

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-ENGLISH

SEMESTER -IV

AMERICAN LITERATURE

CORE 401

BLOCK-2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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FOREWORD

The Self-Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavors.

AMERICAN LITERATURE

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BLOCK-2 AMERICAN LITERATURE

Introduction To Block

UNIT 8: Sylvia Plath's life as well as career, her works and about the Hughes' Controversies, the themes used by her in her work, the legacy and the portrayals in media of her work.

Unit 9: "Point Shirley" by Sylvia Plath and, "The Colossus" by Sylvia Plath.

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Unit 11: Poem "Fever 103" by Sylvia Plath, and the poem "Ariel" by Sylvia Plath.

Unit 12: Poem "Purdah" by Sylvia Plath and, the poem "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath.

Unit 13: William Cuthbert Faulkner's life, his career, his various writing, legacy, and finally the list of awards h has received, collections and audio recordings.

UNIT 14: Plot, the Characters, the style, structure, themes, motifs, symbols used and the title, reception, literary significance, adaptations, limited edition, context and analysis, of "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner.

UNIT-8 SYLVIA PLATH- POINT SHIRLEY, THE COLOSSUS, DADDY, FEVER 103, ARIEL, PURDAH, LADY LAZARUS - 1

STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Life and Career
- 8.3 Works
- 8.4 Hughes' Controversies
- 8.5 Themes and Legacy
- 8.6 Portrayals in media
- 8.7 Let us sum up
- 8.8 Keywords
- 8.9 Questions for Review
- 8.10 Suggested Reading and References
- 8.11 Answers to Check your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about Sylvia Plath's life as well as career,
- you would also learn about her works and about the Hughes' Controversies,
- further you would also learn about the themes used by her in her work,
- finally you would also learn about the legacy and the portrayals in media of her work.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath was an American poet, novelist, and short-story writer. She is credited with advancing the genre of confessional poetry and is best known for two of her published collections, *The Colossus and Other Poems* and *Ariel*, as well as *The Bell Jar*, a semi-autobiographical novel published shortly before her death. In 1982, she won a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for *The Collected Poems*.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Plath studied at Smith College in Massachusetts and at Newnham College in Cambridge, England. She married fellow poet Ted Hughes in 1956, and they lived together in the United States and then in England. They had two children before separating in 1962.

Plath was clinically depressed for most of her adult life, and was treated multiple times with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). She died by suicide in 1963.

8.2 LIFE AND CAREER

Early life

Sylvia Plath was born on October 27, 1932, in Boston, Massachusetts. Her mother, Aurelia Schober Plath (1906–1994), was a second-generation American of Austrian descent, and her father, Otto Plath (1885–1940), was from Grabow, Germany. Plath's father was an entomologist and a professor of biology at Boston University who authored a book about bumblebees.

On April 27, 1935, Plath's brother Warren was born, and in 1936 the family moved from 24 Prince Street in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, to 92 Johnson Avenue, Winthrop, Massachusetts. Plath's mother, Aurelia, had grown up in Winthrop, and her maternal grandparents, the Schobers, had lived in a section of the town called Point Shirley, a location mentioned in Plath's poetry. While living in Winthrop, eight-year-old Plath published her first poem in the Boston Herald's children's section. Over the next few years, Plath published multiple poems in regional magazines and newspapers. At age 11, Plath began keeping a

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journal. In addition to writing, she showed early promise as an artist, winning an award for her paintings from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards in 1947. "Even in her youth, Plath was ambitiously driven to succeed". Plath also had an IQ of around 160.

Otto Plath died on November 5, 1940, a week and a half after Plath's eighth birthday, of complications following the amputation of a foot due to untreated diabetes. He had become ill shortly after a close friend died of lung cancer. Comparing the similarities between his friend's symptoms and his own, Otto became convinced that he, too, had lung cancer and did not seek treatment until his diabetes had progressed too far. Raised as a Unitarian, Plath experienced a loss of faith after her father's death and remained ambivalent about religion throughout her life. Her father was buried in Winthrop Cemetery, in Massachusetts. A visit to her father's grave later prompted Plath to write the poem "Electra on Azalea Path". After Otto's death, Aurelia moved her children and her parents to 26 Elmwood Road, Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1942. In one of her last prose pieces, Plath commented that her first nine years "sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle—beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth". Plath attended Bradford Senior High School (now Wellesley High School) in Wellesley, graduating in 1950. Just after graduating from high school, she had her first national publication in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

College years and depression

In 1950 Plath attended Smith College, a private women's liberal arts college in Massachusetts. She excelled academically, and wrote to her mother. While at Smith she lived in Lawrence House, and a plaque can be found outside her old room. She edited *The Smith Review*. After her third year of college Plath was awarded a coveted position as a guest editor at *Mademoiselle* magazine, during which she spent a month in New York City. The experience was not what she had hoped it would be, and many of the events that took place during that summer were later used as inspiration for her novel *The Bell Jar*.

She was furious at not being at a meeting the editor had arranged with Welsh poet Dylan Thomas—a writer whom she loved, said one of her

boyfriends, "more than life itself." She hung around the White Horse Tavern and the Chelsea Hotel for two days, hoping to meet Thomas, but he was already on his way home. A few weeks later, she slashed her legs to see if she had enough "courage" to commit suicide.

During this time she was refused admission to the Harvard writing seminar. Following electroconvulsive therapy for depression, Plath made her first medically documented suicide attempt on August 24, 1953 by crawling under her house and taking her mother's sleeping pills.

She survived this first suicide attempt, later writing that she "blissfully succumbed to the whirling blackness that I honestly believed was eternal oblivion." She spent the next six months in psychiatric care, receiving more electric and insulin shock treatment under the care of Dr. Ruth Beuscher. Her stay at McLean Hospital and her Smith Scholarship were paid for by Olive Higgins Prouty, who had successfully recovered from a mental breakdown herself. Plath seemed to make a good recovery and returned to college.

In January 1955, she submitted her thesis, *The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoyevsky's Novels*, and in June graduated from Smith with highest honors.

She obtained a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Newnham College, one of the two women-only colleges of the University of Cambridge in England, where she continued actively writing poetry and publishing her work in the student newspaper *Varsity*. At Newnham, she studied with Dorothea Krook, whom she held in high regard. She spent her first year winter and spring holidays traveling around Europe.

Career and marriage

I'd read some of Ted's poems in this magazine and I was very impressed and I wanted to meet him. I went to this little celebration and that's actually where we met... Then we saw a great deal of each other. Ted came back to Cambridge and suddenly we found ourselves getting married a few months later... We kept writing poems to each other. Then it just grew out of that, I guess, a feeling that we both were writing so

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much and having such a fine time doing it, we decided that this should keep on.

Plath described Hughes as "a singer, story-teller, lion and world-wanderer" with "a voice like the thunder of God."

The couple married on June 16, 1956, at St George the Martyr, Holborn in London (now in the Borough of Camden) with Plath's mother in attendance, and spent their honeymoon in Paris and Benidorm. Plath returned to Newnham in October to begin her second year. During this time, they both became deeply interested in astrology and the supernatural, using Ouija boards.

In June 1957, Plath and Hughes moved to the United States, and from September, Plath taught at Smith College, her alma mater. She found it difficult to both teach and have enough time and energy to write, and in the middle of 1958, the couple moved to Boston. Plath took a job as a receptionist in the psychiatric unit of Massachusetts General Hospital and in the evening sat in on creative writing seminars given by poet Robert Lowell (also attended by the writers Anne Sexton and George Starbuck).

Both Lowell and Sexton encouraged Plath to write from her experience and she did so. She openly discussed her depression with Lowell and her suicide attempts with Sexton, who led her to write from a more female perspective. Plath began to consider herself as a more serious, focused poet and short-story writer. At this time Plath and Hughes first met the poet W. S. Merwin, who admired their work and was to remain a lifelong friend. Plath resumed psychoanalytic treatment in December, working with Ruth Beuscher.

Plath and Hughes traveled across Canada and the United States, staying at the Yaddo artist colony in Saratoga Springs, New York State in late 1959. Plath says that it was here that she learned "to be true to my own weirdnesses", but she remained anxious about writing confessionally, from deeply personal and private material. The couple moved back to England in December 1959 and lived in London at 3 Chalcot Square, near the Primrose Hill area of Regent's Park, where an English Heritage plaque records Plath's residence. Their daughter Frieda was

born on April 1, 1960, and in October, Plath published her first collection of poetry, *The Colossus*.

In February 1961, Plath's second pregnancy ended in miscarriage; several of her poems, including "Parliament Hill Fields", address this event. In a letter to her therapist, Plath wrote that Hughes beat her two days before the miscarriage. In August she finished her semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* and immediately after this, the family moved to Court Green in the small market town of North Tawton in Devon. Nicholas was born in January 1962. In mid-1962, Hughes began to keep bees, which would be the subject of many Plath poems.

In 1961, the couple rented their flat at Chalcot Square to Assia and David Wevill. Hughes was immediately struck with the beautiful Assia, as she was with him. In June 1962, Plath had a car accident which she described as one of many suicide attempts. In July 1962, Plath discovered Hughes had been having an affair with Assia Wevill and in September the couple separated.

Beginning in October 1962, Plath experienced a great burst of creativity and wrote most of the poems on which her reputation now rests, writing at least 26 of the poems of her posthumous collection *Ariel* during the final months of her life. In December 1962, she returned alone to London with their children, and rented, on a five-year lease, a flat at 23 Fitzroy Road—only a few streets from the Chalcot Square flat. William Butler Yeats once lived in the house, which bears an English Heritage blue plaque for the Irish poet. Plath was pleased by this fact and considered it a good omen.

The northern winter of 1962–1963 was one of the coldest in 100 years; the pipes froze, the children—now two years old and nine months—were often sick, and the house had no telephone. Her depression returned but she completed the rest of her poetry collection, which would be published after her death (1965 in the UK, 1966 in the US). Her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, was published in January 1963, under the pen name Victoria Lucas, and was met with critical indifference.

Final depressive episode and death

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Before her death, Plath tried several times to take her own life. On August 24, 1953, Plath overdosed on pills in the cellar of her mother's home. In June 1962, Plath drove her car off the side of the road, into a river, which she later said was an attempt to take her own life.

In January 1963, Plath spoke with John Horder, her general practitioner and a close friend who lived near her. She described the current depressive episode she was experiencing; it had been ongoing for six or seven months. While for most of the time she had been able to continue working, her depression had worsened and become severe, "marked by constant agitation, suicidal thoughts and inability to cope with daily life." Plath struggled with insomnia, taking medication at night to induce sleep, and frequently woke up early. She lost 20 pounds. However, she continued to take care of her physical appearance and did not outwardly speak of feeling guilty or unworthy.

Horder prescribed her an anti-depressant, a monoamine oxidase inhibitor, a few days before her suicide. Knowing she was at risk alone with two young children, he says he visited her daily and made strenuous efforts to have her admitted to a hospital; when that failed, he arranged for a live-in nurse. Commentators have argued that because anti-depressants may take up to three weeks to take effect, her prescription from Horder would not have taken full effect.

The nurse was due to arrive at nine on the morning of February 11, 1963, to help Plath with the care of her children. Upon arrival, she could not get into the flat but eventually gained access with the help of a workman, Charles Langridge. They found Plath dead of carbon monoxide poisoning with her head in the oven, having sealed the rooms between her and her sleeping children with tape, towels and cloths. At approximately 4:30 a.m. Plath had placed her head in the oven, with the gas turned on. She was 30 years old.

Some have suggested that Plath had not intended to kill herself. That morning, she asked her downstairs neighbor, a Mr. Thomas, what time he would be leaving. She also left a note reading "Call Dr. Horder," including the doctor's phone number. Therefore, it is argued Plath turned on the gas at a time when Thomas would have been able to see the

note. However, in her biography *Giving Up: The Last Days of Sylvia Plath*, Plath's best friend, Jillian Becker wrote, "According to Mr. Goodchild, a police officer attached to the coroner's office. Plath had thrust her head far into the gas oven and had really meant to die." Horder also believed her intention was clear. He stated that "No one who saw the care with which the kitchen was prepared could have interpreted her action as anything but an irrational compulsion." Plath had described the quality of her despair as "owl's talons clenching my heart." In his 1971 book on suicide, friend and critic Al Alvarez claimed that Plath's suicide was an unanswered cry for help, and spoke, in a BBC interview in March 2000, about his failure to recognize Plath's depression, saying he regretted his inability to offer her emotional support: "I failed her on that level. I was thirty years old and stupid. What did I know about chronic clinical depression? She kind of needed someone to take care of her. And that was not something I could do."

Following Plath's death

An inquiry on the day following Plath's death gave a ruling of suicide. Hughes was devastated; they had been separated for six months. In a letter to an old friend of Plath's from Smith College, he wrote, "That's the end of my life. The rest is posthumous." Plath's gravestone, in Heptonstall's parish churchyard of St Thomas the Apostle, bears the inscription that Hughes chose for her: "Even amidst fierce flames the golden lotus can be planted." Biographers variously attribute the source of the quote to the Hindu text, the *Bhagavad Gita* or to the 16th-century Buddhist novel *Journey to the West* written by Wu Cheng'en.

The daughter of Plath and Hughes, Frieda Hughes, is a writer and artist. On March 16, 2009, Nicholas Hughes, their son, hanged himself at his home in Fairbanks, Alaska, following a history of depression.

