated as a human which was lacking during those days. One of her poem The Moon and the Yew tree, is almost like autobiographical. The title of the poem represents her

parents, the moon is her mother and the yew tree is her father. This poem consists of various symbols. The context of the poem is a churchyard.

“This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary

The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue.

The grasses unload their griefs on my feet as if were God

Prickling my ankles and murmuring of their humility”

This poem was given to her as an exercise to write about moon but this led her to write about her parents resulting in her perspectives on her parents. To escape from alienation she tries to connect her with nature. Through her first line Sylvia Plath gives us a negative notion of divine love and a bleak from the world. The yew tree has a significance. Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* and Plath have been inspired by yew. They say that this tree grows in the graveyard and this has been rooted to the graves and this symbolically observed. Once she finds the moon behind the tree which gives her no comfort and she goes back to her mother.

“The moon is no door .It is a face in its own right,

White as a knuckle and terribly upset.”

Normally moon stand for Hope. It shows the way in darkness and it symbolically represents boldness but in this poem Moon is considered to be the opposite. This makes one to lose hope. Many other words from this poem shows the negative connotations about Plath, words like candles, mystical, bald and wild.

“The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,

Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild.

And the message of the yew tree is blackness-blackness and silence.”

The words like blackness and silence symbolizes darkness, ghostliness and obscurity. The poem indicates that Plath doesn't think about anything positive around her and she always thinks of something bad and wild. She never takes anything to be good and this shows the melancholic state of Sylvia Plath.

In ancient times women were not free to take decisions they were only made to do the household works, they had to cook, take care of the children but were never given the respect they deserve. In another poem Lady Lazarus. She about the struggles of women.

“Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call.”

This line gives us the detail that she had many times tried to commit suicide and has Failed many times. This was due to her life, she was living under a patriarchal society. The poem reveals her painful struggle. She compares herself to Nazi lampshade symbolizing her pregnant sufferings.

“Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air.”

She compares herself with Christ in resurrection, this time it's the resurrection from the male dominated society. This shows the anger of woman on a man. How much a man would have tortured her that she loses her sense of forgiveness and steps forward against him.

Edge was written in 1963 after which the author committed suicide within a week. It is also considered to be a suicidal note. The word perfect means a lot in this poem as this talks about women being perfect. It is a death poem but she takes it positively.

“The woman is perfected.

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,”

As she is done with her works even after her death she wears a smile that gives the impact of being satisfied with what has happened in her life. Toga is a colour imagery and that it is white which is referred to pureness and it accomplishes her justification for suicide. Sylvia considers suicide as a brave act. The only

worry she has is that she is leaving her children back, she thought of killing them too but she doesn't end up doing that.

“She has folded

Them back into her body as petals

Of a rose when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed

From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.”

Through these lines she compares her love for her children to that of a petal of a flower. Her children have been folded into her. Now this carries two kinds of perspectives one is that of her embracing her children and the other one is that of her loving her children so much that of her desiring to take them with her in suicide.

“Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and drag.”

In the narrative of the Bible the woman was made out of a bone from the male and this idea is harbored still. This has given support to the patriarchal notion that female is subservient. The last line tells us that she will struggle till the end to have a place for her in her life. Here the word black refers to sadness and darkness and this is men according to Sylvia Plath, men who accuses women for everything.

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