8.3 WORKS

Plath wrote poetry from the age of eight, her first poem appearing in the *Boston Traveler*. By the time she arrived at Smith College she had written over 50 short stories and published in a raft of magazines. In fact Plath desired much of her life to write prose and stories, and she felt that

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poetry was an aside. But, in sum, she was not successful in publishing prose. At Smith she majored in English and won all the major prizes in writing and scholarship. Additionally, she won a summer editor position at the young women's magazine *Mademoiselle*, and, on her graduation in 1955, she won the Glascock Prize for *Two Lovers* and a *Beachcomber* by the Real Sea. Later, she wrote for the university publication, *Varsity*.

The Colossus

By the time Heinemann published her first collection, *The Colossus and Other Poems* in the UK in late 1960, Plath had been short-listed several times in the Yale Younger Poets book competition and had had work printed in *Harper's*, *The Spectator* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. All the poems in *The Colossus* had already been printed in major US and British journals and she had a contract with *The New Yorker*. It was, however, her 1965 collection *Ariel*, published posthumously, on which Plath's reputation essentially rests. "Often, her work is singled out for the intense coupling of its violent or disturbed imagery and its playful use of alliteration and rhyme."

The Colossus received largely positive UK reviews, highlighting Plath's voice as new and strong, individual and American in tone. Peter Dickinson at *Punch* called the collection "a real find" and "exhilarating to read", full of "clean, easy verse". Bernard Bergonzi at the *Manchester Guardian* said the book was an "outstanding technical accomplishment" with a "virtuoso quality". From the point of publication she became a presence on the poetry scene. The book went on to be published in America in 1962 to less-glowing reviews. Whilst her craft was generally praised, her writing was viewed as more derivative of other poets.

The Bell Jar

Plath's semi-autobiographical novel, which her mother wished to block, was published in 1963 and in the US in 1971. Describing the compilation of the book to her mother, she wrote, "What I've done is to throw together events from my own life, fictionalizing to add color—it's a pot boiler really, but I think it will show how isolated a person feels when he is suffering a breakdown.... I've tried to picture my world and the people

in it as seen through the distorting lens of a bell jar". She described her novel as "an autobiographical apprentice work which I had to write in order to free myself from the past". She dated a Yale senior named Dick Norton during her junior year. Norton, upon whom the character of Buddy in *The Bell Jar* is based, contracted tuberculosis and was treated at the Ray Brook Sanatorium near Saranac Lake. While visiting Norton, Plath broke her leg skiing, an incident that was fictionalized in the novel. Plath also used the novel to highlight the issue of women in the workforce during the 1950s. She strongly believed in their abilities to be writers and editors, while society forced them to fulfill secretarial roles.

Double Exposure

In 1963, after *The Bell Jar* was published, Plath began working on another literary work titled *Double Exposure*. It was never published and the manuscript disappeared around 1970. According to Hughes, Plath left behind "some 130 typed pages of another novel, provisionally titled *Double Exposure*." Theories about what happened to the unfinished manuscript are repeatedly brought up in the book *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study* by Luke Ferretter. Ferretter also claims that the rare books department at Smith College in Massachusetts has a secret copy of the work under seal. Ferretter believes that the draft of *Double Exposure* may have been destroyed, stolen, or even lost. He presumes in his book that the draft may lie unfound in a university archive.

Ariel

It was Plath's publication of *Ariel* in 1965 that precipitated her rise to fame. The poems in *Ariel* mark a departure from her earlier work into a more personal arena of poetry. Robert Lowell's poetry may have played a part in this shift as she cited Lowell's 1959 book *Life Studies* as a significant influence, in an interview just before her death. Posthumously published in 1966, the impact of *Ariel* was dramatic, with its dark and potentially autobiographical descriptions of mental illness in poems such as "Tulips", "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus". Plath's work is often held within the genre of confessional poetry and the style of her work compared to other contemporaries, such as Robert Lowell and W. D. Snodgrass. Plath's close friend Al Alvarez, who has written about her

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extensively, said of her later work: "Plath's case is complicated by the fact that, in her mature work, she deliberately used the details of her everyday life as raw material for her art. A casual visitor or unexpected telephone call, a cut, a bruise, a kitchen bowl, a candlestick—everything became usable, charged with meaning, transformed. Her poems are full of references and images that seem impenetrable at this distance, but which could mostly be explained in footnotes by a scholar with full access to the details of her life." Many of Plath's later poems deal with what one critic calls the "domestic surreal" in which Plath takes everyday elements of life and twists the images, giving them an almost nightmarish quality. Plath's poem "Morning Song" from *Ariel* is regarded as one of the twentieth century's finest poems concerning an artist's freedom of expression failed verification

Plath's fellow confessional poet and friend Anne Sexton commented: "Sylvia and I would talk at length about our first suicide, in detail and in depth—between the free potato chips. Suicide is, after all, the opposite of the poem. Sylvia and I often talked opposites. We talked death with burned-up intensity, both of us drawn to it like moths to an electric lightbulb, sucking on it. She told the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail, and her description in *The Bell Jar* is just that same story." The confessional interpretation of Plath's work has led to some dismissing certain aspects of her work as an exposition of sentimentalist melodrama; in 2010, for example, Theodore Dalrymple asserted that Plath had been the "patron saint of self-dramatisation" and of self-pity. Revisionist critics such as Tracy Brain have, however, argued against a tightly autobiographical interpretation of Plath's material.

Other works

In 1971, the volumes *Winter Trees* and *Crossing the Water* were published in the UK, including nine previously unseen poems from the original manuscript of *Ariel*. Writing in *New Statesman*, fellow poet Peter Porter wrote:

Crossing the Water is full of perfectly realized works. Its most striking impression is of a front-rank artist in the process of discovering her true

power. Such is Plath's control that the book possesses a singularity and certainty which should make it as celebrated as *The Colossus* or *Ariel*.

The *Collected Poems*, published in 1981, edited and introduced by Ted Hughes, contained poetry written from 1956 until her death. Plath was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. In 2006 Anna Journey, then a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University, discovered a previously unpublished sonnet written by Plath titled "Ennui". The poem, composed during Plath's early years at Smith College, is published in the online journal *Blackbird*.

Journals and letters

Plath's letters were published in 1975, edited and selected by her mother Aurelia Plath. The collection, *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963*, came out partly in response to the strong public reaction to the publication of *The Bell Jar* in America. Plath began keeping a diary from the age of 11 and continued doing so until her suicide. Her adult diaries, starting from her first year at Smith College in 1950, were first published in 1982 as *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Frances McCullough, with Ted Hughes as consulting editor. In 1982, when Smith College acquired Plath's remaining journals, Hughes sealed two of them until February 11, 2013, the 50th anniversary of Plath's death.

During the last years of his life, Hughes began working on a fuller publication of Plath's journals. In 1998, shortly before his death, he unsealed the two journals, and passed the project onto his children by Plath, Frieda and Nicholas, who passed it on to Karen V. Kukil. Kukil finished her editing in December 1999, and in 2000 Anchor Books published *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (Plath 2000). More than half of the new volume contained newly released material; 66 the American author Joyce Carol Oates hailed the publication as a "genuine literary event". Hughes faced criticism for his role in handling the journals: he claims to have destroyed Plath's last journal, which contained entries from the winter of 1962 up to her death. In the foreword of the 1982 version, he writes, "I destroyed the last of her journals because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival)."

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Poetry collections

- The Colossus and Other Poems (1960) William Heinemann
- Ariel (1965) Faber and Faber
- Three Women: A Monologue for Three Voices (1968) Turret Books
- Crossing the Water (1971) Faber and Faber
- Winter Trees (1971) Faber and Faber
- The Collected Poems (1981) Faber and Faber
- Selected Poems (1985) Faber and Faber
- Ariel: The Restored Edition (2004) Faber and Faber

Collected prose and novels

- The Bell Jar (novel, 1963), under the pseudonym "Victoria Lucas" (Heinemann)
- Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963 (1975, Harper & Row, US; Faber and Faber, UK)
- Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams: Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts (1977, Faber and Faber)
- The Journals of Sylvia Plath (1982, Dial Press)
- The Magic Mirror (published 1989), Plath's Smith College senior thesis
- The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath, edited by Karen V. Kukil (2000, Anchor Books)
- The Letters of Sylvia Plath, Volume 1, edited by Peter K. Steinberg and Karen V. Kukil (Faber and Faber, 2017)
- The Letters of Sylvia Plath, Volume 2, edited by Peter K. Steinberg and Karen V. Kukil (Faber and Faber, 2018)

Children's books

- The Bed Book (1976), illustrated by Quentin Blake, Faber and Faber
- The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit (1996) Faber and Faber
- Mrs. Cherry's Kitchen (2001) Faber and Faber
- Collected Children's Stories (UK, 2001) Faber and Faber

Check your Progress-1

1. When was Sylvia Plath born?

2. Where was Sylvia Plath born?

3. What was the name of Sylvia Plath's mother?

4. What was the name of Sylvia Plath's father?

5. What was the Sylvia Plath's father's profession?

8.4 HUGHES CONTROVERSIES

As Hughes and Plath were legally married at the time of her death, Hughes inherited the Plath estate, including all her written work. He has been condemned repeatedly for burning Plath's last journal, saying he "did not want her children to have to read it." Hughes lost another journal and an unfinished novel, and instructed that a collection of Plath's papers and journals should not be released until 2013. He has been accused of attempting to control the estate for his own ends, although royalties from Plath's poetry were placed into a trust account for their two children, Frieda and Nicholas.

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Plath's gravestone has been repeatedly vandalized by those aggrieved that "Hughes" is written on the stone; they have attempted to chisel it off, leaving only the name "Sylvia Plath." When Hughes' mistress Assia Wevill killed herself and their four-year-old daughter Shura in 1969, this practice intensified. After each defacement, Hughes had the damaged stone removed, sometimes leaving the site unmarked during repair. Outraged mourners accused Hughes in the media of dishonoring her name by removing the stone. Wevill's death led to claims that Hughes had been abusive to both Plath and Wevill.

Radical feminist poet Robin Morgan published the poem "Arraignment", in which she openly accused Hughes of the battery and murder of Plath. Her book *Monster* (1972) "included a piece in which a gang of Plath aficionados are imagined castrating Hughes, stuffing his penis into his mouth and then blowing out his brains. Hughes threatened to sue Morgan. The book was withdrawn by the publisher Random House, although it remained in circulation among feminists. Other feminists threatened to kill Hughes in Plath's name and pursue a conviction for murder. Plath's poem "The Jailer", in which the speaker condemns her husband's brutality, was included in the 1970 anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*.

In 1989, with Hughes under public attack, a battle raged in the letters pages of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. In *The Guardian* on April 20, 1989, Hughes wrote the article "The Place Where Sylvia Plath Should Rest in Peace": "In the years soon after Plath's death, when scholars approached me, I tried to take their apparently serious concern for the truth about Sylvia Plath seriously. But I learned my lesson early. ... If I tried too hard to tell them exactly how something happened, in the hope of correcting some fantasy, I was quite likely to be accused of trying to suppress Free Speech. In general, my refusal to have anything to do with the Plath Fantasia has been regarded as an attempt to suppress Free Speech ... The Fantasia about Sylvia Plath is more needed than the facts. Where that leaves respect for the truth of her life (and of mine), or for her memory, or for the literary tradition, I do not know."

Still the subject of speculation and opprobrium in 1998, Hughes published *Birthday Letters* that year, his own collection of 88 poems about his relationship with Plath. Hughes had published very little about his experience of the marriage and Plath's subsequent suicide, and the book caused a sensation, being taken as his first explicit disclosure, and it topped best seller charts. It was not known at the volume's release that Hughes was suffering from terminal cancer and would die later that year. The book went on to win the Forward Poetry Prize, the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, and the Whitbread Poetry Prize. The poems, written after Plath's death, in some cases long after, try to find a reason why Plath took her own life. Hughes himself died in 1998, only months after the book was published.

In October 2015, the BBC Two documentary *Ted Hughes: Stronger Than Death* examined Hughes' life and work; it included audio recordings of Plath reciting her own poetry. Their daughter Frieda spoke for the first time about her mother and father.

8.5 THEMES AND LEGACY

Sylvia Plath's early poems exhibit what became her typical imagery, using personal and nature-based depictions featuring, for example, the moon, blood, hospitals, fetuses, and skulls. They were mostly imitation exercises of poets she admired such as Dylan Thomas, W. B. Yeats and Marianne Moore. 48 Late in 1959, when she and Hughes were at the Yaddo writers' colony in New York State, she wrote the seven-part "Poem for a Birthday", echoing Theodore Roethke's *Lost Son* sequence, though its theme is her own traumatic breakdown and suicide attempt at 20. After 1960 her work moved into a more surreal landscape darkened by a sense of imprisonment and looming death, overshadowed by her father. *The Colossus* is shot through with themes of death, redemption and resurrection. After Hughes left, Plath produced, in less than two months, the 40 poems of rage, despair, love, and vengeance on which her reputation mostly rests.

Plath's landscape poetry, which she wrote throughout her life, has been described as "a rich and important area of her work that is often

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overlooked ... some of the best of which was written about the Yorkshire moors." Her September 1961 poem "Wuthering Heights" takes its title from the Emily Brontë novel, but its content and style is Plath's own particular vision of the Pennine landscape.

It was Plath's publication of *Ariel* in 1965 that precipitated her rise to fame. As soon as it was published, critics began to see the collection as the charting of Plath's increasing desperation or death wish. Her dramatic death became her most famous aspect, and remains so. *Time* and *Life* both reviewed the slim volume of *Ariel* in the wake of her death. The critic at *Time* said: "Within a week of her death, intellectual London was hunched over copies of a strange and terrible poem she had written during her last sick slide toward suicide. 'Daddy' was its title; its subject was her morbid love-hatred of her father; its style was as brutal as a truncheon. What is more, 'Daddy' was merely the first jet of flame from a literary dragon who in the last months of her life breathed a burning river of bile across the literary landscape. ... In her most ferocious poems, 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus,' fear, hate, love, death and the poet's own identity become fused at black heat with the figure of her father, and through him, with the guilt of the German exterminators and the suffering of their Jewish victims. They are poems, as Robert Lowell says in his preface to *Ariel*, that 'play Russian roulette with six cartridges in the cylinder.'"

Some in the feminist movement saw Plath as speaking for their experience, as a "symbol of blighted female genius." Writer Honor Moore describes *Ariel* as marking the beginning of a movement, Plath suddenly visible as "a woman on paper", certain and audacious. Moore says: "When Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* was published in the United States in 1966, American women noticed. Not only women who ordinarily read poems, but housewives and mothers whose ambitions had awakened ... Here was a woman, superbly trained in her craft, whose final poems uncompromisingly charted female rage, ambivalence, and grief, in a voice with which many women identified." Some feminists threatened to kill Hughes in Plath's name.

Smith College, Plath's alma mater, holds her literary papers in the Smith College Library.

In 2018, The New York Times published an obituary for Plath as part of the Overlooked history project.

8.6 PORTRAYALS IN MEDIA

Plath's voice is heard in the BBC documentary about her life.

Gwyneth Paltrow portrayed Plath in the biopic *Sylvia* (2003). Despite criticism from Elizabeth Sigmund, a friend of Plath and Hughes, that Plath was portrayed as a "permanent depressive and possessive person," she conceded that "the film has an atmosphere towards the end of her life which is heartbreaking in its accuracy." Frieda Hughes, now a poet and painter, who was two years old when her mother died, was angered by the making of entertainment featuring her parents' lives. She accused the "peanut crunching" public of wanting to be titillated by the family's tragedies. In 2003, Frieda reacted to the situation in the poem "My Mother" in *Tatler*:

Now they want to make a film
 For anyone lacking the ability
 To imagine the body, head in oven,
 Orphaning children

... they think

I should give them my mother's words

To fill the mouth of their monster,

Their Sylvia Suicide Doll

8.7 LET US SUM UP

Sylvia Plath, pseudonym **Victoria Lucas**, (born October 27, 1932, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.—died February 11, 1963, London, England), American poet whose best-known works, such as the poems "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" and the novel *The Bell Jar*, starkly

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express a sense of alienation and self-destruction closely tied to her personal experiences and, by extension, the situation of women in mid-20th-century America.

Plath published her first poem at age eight. She entered and won many literary contests, and, while still in high school, she sold her first poem to *The Christian Science Monitor* and her first short story to *Seventeen* magazine.

She entered Smith College on a scholarship in 1951 and was a cowinner of the *Mademoiselle* magazine fiction contest in 1952. At Smith Plath achieved considerable artistic, academic, and social success, but she also suffered from severe depression, attempted suicide, and underwent a period of psychiatric hospitalization. She graduated from Smith with highest honors in 1955 and went on to Newnham College in Cambridge, England, on a Fulbright fellowship. In 1956 she married the English poet Ted Hughes; they had two children. The couple separated in 1962, after Hughes's affair with another woman.

During 1957–58 Plath was an instructor in English at Smith College. In 1960, shortly after she returned to England with Hughes, her first collection of poems appeared as *The Colossus*, which received good reviews. Her novel, *The Bell Jar*, was published in London in 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. Strongly autobiographical, the book describes the mental breakdown and eventual recovery of a young college girl and parallels Plath's own breakdown and hospitalization in 1953.

During her last three years Plath abandoned the restraints and conventions that had bound much of her early work. She wrote with great speed, producing poems of stark self-revelation and confession. The anxiety, confusion, and doubt that haunted her were transmuted into verses of great power and pathos borne on flashes of incisive wit. Her poem "Daddy" and several others explore her conflicted relationship with her father, Otto Plath, who died when she was age eight. In 1963, after this burst of productivity, she took her own life.

Ariel (1965)—a collection of Plath's later poems that included "Daddy" and another of her well-known poems, "Lady Lazarus"—sparked the

growth of a much broader following of devoted and enthusiastic readers than she had during her lifetime. *Ariel* received a review in *The New York Times* that praised its “relentless honesty,” “sophistication of the use of rhyme,” and “bitter force,” and *Poetry* magazine noted “a pervasive impatience, a positive urgency to the poems.” Plath quickly became one of the most popular American poets. The appearance of small collections of previously unpublished poems, including *Crossing the Water* (1971) and *Winter Trees* (1971), was welcomed by critics and the public alike. *The Bell Jar* was reissued in Great Britain under her own name in 1966, and it was published in the United States for the first time in 1971. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, a book of short stories and prose, was published in 1977.

The *Collected Poems*, which includes many previously unpublished poems, appeared in 1981 and received the 1982 Pulitzer Prize for poetry, making Plath the first to receive the honor posthumously. A book for children that she had written in 1959, *The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit*, was published in 1996. Interest in Plath and her works continued into the 21st century. She had kept a journal for much of her life, and in 2000 *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, covering the years from 1950 to 1962, was published. A biographical film of Plath starring Gwyneth Paltrow (Sylvia) appeared in 2003. In 2009 Plath’s radio play *Three Women* (1962) was staged professionally for the first time. A volume of Plath’s letters, written in 1940–56, was published in 2017. A second collection—which contained her later letters, including a number of candid notes to her psychiatrist—appeared the following year. In 2019 the story *Mary Ventura and the Ninth Kingdom*, written in 1952, was published for the first time.

Many of Plath’s posthumous publications were compiled by Hughes, who became the executor of her estate. However, controversy surrounded both the estate’s management of her work’s copyright and his editing practices, especially when he revealed that he had destroyed the last journals written prior to her suicide.

8.8 KEYWORDS

- Acanthine: relating to the acanthus, a small herb or shrub

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- Anesthetist: someone who delivers anesthesia to a patient
- Bailiwick: a special place, domain
- Caustic: marked by harsh sarcasm
- Contusion: an injury without an open wound; a bruise

8.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Write a short note Sylvia Plath's life and career.
- Mention Sylvia Plath's work.
- Write a note about Sylvia Plath's portrayals in media.

8.10 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Rose, Jacqueline (February 1, 1998). "The happy couple". The Guardian. London. Archived from the original on March 12, 2017.
- "BBC Two – Ted Hughes: Stronger Than Death". BBC. October 10, 2015. Archived from the original on December 17, 2016.
- "Morning Song, Plath, Sylvia". Jeanette Winterson. Archived from the original on December 27, 2010.
- "A Poet's Guide to Britain: Sylvia Plath". BBC. May 11, 2009. Archived from the original on September 1, 2013. Retrieved July 31, 2013.
- "The Blood Jet Is Poetry". Time. June 10, 1966. Retrieved July 9, 2010. Book review, Ariel.

8. 11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Sylvia Plath was born on October 27, 1932. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q1)**

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 2)**

Sylvia Plath's mother's name was Aurelia Schober Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 3)**

Sylvia Plath's father's name was Otto Plath. (**answer to check your progress – 1 Q 4**)

Sylvia Plath's father's profession was an entomologist and a professor of biology at Boston University. (**answer to check your progress – 1 Q 5**)

UNIT-9 SYLVIA PLATH- POINT SHIRLEY, THE COLOSSUS, DADDY, FEVER 103, ARIEL, PURDAH, LADY LAZARUS - 2

STRUCTURE

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Point Shirley

9.3 The Colossus

9.4 Let us sum up

9.5 Keywords

9.6 Questions for Review

9.7 Suggested Reading and References

9.8 Answers to Check your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about “Point Shirley” by Sylvia Plath and,
- you would also learn about “The Colossus” by Sylvia Plath.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

POINT SHIRLEY

Written in 1960, “Point Shirley” is a poem in which the details are more important than the actual time and place that the events occurred.

THE COLOSSUS

It's probably safe to say that Sylvia Plath is almost as famous for her mega-sad life as she is for her poetry. This is kind of too bad, because her poetry rocks on its own. Her rocky—make that mega-rocky—marriage to fellow poet Ted Hughes and her suicide have been the center of a storm of discussion and controversy. Plenty of bad stuff happened earlier in her life as well. When she was eight, for example, her father Otto died from untreated diabetes. His leg had to be amputated, and he eventually died from complications from his long hospitalization, which can't have been an easy thing for an eight-year-old to deal with. Yeah, this lady's poems were dark, but you can totally see where all that darkness came from.

Though her life was short and troubled, Plath wrote a ton of poems and earned her place as one of the greats of American poetry. "The Colossus" was first published in *The Colossus and Other Poems* in 1960. Some have said that the giant shattered statue in the poem is meant to represent the father that Plath lost at an early age. Along with the rest of the poems in the collection, it was received well, and most critics agreed that Plath was a poet to watch out for. In 1982, nineteen years after Plath's death in 1963, Hughes published his wife's *Collected Poems*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. "The Colossus" and the many other poems in the collection are still seen as some of most haunting and beautiful pieces in the history of American poetry.

9.2 POINT SHIRLEY

From Water-Tower Hill to the brick prison

The shingle booms, bickering under

The sea's collapse.

Snowcakes break and welter. This year

The gritted wave leaps

The seawall and drops onto a bier

Of quahog chips,

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Leaving a salty mash of ice to whiten
In my grandmother's sand yard. She is dead,
Whose laundry snapped and froze here, who
Kept house against
What the sluttish, rutted sea could do.
Squall waves once danced
Ship timbers in through the cellar window;
A thresh-tailed, lanced
Shark littered in the geranium bed —
Such collusion of mulish elements
She wore her broom straws to the nub.
Twenty years out
Of her hand, the house still hugs in each drab
Stucco socket
The purple egg-stones: from Great Head's knob
To the filled-in Gut
The sea in its cold gizzard ground those rounds.
Nobody wintering now behind
The planked-up windows where she set
Her wheat loaves
And apple cakes to cool. What is it
Survives, grieves
So, battered, obstinate spit
Of gravel? The waves'

Spewed relics clicker masses in the wind,

Grey waves the stub-necked eiders ride.

A labor of love, and that labor lost.

Steadily the sea

Eats at Point Shirley. She died blessed,

And I come by

Bones, only bones, pawed and tossed,

A dog-faced sea.

The sun sinks under Boston, bloody red.

I would get from these dry-papped stones

The milk your love instilled in them.

The black ducks dive.

And though your graciousness might stream,

And I contrive,

Grandmother, stones are nothing of home

To that spumiest dove.

Against both bar and tower the black sea runs.

In Sylvia Plath's "Point Shirley," she tries to create a vivid image in the reader's mind as to what the New England coast looks like. In doing so, she sends a depressing image that helps to set the tone for the next stanza where her grandmother is found dead. In the absence of the grandmother, the sea is slowly breaking down the house. Although the aggressive sea is unable to destroy the house in the grandmother's presence, it does begin to wear down after the absence of the grandmother sets in.

The title of the poem is simply to let the reader know where the story is taking place. However, it is not very important if the exact location of the poem is known, because Plath's purpose for writing the poem can still be

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expressed without knowing this. The title does show a hint of what the poem is about, however, because any location name that is preceded by the word “point” can usually be assumed to be on the beach.

The speaker, Sylvia Plath, plays a very important role in the poem as she is writing it about her grandmother. Through the way that she describes the house coping with the brutality of the sea, she is complimenting her grandmother’s stubborn attitude, which Plath had admired. Plath has a loving memory of her grandmother and much of this memory comes from the house. She is almost complaining about the sea removing the memory of her grandmother as time goes on.

Throughout the poem, Plath describes the sea in a way that makes it seem alive. The ferocity of the sea seems to be purposefully tearing down the house. This type of personification allows the reader to develop the idea that there is nothing to stop the sea and that, over time, the house and memory of the grandmother will be gone.

Sylvia Plath is obviously very upset with the death of her grandmother and is using her poetry to express her feelings about her. She labels her grandmother as stubborn but loving, and does not ever want to forget her. However, as time passes, the memory of the grandmother is fading away along with the house.

As a reader, this writer can personally identify with the setting of this poem, as I have grown up on the New England coast. For example, I can relate with the quahog chips mentioned in the first stanza because they covered many of the beaches I frequented as a child. The vivid details used to describe the rough sea reminds me of the many stormy days that I lived on the beach as the waves crashed against the beach. I believe that being able to identify with the setting helps the reader feel the emotion that Plath is trying to express.

9.3 THE COLOSSUS

The Colossus and Other Poems is a poetry collection by American poet Sylvia Plath, first published by Heinemann, in 1960. It is the only volume of poetry by Plath that was published before her death in 1963.

SUMMARY

"The Colossus" takes us through a day in the life of a person who spends her time taking care of a huge, shattered statue. What does one do to take care of a huge shattered statue, you ask? Well, the speaker mostly does some cleaning here and there, and tries her best to put it back together again. She knows it's a hopeless task, but she just can't seem to stop doing it.

Throughout the poem, there are hints that the whole thing is an extended metaphor for a woman who's dealing with emotional damage caused by the loss of her father. Ultimately, she's well aware of the unhealthy nature of her situation, but she seems resigned to the fact that this is how she lives.

STANZA 1**Lines 1-2**

I shall never get you put together entirely, Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

- Our speaker starts off by addressing some unknown person who she's apparently trying to put back together. (We're just assuming our speaker is a she at this point, since we haven't got anything else to go on.)
- So... what, does she work in a morgue or something? Nah, probably not.
- We're going to go ahead and assume that she's talking about piecing a giant *statue* back together, since this poem is titled "The Colossus."
- (The Colossus was a giant statue that once stood in the harbor of the ancient city of Rhodes. Check "What's Up with the Title?" for more.)
- We also notice that the speaker seems to be admitting defeat. She's sure she'll never get this job done.
- Words like "pieced" and "glued" also conjure the image of someone trying to put together the shattered remnants of a statue.

Notes

- When the speaker talks about making sure it's "properly jointed," we think of broken stone elbows and knees.
- We're going to go ahead and guess that this whole "hanging out in the ruins of a giant statue" thing is a big ole metaphor for something. So, we're on the lookout to see what that is.

Lines 3-5

Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles proceed from your great lips.

It's worse than a barnyard.

- Apparently, all kinds of crazy animal-like noises are coming out of statue's giant mouth.
- Notice how Plath uses some creative hyphenation with "mule-bray" and "pig-grunt" to make up her own words. (Those are called neologisms.) This has the cool effect of bringing to our minds both the sounds the animals make as well as the image of the animals themselves.
- Next we veer away from direct references to animals with "bawdy cackles." This could be meant to reference some kind of weird chicken or something. But the word "bawdy" means something that's kind of raunchy or indecently sexual.
- So, "bawdy cackles" kind of summons the image of the peals of laughter that might come from some house of prostitution (not, you know, a sexy chicken or anything like that).
- Perhaps the animal sounds referenced before are meant to be sounds of men braying and grunting with these "bawds."
- Notice that the speaker says, "It's worse than a barnyard," but not that it is one.
- Whatever is going on inside this statue's mouth, it's base and animalistic, and the speaker does not seem to be a fan of it.

STANZA 2

Lines 6-7

Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle, Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.

- With these lines, the speaker seems to be mocking the fallen statue.
- She was just talking about all the crude noises coming from its mouth, right? But now she accuses it of having delusions of grandeur, saying that it thinks it speaks for the "dead" or a "god."
- Notice that the speaker drops another classical reference here with the word "oracle," which is most likely an allusion to the Oracle of Delphi, a major center of prophecy in the ancient world.
- Many pilgrims used to travel to Delphi to ask questions of the priestesses there, who answered with prophecies from Apollo.
- So, the speaker is basically saying that the statue thinks it's just as cool and important as this ancient oracle, but really it's got nothing to say.
- Nothing but base, animal noises are coming out of its mouth.
- Quick note on rhyme: so far, there isn't any. This poem seems to be pretty conversational, not particularly structured in any way. For more on this choice, check out "Form and Meter."

Lines 8-10

Thirty years now I have labored To dredge the silt from your throat.

I am none the wiser.

- The speaker continues to diss on the statue's speaking abilities here by describing its throat as being full of "silt." Silt is a finely-ground type of soil, somewhere between sand and clay.
- So, if the statue's throat is full of this stuff, it's probably not able to say much at all. No wonder the speaker is "none the wiser."
- Not only can this Colossus only make animal sounds, its throat it totally clogged. Some oracle it is, huh?

Notes

- We also notice that the speaker is again depicting herself in a caretaker role. She may be mocking the fallen statue, but she's "labored" for "thirty years" to try and clear out its silty throat.
- It seems like, even though she resents it, she must care for it deeply in some way.
- Here again, at the end of the second stanza, we're left wondering what the speaker's relationship with the statue represents.
- This stanza ultimately seems to tell us that it is something she once expected to get wisdom from, but now just can't—no matter how hard she tries.

STANZA 3

Lines 11-12

Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pails of Lysol
I crawl like an ant in mourning

- Again, the speaker describes herself as a caretaker of the statue. The reference to "glue pots" takes us back to line 2, where she talked about trying to glue it back together again.
- We also notice how this reference to "Lysol," a very modern cleaning product, sticks out like a sore thumb in this poem so full of classical references.
- It lets us now that this is a woman from the modern era in this ruined, classical landscape.
- By describing herself as an ant, the speaker gives us a sense of how small she feels as she crawls around the remnants of the huge statue.
- It's interesting that she specifically says that she's an "ant in mourning." Have you ever seen an ant mourn something? Yeah, us either. Really, we're not sure they do, but... hey, would we know what it looked like if they did? (Maybe they wear tiny black outfits?)

- Whatever that case, the use of the word "mourning" here gives us the sense that the speaker is grieving a great loss of some kind.
- It might also be a play on words, telling us that this is her "morning" ritual.

Lines 13-15

Over the weedy acres of your brow To mend the immense skull-plates
and clear The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

- We get more great imagery of the ruined statue in these lines.
- We can really see all the little weeds poking up from the shattered remnants of the statue's "brow."
- The speaker struggles to do her best to heave the slabs of its "skull-plates" back together..
- The speaker also slips into some kind of intense death imagery here with the word "skull-plates," which are slabs of bone that make up the human skull.
- Also, she calls the eyes of the statue "tumuli." Tumuli are burial mounds.
- This funereal imagery connects back to that talk of the "ant in mourning" in line 12.
- Okay, seriously, though—we want to know for real what or who this statue represents.
- It's been going on for a long time now, so we're ready to dub it an extended metaphor.

STANZA 4

Lines 16-17

A blue sky out of the Oresteia Arches above us. O father, all by yourself

- Wowzers—it looks like the speaker is finally letting us in on what this extended metaphor is representing.

Notes

- She addresses the statue as "father" here, so we're going to assume that it symbolizes her dad.
- The fact that the statue is ruined (coupled with all the death-talk we've been hearing) makes us think that the speaker's father is dead.
- So, it seems like this whole poem is an extended metaphor for the speaker dealing with the loss of her dad and the scars that put on her psyche.
- (Biography note time: Sylvia Plath's dad died when she was really young, and a lot of her poems are about dealing with that trauma. Check out "Daddy" for another famous example.)
- It seems that by using the image of this fallen giant statue, the speaker is relating how huge the loss of the male presence was in her life.
- The speaker kind of carries this daughter-mourning-father thing through with another classical reference, this one to Aeschylus's tragic trilogy, the *Oresteia*.
- It specifically seems to reference the way Electra mourns her murdered father, Agamemnon, in *The Libation Bearers*, the second play of the trilogy.
- (Go to "Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay" for more on Electra and Agamemnon.)
- We wonder why the speaker references the "blue sky" of the *Oresteia*. Could it a reference to the realm of the gods, those forces that have the power to bring death down on humanity whenever they feel like it? Maybe reading on will give us some insights.

Lines 18

You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum.

- The speaker references another ancient structure here with the Roman Forum, which today is a big ole ruin.
- It seems obvious why the speaker describes the Forum as "historical," but the reason why she describes is as "pithy" seems a little harder to figure out. "Pithy" is usually used to

describe a statement that sums something up really succinctly—you know, like without using a lot of words.

- Could the speaker be saying that the image of this ruined Forum-Colossus succinctly sums up the way she feels about her dead father?

Line 19

I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress.

- Whatever it is, she takes a break from her daily caretaker duties and contemplates the ruins on "a hill of black cypress." We wonder why she chooses a hill with this particular kind of tree.
- Well, the mention of the color black does put us in kind of a funereal mindset, because it's a color of mourning and all that.
- Sounds like not the most fun place to chow down.

Line 20

Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered

- The speaker returns to the imagery of the ruined Forum by describing the ruined statue's "fluted bones and acanthine hair."
- (Come again? Both fluted and acanthine describe the kind of ancient columns found in the Forum. Check out "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory" for the deets.)
- The mention of bones also reminds us of the skeleton of the father who's died.

STANZA 5

Line 21

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.

- The poem whips out some enjambment here, completing the sentence of the previous line.
- So, our speaker is carrying over that image of the "fluted bones and acanthine hair" and shows these colossal fragments stretching out to the horizon.

Notes

- It's kind of like the movie camera just pulled out for a wide shot and now we see just how big the Colossus was.
- All of this really helps us feel how massively devastating the loss of the speaker's father was for her.
- The use of the "old anarchy" not only paints a picture of the chaotic ruin spreading around the speaker, but also gives us a sense of just how long it's been there.
- We're reminded that this is a pain that the speaker has been dealing with for a while.

Lines 22-23

It would take more than a lightning-stroke
To create such a ruin.

- Here, the speaker again helps us see the vast destruction that's spreading all around her.
- It wasn't just some pip-squeaky flash of lighting that did this; it was something bigger and way more powerful.
- Could this possibly be a reference to the earthquake, which took down the original Colossus of Rhodes? Could it be a reference to nuclear weapons, which were still relatively new to the world when Plath wrote the poem?
- Whatever it is, the speaker again gets across the idea that her father's death was accompanied by some major-league devastation.

Lines 24-25

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia
Of your left ear, out of the wind,

- The speaker has taken us through her day of work and now we see how she spends her nights, taking shelter from the wind in the statue's ear.
- The description of the ear canal as a "cornucopia" is pretty great, in our humble opinion. A cornucopia is one of those kinda curvy,

cone-shaped things that you usually see spilling over with the fruits of the harvest.

- So, the shape of it is actually a whole lot like an ear canal.
- It's interesting that the speaker chooses to use this symbol of thriving life in a poem that's so focused on ruin and death.
- Could it be a reference to the fact that she still gains some kind of sustenance from the memory of her father?
- Or, to go the totally opposite direction, could it represent the lack of sustenance, since the cornucopia-shaped ear canal would have to be empty for her to take shelter in it?

STANZA 6

Lines 26-27

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color. The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.

- The speaker now tells us that she spends all night counting "red stars" and also ones that are "plum color ed ." Hmm, red and purple stars—what's up with that?
- Well, next the speaker describes the sun rising from under the "tongue" of the statue.
- This makes us wonder if the red and purple stars are somehow a reference to taste buds.
- You know, if you stick your tongue out and look at it, the taste buds do kind of look like red and purple stars. Come on, you know you want to try it.
- We also notice that the speaker is bringing back some of that Roman Forum imagery by describing the tongue as a "pillar," which is pretty much the same thing as the columns she was alluding to before.
- So again, the speaker seems to be somehow inside the body of this mega-gigantic statue.

Notes

Lines 28

My hours are married to shadow.

- Even though the sun is rising, the speaker is still focused on darkness. In fact, she's "married" to it.
- Could this be a reference to the way she feels forever bound by the depression caused by the death of her father?
- Notice that she chooses to say that her "hours" are married. To us, this gets across the awful feeling of time slowly, agonizingly inching by. That's not really a fun marriage to be in.

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the
landing.

- The speaker chooses to end with a little boat imagery—no, not imagery of a little boat, but a little imagery *about* boats.
- This is a little weird, because there hasn't been any of that stuff up until now, but whatever. Of course, the original Colossus was by the harbor of Rhodes, so it does make sense.
- A keel is that ridge that runs along the bottom of some kinds of boats. The idea of one scraping a landing—where boats, you know, land—seems to imply that a boat has returned home to shore.
- The stones are blank, though, without any decoration or importance. Could the speaker be saying that she's ceased to wait for her father to come home?
- If this is true, then it makes it even sadder that she's unable to leave these ruins. She knows he'll never come, but still she waits.
- She began the poem by telling him that she'll never be able to put him back together, but every day of her life that's what she spends her time trying to do.
- The speaker is trapped in the ruins of what he was.

ANALYSIS

Sound Check

You won't find any specific rhyme scheme or meter in "The Colossus." Plath doesn't pull any of those other typical poetic tricks like assonance or alliteration either. Instead, she uses free verse to deliver her striking imagery in an almost conversational tone. Sure, it's like you're hearing an incredibly smart and literate person have a conversation. We don't know too many people who'd casually drop words like "tumuli" (15) and "acanthine" (20) in a sentence. But still, the lack of any of those poetic formalities works well to make this blasted wasteland feel intimate and personal.

What's Up With the Title?

The title of the poem is most likely a reference to the Colossus of Rhodes, a big mamma jamma of a statue that used to stand near the harbor of the ancient city. The Rhodians built the original Colossus to celebrate their victory over Demetrius, who laid siege to Rhodes. It's said this giant statue of Helios, the sun god and patron god of Rhodes, was built in part from the remains of the siege towers and weapons left by the enemy. The gigantic statue gave meaning to the word "colossal," and it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Eventually, though, an earthquake rocked Rhodes and the Colossus came a tumblin' down.

In the poem, the speaker describes herself as endlessly tending the remains of a huge fallen statue much like the original Colossus. Many, of course, say this is all one big whopping extended metaphor for the speaker dealing with the loss of her father. It totally makes sense that the speaker would use the fallen Colossus to represent this loss. When it was standing upright, the statue was a symbol of strength, victory, and a seemingly all-powerful sun god. When we're little kids, a lot of us feel this way about our dad. The speaker definitely seems to have almost worshipped him, and seeing him defeated by death seems to have shattered her as much as it did him. By using such an epic allusion to

Notes

symbolize her fallen father, the speaker makes us really feel the hugeness of loss she wrestles with every day.

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symbolize her fallen father, the speaker makes us really feel the hugeness of loss she wrestles with every day.

Setting

This poem is all about setting. The speaker crawls around the ruins of the Colossus, a huge toppled statue. (It's kind of a weird thing to do, but to each her own, right?) The speaker gives us a real sense of all the huge, cracked body parts that she tends. She says, "Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles / Proceed from your great lips" (3-4), and we can see the giant face, now inhabited by animals (or at least animalistic activities). Another one of our fave descriptions is "I crawl like an ant in mourning / Over the weedy acres of your brow" (12-13). Not only does this help us see how time takes its toll on the fallen statue as the weeds creep in, it also gives us a sense of how massive this thing is. The speaker is like an ant compared to it, and its brow goes on for acres. (That's one big brow, gang.)

Throughout the poem we wonder what terrible catastrophe brought the big guy down. The speaker doesn't tell us exactly, instead saying,

Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.

It would take more than a lightning-stroke

To create such a ruin (20-23).

So, she says it would take more than lightning, but she doesn't bother to specify any further. We think it's cool that she does this, though, because it increases the sense of foreboding around these post-apocalyptic ruins. We're left to imagine what horrible disaster could've spread the remains of the stone giant all the way to the horizon.

Speaker

It's widely known that Sylvia Plath's father died of untreated diabetes when she was very young. So, many have said that her many poems about the loss of a father were inspired by this. She's also often lumped

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into the "confessional" school of poetry, whose poets were all about directly dredging up the joys and horrors (mostly horrors) of their lives as fuel for their work. All that said, it's hardly ever a good idea think of the poet as the speaker, because poets tend to embellish and push past themselves in their writing. (Hey, it's their job to be poetic, right?) For example, Sylvia Plath never spent a lot of time hanging around the ruined remains of a giant statue (that we know of).

So, what do we know about the speaker in this particular poem? Well, she certainly is dutiful to this toppled Colossus. (We wonder what Dr. Phil would have to say about her life choices.) She spends every day "Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pails of Lysol" to try to put ruin back together and keep it clean (11). Still, she's not exactly optimistic about her project. She even kicks the poem off by telling the statue, "I shall never get you put together entirely, / Pieced, glued, and properly jointed (1-2). So, if she knows there's no use in fretting about it anymore, why does she spend all day every day doing just that? Toward the end of the poem, the speaker says that her "hours are married to shadow" (28). This seems to really sum up her situation. She's tied to this dark event from her past, and she just can't seem to let herself escape. Sad, right?

Tough-o-Meter

Sure, this poem has a few fancy words, but mostly the imagery is approachable and easy to understand.

Calling Card

Plath is often lumped into what's called "confessional poetry." This basically means that she and other poets like her weren't shy about drawing from personal experiences when writing their poems. (Were they totally self-obsessed? Maybe. But maybe that's okay sometimes.) In "The Colossus," for example, you'll notice that she uses the word "I" a lot—you know, like in the lines, "I am none the wiser." (10) and "I crawl like an ant in mourning" (12). That fact that she's thought of as a confessional poet leads a lot of people to assume that "The Colossus" and other of Plath's father-themed poems are about her own father who died.

Of course, if all Plath did was regurgitate past traumas without any kind of interesting language, we probably wouldn't be sitting here talking about her today. Though she loots her troubled past for inspiration, she constantly relates those feelings by hurling one striking image after another at us. (You might be tempted to duck, but don't. You'll be wowed by what hits you.) Instead of just talking in a generally sad way about how her dad died, Plath shows her speaker, haunting the wasteland of a giant, fallen statue. She paints the creepy landscape so vividly, you almost feel like you're there: "Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered / In their old anarchy to the horizon-line" (20-21). (Sounds like a Tim Burton movie, right?) Plath's incredible ability to wow us with such specific and striking language is proven in poem after poem. Check out "Daddy" or "Lady Lazarus" for just two examples.

Form and Meter

"The Colossus" doesn't follow any particular meter. Its haunting images come in fairly conversational free verse. Still, the stanzas are all pretty tidy, with each having five lines. Why five lines exactly? Well, the generally tidy appearance of the poem mirrors the way the speaker is trying to tidy the ruins of the statue. Despite all this tidiness, however, another thing the poem does structurally is become a little more disjointed as it goes along. Check out how the fourth stanza begins:

A blue sky out of the Oresteia Arches above us. O father, all by
yourself (16-17)

Notice, how we get a period right in the middle of 17, creating a pause (or caesura) smack dab in the middle of the line. Yeah, that hasn't happened before in the poem (and it won't again actually). Having the pause right before "O father" really makes it pop in our mind's ear (if you follow), which works well since the father is what the whole poem seems to be about.

The end of the fourth stanza also spills over into the next:

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I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress. Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line. It would take more than a lightning-stroke (19-22)

This is the first place in the poem that does this and it continues in the transition from fifth to the sixth and final stanza:

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia Of your left ear, out of the wind,

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color. The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue. (24-27)

By having these thoughts visually broken up on the page, the poem starts to feel more and more fractured, which not only mimics the shattered ruins of the statue, but also the damaged psyche of the speaker.

The Classical World

The speaker weaves a bunch of references to the classical world into the poem. Greek tragedies, architecture, fallen empires, the Colossus itself—all of these mentions place the poem in a really epic context. We get the feeling that the tragedy that happened here is as old as the civilization itself, and somehow the speaker's tragedy becomes the tragedy of all humanity.

- Line 6: The first classical reference we get is when the speaker mockingly implies that the fallen statue thinks of itself as an "oracle." The most famous of these from ancient times was the Oracle of Delphi in Greece. For centuries, pilgrims traveled to this sacred place to ask questions of the Pythia, young virgin priestesses of Apollo who shared the prophecies of their god for a price.
- Line 16: The speaker drops another reference to the classical world on us when she says, "A blue sky out of the Oresteia/ Arches above us" 16-17. *The Oresteia*, by Aeschylus, is the only complete trilogy of Greek tragedies still in existence. This allusion might be a direct

reference to the second play in trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, in which Electra mourns the loss of her father Agamemnon, who was murdered by her mother Clytemnestra. In the play, Electra performs funeral ceremonies in honor of Agamemnon, which are kind of similar to the sorts of things that our speaker does to care for her fallen Colossus. So, this reference seems to make it even clearer that the shattered statue is meant to represent a father who's passed on. Like Electra, the speaker is obsessed with her dead father. Plath actually wrote another poem about the death of her father called "Electra on the Azalea Path", which makes us think we're on the right track with this one.

- Line 18: Next, the speaker compares the ruined statue to the ruins of the Roman Forum, which you can still see today in modern Rome. [Click here for a pic.](#) The Forum was at the heart of the city of Rome and its entire empire. It makes total sense that the speaker would tie the ruins of this ancient seat of power with the shattered remains of the once-awesome Colossus. Both seem to represent the downfall of something huge and seemingly indestructible, which is probably what the speaker felt like when her seemingly all-powerful Father passed away.
- Line 20: The speaker continues to tie the Colossus and the Forum by describing the statue's "fluted bones and acanthine hair." Both "fluted" and "acanthine" are referencing the kind of ancient columns that tourists still snap pictures of at the remains of the Forum in Rome. Fluted columns have grooves running up their sides, and acanthine describes the decorative stone curls at the top of the columns.

Body Parts

- Lines 3-4: The first mention of a body part comes when the speaker says, "Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles / Proceed from your great lips." It's kind of an intense image, right? The lips are a pretty intimate part of the body, and the idea of someone's mouth being full of animals, or at least animalistic activities, is sort of horrifying. It's

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almost like the speaker is dehumanizing the statue with the mention of this human body part, since all that comes from its lips now is the sounds of animals.

- Lines 8-9: The speaker continues the body part thing with "Thirty years now I have labored / To dredge the silt from your throat." It's cool how this links back to the mention of lips. Both lines seem to be about how the speaker can't communicate with the statue anymore.
- Lines 12-13: Next we have, "I crawl like an ant in mourning / Over the weedy acres of your brow." This image relates the general state of decay of the statue. Apparently, the speaker doesn't have weed killer, because pesky plants are growing everywhere. You could also interpret this line to mean the weeds have actually grown from the statue, forming living eyebrows (eesh) where before there was only stone.
- Lines 14-15: The speaker is crawling over the face of the statue "To mend the immense skull-plates and clear / The bald, white tumuli of your eyes." We get the mention of two body parts here. First, we have skull-plates, which we wouldn't like to eat off of, but which totally conjure the image of a human corpse. Then there are these spooky eyes, which look like tumuli, or burial mounds.
- Lines 20-21: The corpse-like imagery continues with the mention of the statue's "fluted bones." This seems to carry through the image of skull-plates and tumuli eyes from earlier. More and more the speaker is weaving the idea that these ruins are the remains of a human who's died.
- Lines 24-27: Our tour of the body ends where it began: the statue's mouth. The speaker says, "The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue." This fleshy image makes us feel that this statue might not be made of stone, and it carries through both the lack of communication idea as well as the deathly imagery which are both woven into the motif of body parts.

Steaminess Rating

It's all death and decay all the time here. Nope—no sex in this poem what so ever.

THEMES

Death

Though some have different theories, most say that "The Colossus" is one big long extended metaphor for a woman grieving for her father. The poem is chock full of death imagery, which gets this idea across without smacking us in the face with it too too much. (It just smacks us in the face occasionally, which we can deal with.) Overall, the poem paints a tenderly tragic picture of the way one person's death can dominate the life of another.

Women and Femininity

Some have said that "The Colossus" is more than a poem about a lady mourning her father. You could also say that it's about the power that men have over all women in society. So, the speaker could be kind of an everywoman of sorts, and the whole "dutiful daughter serving her father" thing could represent the way women are under the thumb of men in male-dominated societies. And—let's get real folks—that's pretty much every society around these days.

Duty

"The Colossus" uses the image of a caretaker who spends her days dutifully cleaning and trying to put together a giant shattered statue. Though the task is impossible, and impossibly pointless, she gets up every morning to do it anyway. Sure, she kind of resents the way her duties trap her, but still she can't seem to break away—even though no one seems to holding her there but herself. Now how does your worst job compare to this?

Suffering

Notes

The speaker of "The Colossus" doesn't do a lot of whining about it, but it's clear she's experiencing more than a little suffering. She just can't seem to get over some colossal loss in her past and spends every day picking through the ruins. "The Colossus" is a poem that shows just how much power mental suffering can have over a person's life. It's like having the biggest, most awful job to do ever, and, oh yeah, there's no pay.

Check your Progress-1

1. Who wrote "Point Shirley"?

2. Who wrote "The Colossus"?

3. When was "The Colossus" first published?

4. Who published "The Colossus"?

9.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied about Sylvia Plath's poem's Point Shirley and The Colossus.

9.5 KEYWORDS

- Cornucopia: a receptacle shaped like a horn or cone
- Cypress: a coniferous, evergreen tree
- Efface: to eliminate; to erase; to make indistinct
- Filaments: single, elongated threadlike objects
- Flagons: large glasses as for wine, usually with a handle and a spout

9.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Summarize “The Colossus “by Sylvia Plath.
- Analyze “The Colossus “by Sylvia Plath.
- Summarize “Point Shirley” by Sylvia Plath.
- Write the themes of “The Colossus “by Sylvia Plath.

9.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

- Anemona Hartocollis (March 8, 2018). "Sylvia Plath, a Postwar Poet Unafraid to Confront Her Own Despair". The New York Times. Retrieved March 9, 2018.
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- Carrell, Severin (December 28, 2003). "Sylvia Plath film has lost the plot, says her closest friend". Independent. Independent.
- "Plath film angers daughter". BBC. February 3, 2003. Archived from the original on March 6, 2016.
- Hughes, Frieda (2003). "My Mother". The Book of Mirrors. Archived from the original on May 28, 2012.

9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Point Shirley was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 1)**

The Colossus was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 2)**

The Colossus was first published in 1960. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 3)**

The Colossus was published by Heinemann. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 4)**

UNIT-10 SYLVIA PLATH- POINT SHIRLEY, THE COLOSSUS, DADDY, FEVER 103, ARIEL, PURDAH, LADY LAZARUS - 3

STRUCTURE

10.0 Objectives

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Daddy

10.3 Let us sum up

10.4 Keywords

10.5 Questions for Review

10.6 Suggested Reading and References

10.7 Answers to Check your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about the summary of the poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath,
- you would also go through the critical analysis of the poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath,
- and finally you would also go through the themes used in the poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

DADDY

The poem Daddy by Sylvia Plath is a feminist poem which was written about her father's sudden demise. The poem is also partly

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autobiographical. Because the poet herself, has said that the 'daddy' of the poem is her own daddy.

But, we should not take it only in that rather narrow sense, because we can clearly see that the poem is more psychologically significant than it is autobiographical. In an autobiographical sense when she was eight years old her father died, letting her struggle to this world. She could not have fatherly protection at her neediest time. So her subdued anger to her father is burst out in this poem. Psychologically, the poem is an outlet of the mad anger of the speaker. On the surface of the poem, we see that the speaker hurls a series of verbal assaults against her father. She goes to the extent of scolding her father as a 'bastard'. But on a deeper level of meaning, the image of daddy is the symbolic male who has oppressed the female throughout history; more generally, it is also the symbol of all destructive and tyrannical forces maintained by the males – war, genocide, atrocity, and so on. Her poetry is notable for its controlled and intense treatment of extremely painful states of mind. She is the great exponent of the poetry of neurosis. Though the stuff of Plath's poetry is neurosis (full of delusions, guilt feelings and odd complexes), her poems are not neurotic. They are carefully executed expression of neurosis.

10.2 DADDY

SUMMARY

STANZA 1

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

- The poem starts with the speaker declaring that she will no longer put up with the black shoe she's lived in, poor and scared, for thirty years.
- She uses the second person throughout the poem, saying "you," who, as we find out, is "Daddy." So that means that she's comparing her

father to a shoe that she's been living in very unhappily – but she's not going to put up with it anymore.

- This stanza reminds us of a nursery rhyme – the old woman who lived in a shoe. The repetition of "you do not do" in the first line even makes this stanza sound a little singsong-y. But this is no happy nursery rhyme – the speaker is poor, and won't dare to breathe or sneeze, meaning that she feels trapped and scared.

STANZAS 2 & 3

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time –

- The poem no longer seems like a nursery rhyme in this stanza. In line 6, the speaker tells her father that she has had to kill him, as if she's already murdered him.
- But then in line 7, the speaker says that he died before she "had time," though she doesn't make it 100% clear if she means to say "before I had time to kill him." It could mean something like, "before I had time to get to know him," or "before I could make him proud."
- Either way, it's shocking that our speaker claims she had to kill her father. After hearing this violent sentiment, we're not sure if she's sad that he died, or if she's angry, or what.

Line 8

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

- After we hear that the speaker's father is dead, the phrase describing him, "Marble-heavy," helps us imagine the stiff heaviness of a corpse, or even a marble gravestone.
- The "bag full of God" could refer to a body bag, or the speaker could be saying that the skin around our bodies is nothing but a bag.
- Either way, the image of her father as a bag full of God shows her conflicted feelings about him. Maybe her father died when she was young and he controlled her world – a sort of God over her life.

Notes

Perhaps his death caused memories of him to have more control over the speaker's life – so he seems, to her, to be as powerful as God.

- What is the speaker's view of God anyway? Is it positive or negative?

Lines 9-13

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

Where it pours bean green over blue

In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

- These lines show us that the phrase "Marble-heavy" was partly meant to set up an image of the speaker's father as a statue. But he's no normal statue – he's ghastly, like a gargoyle.
- Then Plath shows us that this statue is humongous. One of its gray toes is as big as a "Frisco" (as in San Francisco, California) seal (as in the blubbery animal – here's a picture). But its head is all the way across the United States in the Atlantic
- The speaker describes the Atlantic as "freakish," but it sounds pretty, pouring its water, green as a bean, over the blue of the ocean. The speaker even comes right out and says that Nauset, a region on the shore of Massachusetts, is beautiful.
- These lines show us that the statue stretches from coast to coast of the United States, with a toe in the Pacific and a head in the Atlantic. But, remember, the statue is actually the image of the speaker's dead father in her head.

Lines 14-15

I used to pray to recover you. Ach, du.

- After we've gotten the image of the father as a statue, stretching across the US, the speaker says that she used to pray to "recover" him. "Recover" seems to mean "regain," but could also imply a second meaning of "get healthy again."

- Knowing our speaker, "used to" is the important part of our line. She doesn't pray to get her father back any more.
- Then we get down to line 15...and we're not speaking English anymore. Even not knowing German, we can get a pretty good sense from the small sounds of these words that it's a sort of sigh. The phrase in German actually means "Oh, you."
- Plath's father was a German immigrant, which probably explains why she's writing this little sigh in his language when she thinks of praying to get him back from the dead. We don't know yet if it's a sad sigh or an angry sigh.

STANZAS 4,5 & 6

Lines 16-18

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.

- Now we get more about Germany than just an exclamation in the language. The speaker is talking about the German tongue, or language, but in a Polish town that has been destroyed by war.
- But the speaker doesn't just say something like "destroyed by war" – she says it has been "scraped flat by the roller of wars," which makes us think a bulldozer and also of rolling out cookie dough until it's flat.
- Then, she repeats the word "wars" three times, giving us the idea that this place has been flattened by more than one war.

Lines 19-23

But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend
Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,

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- Now we find out more about this town – its name is common. The speaker's Polish friend says there are a bunch of town in Poland with the same name.
- Because there are so many towns with the same name, the speaker will never know where "you," her father, has "put his foot, his root" – this probably means that she is wondering where he immigrated from, but will never be able to tell.

Lines 24-28

I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.
It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.

- The speaker also laments that she could never talk to her father, because her tongue always stuck.
- Even worse, the area where her tongue got stuck was like a barb wire snare. Barbed wire is pretty nasty stuff, and would rip a tongue to shreds.
- The speaker demonstrates her tongue getting stuck in German, repeating "Ich," the German word for "I." Her tongue seems to get stuck so badly that she can only stammer, "I, I, I..."
- Why did her tongue stick? We're not sure. Maybe her father made her nervous or scared. Maybe she's not very good at speaking German. What do you think?
- She then repeats that she could hardly speak, but the context of this line seems to be more general – earlier, she said she could hardly talk to her father but, now, she can hardly speak at all.

Lines 29-30

I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

- Our tongue-tied speaker is telling us that she thought every German was her father, and that she found his language dirty and offensive.
- Maybe her tongue only got stuck when speaking German. Perhaps she got nervous speaking the language of her father to other Germans, who all seemed like her father.
- These lines show us that the speaker is deeply disturbed by memories of her father. She sees him in every German person she comes across, and the association is unfortunately a negative one.

STANZA 7

Lines 31-33

An engine, an engine Chuffing me off like a Jew. A Jew to Dachau,
Auschwitz, Belsen.

- There was no period ending line 30, which said that the German language was obscene, so the engine is probably a metaphor for the German language.
- Then the speaker takes the engine metaphor further, saying that the language, like a train, is "chuffing" her off like a Jew. "Chuffing" is an example of onomatopoeia, it uses words to mimic the sound of a train.
- The significance of being taken by train, like a Jew, is that during the Holocaust the Germans took Jews to concentration camps by way of train. The speaker even lists some World War II concentration camps, saying that it's like she's being taken to Dachau, Auschwitz, and Belsen. Dachau and Belsen were in Germany, and Auschwitz was in German-occupied Poland.
- The speaker is so terrified by the German language that it feels like it is a train taking her to a horrible, mass death.

Lines 34-35

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

Notes

- The speaker is so opposed to the German language that she begins to talk like a Jew, perhaps in Yiddish. She even thinks that she may be Jewish.
- These lines explain that the speaker associates the fear and terror of her father with the struggle of the Jewish people against the Germans – it's a vivid and disturbing metaphor.

STANZA 8

Lines 36-37

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.

- The Tyrol is part of the Alpine mountain region, with many snow-capped peaks. It borders Germany, in part, but is mostly between the Italian and Austrian border. Many different languages are spoken there, and its nationality is a little muddled.
- One might pass Tyrol while riding a train through Germany, like the train the speaker imagines she is on.
- Vienna is the capital of Austria. Vienna beer, though it is Austrian in origin, surely could be found in nearby Germany. So the speaker is imagining things that could be found in Europe.
- These lines might seem a bit confusing, but try to think of these lines in the context of some of the Holocaust imagery we encountered earlier. The purity of snow in Tyrol and the clear look of Vienna beer are in stark contrast to the dark horrors that took place nearby in Nazi Germany.
- Also, purity in the context of the Nazis means horrible things – like genocide and the quest for "racial purity."

Lines 38-40

With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my
Taroc pack I may be a bit of a Jew.

- Here, the speaker talks about a gypsy ancestress. This means that one of her female ancestors was, at least figuratively, a gypsy.
- Then she talks about her "weird luck," which could relate to the mysticism of being part-gypsy, as does the Taroc pack – her pack of Tarot cards, which are used to tell fortunes.
- The repetition in line 39 keeps the rhythm of the line moving.
- But then she ties these lines to her suspicions that she may be part Jewish. This doesn't seem to make very much sense, but it's important to remember that gypsies, like Jews, were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust because they were considered to be "impure." (Learn more about the persecution of the gypsies by the Nazis here.)
- So, if the Nazis killed gypsies and Jews because they thought those people weren't pure, the speaker seems to sarcastically suggest that they should have killed the snows of Tyrol, or the beer of Vienna, for being impure as well.

STANZA 9

Lines 41-42

I have always been scared of you,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.

- Now the speaker switches back from describing herself as a victim to addressing her father, saying that she's always been scared of him.
- Then she goes on to describe her father's German characteristics. "Luftwaffe" is the German word for air force, and is specifically used to refer to the German air force of World War II.
- "Gobbledygoo" follows "Luftwaffe," masked as something of significance, but it's actually a nonsense word. Yet it probably refers to the strangeness of the German language to an English-speaking listener.

Lines 43-44

Notes

And your neat mustache

And your Aryan eye, bright blue.

- The "neat mustache" and blue "Aryan eye" describe the father physically, and make him seem very German.
- The mustache aligns her father with Hitler, whose toothbrush-shaped mustache was emblematic.
- "Aryan" is a term that, during the Nazi rise to power, referred to Hitler's "perfect race" of blond and blue-eyed people who were seen as "superior" to Jews and gypsies.
- So the speaker's father is now like the German image of terrible perfection – with Hitler's mustache and idealized bright blue eyes.

Line 45

Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You –

- "Panzer-man" refers to German tank drivers, and continues the image of the speaker's father as scary and terrible.
- Then, again, we get the phrase "O You," but this time it's in English. The poem has gone a long way since we heard the "Ach, du" (line 15). This "O you" follows not a prayer to recover him, but an invocation of his horrors.

STANZA 10

Lines 46-47

Not God but a swastika

So black no sky could squeak through.

- Now that the speaker has returned to her sigh of "O You" from earlier in the poem, she also returns to the concept that her father seemed like God to her. Now he appears to her to be a swastika, the Nazi symbol that has come to be associated with evil.
- But he's no normal swastika; he's so black that he blocks the sky. Just like when the speaker described him as a statue that stretches across the United States, when he is a swastika, he's rather extreme.

Lines 48-50

Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you.

- The speaker here says that every woman loves fascist men. Fascism is an extreme authoritarian type of government that we associate with cruel dictators. Hitler and the Nazis were fascists.
- She then goes on to describe what women love about Fascist men: the man's "boot in the woman's face," a rather cruel gesture to establish dominance and power. It's not hard to imagine someone like Hitler stomping on someone's face.
- She connects the boot in the face with "brute" hearts of "brute" men like her father. This use of internal rhyme and repetition really intensifies the accusation that her father was a cruel Fascist.
- So the speaker has connected her father with Fascists, and with their brutality. But she's saying that women love all this cruelty and brutality.
- Perhaps she has seen herself love a cruel man – like she claims her father is – and perhaps she's seen other women fall in love with unkind men too. She may be commenting on women allowing themselves to be dominated by men. This statement may also be more bitterly sarcastic than true. If it is meant as a statement of fact, it's criticizing women as well as the brutes they love.

STANZA 11 & 12**Lines 51-52**

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
 In the picture I have of you,

- These two lines are pretty clear-cut. The speaker is looking at a picture of her father, and in the picture he's standing at a blackboard, probably in a classroom, teaching.

Notes

- An interesting fact: Plath's father was a professor.

Lines 53-54

A cleft in your chin instead of your foot

But no less a devil for that, no not

- These lines get a little more complicated.
- The speaker says that her father has a cleft in his chin, which still sounds like a pretty normal physical description, but then she says that this cleft is in his chin instead of his foot. What kind of person has a cleft in his foot?
- Well, in the next line, we find out that she's not comparing her father to a person – but to the devil. The devil is often depicted as some sort of animal, like a goat, that has hooves and not feet. There's often a signature cleft, or indent, in the devil's feet.
- The speaker has moved from calling her father a Nazi, to calling him a devil.
- The "no not" at the end of this line is an example of enjambment, a poetic device in which an idea is split between two lines.

Lines 55-56

Any less the black man who Bit my pretty red heart in two.

- These lines continue the idea that was started in the previous line. Just like the cleft in the wrong place didn't make the speaker's father any less a devil, it didn't make him any less the cruel man who the speaker says bit her heart in two.
- The speaker says that her father is a black man, but she's probably not talking about his skin color. Instead, she's referring to him as a dark and evil person.
- The color black also contrasts vividly with the red of her heart. Again, he probably didn't actually bite her heart in two. That's just a more vivid, vicious way to say that he broke her heart.

- These two lines continue the contrast of the father to the speaker. The father is huge, evil, and black, while the speaker, like her heart, is a pretty, red, and a victim.

Lines 57-60

I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

- After we're told that the speaker's father, whom she is comparing to the devil, has broken her heart, we're shown a little more how he otherwise affects her.
- He died when the speaker was ten years old, and ten years later, when she was twenty, she attempted to die as well.
- She says that the reason she attempted suicide was to get back to her father. She repeats the word "back" three times, showing that she's distressed.
- We can remember from earlier in this poem that she used to pray to "recover" her father. When she was twenty, she took this further, and tried to die to see if she could be reconnected with him.
- She says she thought that "even the bones would do." Maybe she thought when she died she'd be buried near her father, or that once she became only a skeleton, she would be back with him.
- Mostly, this line shows how disturbed the speaker is by her relationship with her dead father – so disturbed that she would try to kill herself so that she could come closer to him.

STANZA 13 & 14

Lines 61-62

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.

Notes

- Read together with line 58, these lines tell us that the speaker tried to die, but did not succeed.
- They (whoever "they" is) rescued her from killing herself by pulling her out of the sack of death and gluing her back together.
- We can imagine that someone who has been glued back together wouldn't ever feel quite right again.
- The idea of the speaker being pulled out of a sack after she has tried to kill herself reminds us of when she said that her father was a "bag full of God" in line 8.

Lines 63-65

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Meinkampf look

- After the speaker has been rescued from her suicide attempt and glued back together, she seems to have found a new direction in life – now, she "knows what to do."
- Her new direction in life is to make a model of her father, the man she claims is a Nazi and a devil.
- Of course, she's not actually making a model of this man physically, like creating a clay model. She's creating a substitute for her father, probably by finding a real man whom she imagines is like her father.
- She doesn't call the model a "black man" as she did with her father, but she does say the model's a man in black.
- And she doesn't say that this man has a mustache, but says that he is like Hitler in perhaps an even more direct way: Mein Kampf means "My Struggle" in German, and is the title of a book that was written by Hitler.
- It doesn't make much sense that a person would have a "My Struggle" look. But if you take Meinkampf to mean Hitler, a "Hitler look" does make a little more sense.

Lines 66-67

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

- So now we know this man, modeled after the speaker's father, wears black and looks like Hitler. Doesn't sound very appealing so far.
- But line 66 makes it even worse – the rack and the screw are both gruesome torture instruments. This man sounds like the epitome of evil – he's like Hitler and loves gruesome torture.
- So what does our speaker do? She marries him, confirming her wedding vows, "I do."
- She set this up earlier, when she claimed that every woman loves a fascist in line 48. Here, the speaker is definitely showing herself in love with a fascist.
- By marrying the man she modeled after her father, the speaker is fulfilling the Electra complex, which is like the female version of the more well-known Oedipus complex. Basically, the Electra complex is a theory that women seek men who are like their fathers, and the Oedipus complex theorizes that men seek women who are like their mothers.

Line 68

So daddy, I'm finally through.

- Now that she has this model of her father, she's through with her actual father. She doesn't need him anymore.
- Wait, we think – isn't her father dead? How can you be through with someone who is dead?
- As we can see in this poem, even though he is physically dead, her father is still very alive in the memories of the speaker. She's through with her memories of him, and their effect on her daily life.
- We've seen her dangerous obsession with her father throughout this whole poem, so we'd expect to find her relieved upon declaring that she's through with her father. But she's not relieved enough to end the poem here.

Lines 69-70

The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

Notes

- Now that she's declared that she's through with her father, the speaker details how she is through with him. It's as if they've been in contact over a phone, which is now "off at the root."
- Of course, the telephone that she used to talk to her father, whom she called a "black man," is also black. This makes it seem mystical – any telephone that you could use to talk to a dead person would, naturally, be black.
- The speaker signifies that she's "through" with her father by saying the phone is "off at the root" – which, for a normal phone, would probably mean something like "it's unplugged."
- The telephone having a root makes the idea that voices can't "worm" through make more sense. We can imagine a black telephone, growing like a plant, from the speaker's father's grave. The voices coming through the phone would be like worms in the soil.
- But now, the phone is cut off – no voices can get through, so the father and daughter can no longer communicate.

STANZA 15

Line 71

If I've killed one man, I've killed two –

- Here we are, back to the speaker's claim from line 6 that she killed her father. We know from that stanza that he died before she actually killed him. But here she is again, claiming that she's killed not one man, but two.
- We can guess that the first man she claims to have killed is her father, and since the only other man in this poem is the model of her father, we're guessing that's the second man.
- But we're also guessing she hasn't actually killed these men, except in her head.

Lines 72-74

The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.

- Now we get more indication that the second man the speaker has killed is, as suspected, the man that she modeled after her father and married. We're guessing this because that man, whom she's calling a vampire, "said he was you," so is very similar to her father.
- She's already made this man out to be like Hitler, and now he's a vampire too. He's such a vampire that he actually drank her blood. She starts by saying that he drank her blood for a year, but then changes her mind and says he's been drinking it for seven.
- Drinking blood could be a metaphor for the speaker's relationship with this man, which, as we found out earlier, was marriage. It sounds like this man has been draining her life away, like a vampire would drain his victim's blood.
- We're not sure why she changed her mind on the time span. Maybe she was only married to the man for one year, but knew him for seven. Or maybe she thought he was only cruel to her for one year, but upon further thought, she realizes that he's really been cruel for seven, which could be the totality of their marriage.
- (Interesting fact: In real life, Plath was married to Ted Hughes for about seven years.)
- The speaker adds the "if you want to know" at the end of this line in what seems like a jab to her father, who could be either disinterested in or hurt by his daughter's distress.

Line 75

Daddy, you can lie back now.

- After the speaker has asserted that she's killed both her father and the man she married (who reminded her of him), she tells her father to lie back.
- Normally you'd think of this as something comforting – like lying back and relaxing. But it's kind of weird that our speaker is telling

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her dead father, whom she seems to hate, or at least be angry at, to lie back and relax.

- It's also a little strange that she calls him "Daddy," which is an affectionate name for someone she has aligned with so much evil.

STANZA 16

Line 76

There's a stake in your fat black heart

- As suspected, the speaker isn't telling her father to lie back so that he can relax. She's telling him – or perhaps telling the part of him that is in herself – to lie back because he's dead.
- But he hasn't died a merely human death. Because memories of him, like a vampire, have lived past his physical death, sucking blood (or at least the will to live) from our speaker, he must be killed like a vampire – with a stake to the heart.
- His heart, here, fits with the rest of the descriptions of him – big and black (as in evil). It's the opposite of the speaker's heart, described in line 56 as pretty and red.

Lines 77-79

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.

- Not only is the speaker's father dead, slain like a vampire, but the villagers never liked him anyway.
- This seems like a reference to vampire lore. We're not talking Twilight here, but older literature like Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in which vampires lived near little villages.
- The poem shows us that it's kind of an understatement that the villagers never liked the speaker's father – they're so happy that he's dead that they're brazenly dancing and stomping on his dead body.
- They're doing this because they always knew "it" was you. Given the vampire references, this probably means that they always

suspected that the speaker's father was the vampire, causing all sorts of problems and mysterious disappearances in the village.

- It's important to remember, as the metaphor grows wider, that this vampire is really just in the speaker's head. While the villagers could be a metaphor for the real, living people who surround the speaker, they're probably not actually villagers. And there's a good chance that the villagers are just in the speaker's head.

Line 80

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

- The poem reaches its crescendo with this line and, if it was a rock concert, this is where the guitars would be smashed.
- The speaker has threatened that she's through with her father before, in line 68. But the repetition of the word "Daddy" here, and the addition of the word "bastard," makes this condemnation final.
- Before this, the speaker has used the word "Daddy" only four times in an 80-line poem, not counting the title. Using this affectionate term for father twice in the last line makes it sound almost like she's beating on his chest to get her point across.
- The use of the word "bastard" seems to be what this poem has worked itself up to. The speaker has tried out every way possible to criticize her father – he's a Nazi, the devil, and a vampire. But, in the end, she just wanted to get out a good verbal punch, calling her father a bastard.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This poem is a very strong expression of resentment against the male domination of women and also the violence of all kinds for which man is responsible. The speaker expresses her rage against her 'daddy', but daddy himself is a symbol of male. As well as a symbol of more general agents and forces like science and reason, violence and war, the German and their Hitler, and all other "inhuman" agents of oppression in the world. The speaker is also a symbol of female and the creative force, humility, love and humanity in general.

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This poem can also be analyzed from a psychological point of view. It is the outpour of a neurotic anger through the channel of creative art, or poetry. It is a kind of therapy. The poem is also significant for its assonance, allusion and images. Though it is slightly autobiographical, the poem must be interpreted symbolically and psychologically without limiting it to the poetess's life and experiences also.

The poem begins with the angry attack on daddy: "you", "black shoe", "I have had to kill you". The name -calling continues: daddy is a ghostly statue, a seal, a German, Hitler himself, a man-crushing engine, a tank driver (Panzer man), a swastika symbol of the Nazi, a devil, a haunting ghost and vampire, and so on. The speaker has lived for thirty years, poor and white, as in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. She is not able to breathe or express her pain. Her tongue is stuck in her jaw, or in the barbell wires. She is always scared of daddy or the German images of terror. She feels like a Jew herself. She feels she is crushed under the roller as the Polish were killed by the German in 1941.

She is afraid of the German language that is obscene and vague. She remembers the concentration camps like Dachau, Auschwitz and Belsen where thousands of Jews were tortured and killed. She feels she is a descendant of a gypsy ancestress (ancient mother). She is afraid of the neat mustache like that of Hitler, and the Aryan eye. The image of a boot in the face comes to her troubled mind. She thinks her daddy had a brutish (savage) black heart. She remembers the image of a strict teacher near the blackboard, which is also her father's image. She was ten when he died. But she wanted to kill him again, and throw him out of her mind. She also tried to die herself, but they prevented her. Then she made an effigy or (model) of him and killed it. She had killed him and his vampire that drank her blood for seven years. She claims that all the villagers also hated and still hate him. So, he can go back and die forever. She calls him a bastard.

The extremity of anger in this poem is not justifiable as something possible with a normal person in real life. We should understand that this is partly due to the neurosis that Plath was actually suffering from. Besides, it is essential to understand from the psychoanalytical point of

view, the poem does not literally express reality alone: it is the relieving anger and frustration, and an alternative outlet of the neurotic energy in the form of poetic expression. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the anger as being directed against the general forces of inhumanity, violence and destruction only symbolized by 'daddy'. In fact, Plath's father loved her very much when she was a child, before he died when she was only eight. So her death was always a shock to her. But, while she felt tortured and destitute without her father, she also felt suppressed by her father's dominating image. The idea is mixed and complex. She said, "He was an autocrat... I adored and despaired him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead". The poem moves far beyond the father-daughter team if we read carefully. By a process of association and surrealism, the protest moves from father to Hitler and then to inhumanity and oppression. Sylvia Plath also said that "the personal experience is very important, but... I believe (poetry) should be relevant to larger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on." This means that the frustration and anger against a dominating father who left her a destitute has here become a starting point or central symbol for larger issues including Hitler, torture and inhumanity. The poem is, therefore, also about the victimization of modern war. The poem is only slightly autobiographical, but it is more general.

The theme of female protest is perhaps the most striking symbolic meaning in the poem. The female speaker represents the creative force and she is angry with the destructive forces symbolized by her daddy and the male. But, we should also see the poem as a psychological poem that allows the speaker to relieve her neurotic energy through the channel of creativity. The speaker says, "I'm trough", meaning "I'm satisfied" at the end. She is relieved. The allusions of the Second World War are all real. The anger against the German, soldiers, Hitler and his Nazi party is not too much. The reader will justify this anger if he tries to imagine the inhumanity of Hitler.

THEMES

The poem Daddy by Sylvia Plath is typically a protest poem whose themes are multiple. On its surface, it is the outpour of a daughter's anger

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against her dominating father, but the poem's deeper meanings should be more generalized and symbolically interpreted as themes of 'feminist' protest against male domination, 'political protest' against the Germans and Hitler, 'humanist protest' against the inhumanity of war and politics, and the theme of 'psychological outlet' for relieving a torrent of neurotic energy caused by personal as well as social reasons in the speaker's mind. Besides exploring these themes, it is also possible to interpret the poem as an autobiographical poem of Sylvia Plath's personal life and experiences.

In a simple and superficial level, the theme of the poem is the outrageous expression of anger by a daughter against her father. This 'concrete' level of the poem's meaning should not be underestimated because all the other deeper meanings depend on our understanding of the basic situation and expression. The speaker's father has died, but he has always haunted with the dominating effect, and so she has had to struggle against it and even imagine killing his ghost. She is so angry with him that she identifies him with the Germans, the demoniac Hitler, the Nazi soldier, wars, engines used to crush men on the road, statues, and many other images. All those images suggest force, brutality, inhumanity, heartlessness and so on. Daddy becomes a private symbol of the dominating male and male traditions, war and politics, and a mind-disturbing demoniac image of inhumanity and violence.

One strong dimension of the poem's deeper theme is the feminist protest. The father of the speaker gradually loses his individual qualities and becomes just a macho who is extremely cruel and dominating, harsh and hard like the lifeless statue, comparable to animalistic images, and tyrannical like the Nazi and their devilish Hitler. The father or male figure here takes on the general symbolic meaning as 'power', 'cruelty' and 'oppression', and therefore it need not be taken as 'male' alone. In fact, the extremity of anger against males in general is so unreasonable and unjustifiable that the poem's meanings are only psychologically accountable.

As Plath herself emphasized, the male need not be male alone, but any kind of oppressive force against 'humanity'. In that sense, the poem's theme includes the concern for humanity. It is a humanistic protest

against the system and agents of cruelty and inhumanity. That means, the image of the father develops thematically into a symbol of inhuman forces.

And finally, all the discussions of ‘theme’ in the poem should be considered in terms of psychological causes. Whether it is about feminist protest, humanist protest, or a partly autobiographical protest of a poetess, it is the outpour of a neurotic kind of emotion. The anger of the speaker is not limited to rational or reasonable manner of protest. We cannot ‘excuse’ a poet for being so indecent as to make the speaker call her father a ‘bastard’, if we do not consider that the anger is the cause of a psychosocial strain on the speaker, as it was also on the poetess herself.

Check your Progress-1

1. Who wrote “Daddy” ?

2. What kind of poem is “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath?

3. What is the poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath all about?

10.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you went through the summary, themes and critical analysis of “Daddy “by Sylvia Plath.

10.4 KEYWORDS

Notes

- **Keel:** a flat-bottomed barge
- **Luftwaffe:** the aerial warfare branch of the German military during WWII
- **Opus:** a final, great work, usually referring to a musical composition
- **Oracle:** a person (like a priestess of ancient Greece) through whom a deity is believed to speak; a shrine in which a deity reveals hidden knowledge or the divine purpose through such a person
- **Pillbox:** a round shallow box

10.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Critically analyze “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath.
- Summarize “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath.
- Write the themes of “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath.

10.6 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

- Kirk (2004) p. xx
- "Plaque: Sylvia Plath". London Remembers. Archived from the original on March 22, 2016.
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- Kean, Danuta (April 11, 2017). "Unseen Sylvia Plath letters claim domestic abuse by Ted Hughes". The Guardian. London. Retrieved April 14, 2017.
- "Feinstein, Elaine (2001) Ted Hughes – The Life of a Poet pp. 120–124 Weidenfeld & Nicolson".
- "Sylvia Plath". The Poetry Archive. Archived from the original on July 3, 2017.
- Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath – a marriage examined. From The Contemporary Review. Essay by Richard Whittington-Egan 2005 accessed July 9, 2010

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Daddy was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q1)**

The poem Daddy by Sylvia Plath is a feminist poem. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q2)**

The poem Daddy by Sylvia Plath is about her father's sudden demise. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q3)**

UNIT-11 SYLVIA PLATH- POINT SHIRLEY, THE COLOSSUS, DADDY, FEVER 103,ARIEL, PURDAH, LADY LAZARUS - 4

STRUCTURE

11.0 Objectives

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Fever 103°

11.3 Ariel

11.4 Let us sum up

11.5 Keywords

11.6 Questions for Review

11.7 Suggested Reading and References

11.8 Answers to Check your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about the poem “Fever 103” by Sylvia Plath,
- and you would also learn about the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

FEVER

"Fever 103°" is one of the last poems Sylvia Plath had written in her life, and is included within her anthology of poems called "Ariel."

ARIEL

Ariel is the title poem in the collection Ariel that Plath published in the year before she finally committed a 'successful' suicide. In the canon of Sylvia's work, "Ariel is supreme, a quintessential statement of all that had meaning for her".

In it, she rehearses the whole spectrum of her color imagery, moving from "statis in darkness" into "the substanceless blue" of sky and distance as horse and rider, "God's lioness" rush as one through clutching hostilities. The collection was about her obsessive concern with death/suicide. But in many of the poems she also incorporated many other themes like: feminist protest (which she usually extends to the humanitarian protest against the Nazi atrocity), identity crisis, psychological trauma and a nervous breakdown, childhood memories, and so on. She also usually mythicizes most of the poems by using a concrete level of classical mythical allusions; but she usually uses the myths to negate or at least to adapt in very personal and original ways.

Ariel was the name of the horse that Plath used to ride as a girl. The occasion of this poem is that of one traumatic experience of her attempt of ride it early one morning. The poem narrates the event in which the horse ran at a breakneck, dizzy speed before Plath was able to properly ride it! But this literal level of the poem matters little in our final interpretation of it. Plath uses the very name 'Ariel' with multiple connotations. The name comes from Shakespeare's drama The Tempest in which Ariel is a sexless spirit that serves the (colonizer) king Prospero.

Always seeking liberation; here Ariel becomes the very symbol of liberty much more rebellious than the loyal spirit in Shakespeare. The word 'Ariel' is used to denote the city of Jerusalem in the Bible – a city both cursed and sanctified as the chosen land by God; Plath doesn't seem to evoke the meaning in the poem, though some critics have insisted bringing in the suggestion of salvation too. In short this horse can be taken as symbolizing the rebellious spirit that the female speaker of the poem aspires to be; it symbolizes the transcendence she achieves after the traumatic experience she equates with a suicidal attempt, life, and the experience of growing up. Allegorically it is a movement from darkness

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to light or morning; from stasis to activity; from the void of meaning or understanding; from indirection to direction; from anxiety to confidence of identity; from confusion or unconsciousness to consciousness and control over the vehicle (life, experience, trouble). The poem can also be seen as moving from childhood ignorance to the orgasmic awakening of adolescence; we can also sense certain suggestions about the feminist awakening brought about by the forced dragging of the horse.

11.2 FEVER 103°

Sylvia Plath begins her poem “Fever 103” with a one-word question: “Pure?” as if from the middle of an unheard conversation. She asks impatiently, “What does it mean?” and then plunges in, conjuring up the heat of a high fever:

The tongues of hell

Are dull, dull as the triple

Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus

Who wheezes at the gate. Incapable

Of licking clean

The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin.

The tinder cries.

The indelible smell

Of a snuffed candle!

In a few bold strokes, Plath uses repetition’s incantatory effect to undercut our assumptions about purity. When she writes “tongues of hell,” we think of the shapes of flames and purification by fire. Instead, Plath gives us dog slobber: “dull, dull as the triple // Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus.” Her emphatic twist on the Cerberus myth renders the terrifying three-headed hound of hell into a plainly pathetic old dog who’s “wheezing” and sluggish, “Incapable / Of licking clean // The aguey tendon.” (I must pause here, at “aguey,” to admire how the old-

fashioned word onomatopoeically expresses the pulled-taffy feeling of a high fever.)

When Plath repeats “the sin, the sin,” it conjures all kinds, exponentially multiplying sin itself. The repetition amplifies what comes after it. “Sin” morphs sonically into “tinder,” which, with its soft “ind” sound, both recalls “tendon” and prefigures “indelible.” The pleasure of rhyme heightens the dead black fiery-waxy scent and sonic satisfaction of “a snuffed candle.” It also offers a meager sort of exhausted relief after the terror of crying tinder. If Plath is creating the sense of a fever burning away the soul’s impurities, then she is also creating the sense of a soul so completely composed of impurities that this fever threatens to burn it entirely out.

The poem continues:

Love, love, the low smokes roll

From me like Isadora’s scarves, I’m in a fright

One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel,

Such yellow sullen smokes

Make their own element. They will not rise,

But trundle round the globe

When Plath writes “Love, love, the low smokes roll,” notice how “love” becomes “low” becomes “smokes” becomes “roll”—and how all those round “O” sounds recall and amplify the “ull’s” and “ell’s” in the preceding stanzas, embodying the smoke and giving it weight. Instead of a puff of smoke—or smoke as anything insubstantial and easily waved away—here smoke is deadly and heavy, originating and emanating from herself. It “will not rise” and dissipate. It menaces and threatens the entire planet,

Choking the aged and the meek,

The weak

Hothouse baby in its crib,

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The ghastly orchid

Hanging its hanging garden in the air.

The imagery here is lacerating. With an effortless transposition of adjectives, (“hothouse” for baby and “ghastly” for orchid), Plath nails the sweaty, sleepless (and verboten) repulsion that this new mother feels for her infant: How horrible babies are! And beautiful! The nightmarish imagery morphs: smoke to scarf to knot to noose, infant to orchid to a jungly overgrown garden. The poem is a fever-smear, a dreamy nightmare, fully infecting us—half by image and half by sound.

By the flash-light of her fevered vision, Plath leads us into an apocalyptic wasteland. Then, like a hypnotist, she brings us back from it by repeating the words that induced the state. When she reprises “The sin. The sin,” the phrase beats twice on a muffled drum. It’s an almost-ending; after the transmogrifications of fever, we return (for a second) to the regular world. We pause, take a breath, and—begin again:

Darling, all night

I have been flickering, off, on, off, on.

In this “flickering,” we see faint flashes of dim light and we hear tiny electrical noises. We take a gulp of ordinary air—before the next line sucks us right back down into the delirium-dream, where fabric becomes flesh, and “The sheets grow heavy as a lecher’s kiss.” Plath’s tone is fussy, irritable, sick of being sick:

Three days. Three nights.

Lemon water, chicken

Water, water make me retch.

Plath is loud now, and large, unconfused by delirium. “I am too pure for you or anyone,” she says, referring back to the poem’s first question. She is now the master of her feverish animal, all-powerful and entirely autonomous, self-made, and self-regenerating: She is a light-source (“I am a lantern”) and a planet (“My head a moon / Of”—paper covers rock!—“Of Japanese paper.”) The poem builds to an elated sense of

momentum here, achieved through the repetitive effect of these declarations of self. This piling-up of insistent “I am’s” continues with an almost childlike sense of amazed accomplishment, declaring, “All by myself I am a huge camellia.”

Without any help, she’s made herself into a flower—a flower with a face, pulsing with light: “Glowing and coming and going, flush on flush.” At this point Plath pushes up and past her own immense illuminated image, giving us the sense of an actual, wobbly lift-off:

I think I am going up,

I think I may rise——

The beads of hot metal fly, and I love, I

Solid becomes liquid and liquid becomes gas. The I-sound in “fly” compounds the I-sound in “rise”—and “I love, I” (I love myself!!!).

Am a pure acetylene

Virgin.

By the poem’s finish, Plath is the self-made Virgin Herself—made of acetylene, no less—a colorless, flammable gas capable (unlike slobbery Cerberus) of cutting through even metal. She is “attended” (like a queen, like an invalid) not by nurses or subjects or servants, but “by roses, // By kisses, by cherubim, / By whatever these pink things mean!” Fever spots? Freckles? Flowers? Angels? It doesn’t matter.

Here, in the poem’s last five lines, the fever’s laser-point becomes a spray. The knife-blade doesn’t dull, but begins to disintegrate. Those “pink things” might mean anything except the other: “Not you, nor him // Nor him, nor him”—lines that resurrect, echo, and link “him” to “The sin. The sin.” One by one, she numbers her discarded “selves dissolving, old whore petticoats.” She is ascending whole to heaven now — freed from the constraints of gravity and identity, the fires of her own creative momentum incinerating any last tether she has to the earth.

The poem’s last word, the capital-P “Paradise,” is almost as abstract in meaning as the poem’s first word, “Pure.” In this way, Plath pairs the

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two and leads us on a passage from one to the other, connecting the dots. But does “purity” lead to “paradise”? The structure of the poem seems to suggest that, but we cannot help but suspect that at this point Plath’s tone is ironic—the stock image of the Virgin ascending to heaven cannot help but look overwrought.

She is almost out of sight, almost out of earshot—and then, in the very last line, even the sound-play disintegrates. The sound of “paradise” first faintly recalls and then quickly forgets its rhyme-relation to the words “fly” and “rise,” which came on so strongly a now-distant ten lines before it. This effect is more than powerful—it sounds like what it says: it demonstrates a dissolve. Plath does not finish the poem by solving it, but dis-solves it—the poem, herself, the concept of “sin,” the construct of identity, the question of purity. Though she may have asked what purity means at the beginning of the poem, in the end she’s freed herself from the restriction of a definitive answer. Her fever is a fire that feeds itself—a self-fulfilling, self-sustaining, more than slightly frightening metaphor for her own generative genius—one kind of pure paradise.

11.3 ARIEL

SUMMARY

Hold onto your horses; you're in for a wild ride with "Ariel." When the poem starts out, the speaker is in quiet, still, early morning darkness. Then she, and we, are jerked to attention. The speaker's horse, Ariel, takes off at a crazy gallop, and the speaker is "haul ed through air." At first, she seems scared, but as she begins to take in the world flashing around her, she seems to develop a deep appreciation of her wild ride. She's lost control, but by the end of the poem, the speaker is "at one" with the drive of her wildly galloping Ariel.

Lines 1-3

Stasis in darkness. Then the substance less blue Pour of tor and distances.

- "Ariel" begins on a quiet, somber, note. But Plath doesn't waste much time setting the scene, or giving us lots of details about our speaker or her setting. Instead, we jump right into what our speaker is feeling and sensing. In this stanza, picture her chilling in the pre-dawn morning, where there's "stasis in darkness." "Stasis" means that something's unchanged, at rest, not moving. So, for now anyway, nothing much is happening, and it's not happening in darkness.
- This line sounds still—the consonance of the S sounds in "stasis," and "darkness," the assonance of the short I sound in "stasis" and "in," and the slant rhyme of "stasis" and "darkness"—all those thick, repeated sounds give us a feeling like we're still too. Even on a sound level, everything's staying the same in this first line—no changes to speak of... yet. (Check out "Sound Check" for more on this poem's use of sound.)
- Then, in the next line, everything changes. Suddenly, our speaker is faced with the "substanceless blue" and the "pour of tor and distances."
- Huh? Confused about what's actually happened? Don't worry about it—being on unsure ground is one of the challenges, and pleasures, of "Ariel." What we can noodle through from just this line, though, is that we have any airy ("substanceless") impression of blue, as well as a hill ("tor" is another word for hill) and "distances." It seems like we're entering into some kind of landscape.
- Still not satisfied with what's going on? Well, a little bit of biography goes a long way with this poem. After Sylvia Plath's death, her husband (and fellow poet) Ted Hughes explained that Ariel was the name of Plath's horse. Understanding this poem is a bit tricky without this information; the word "horse" never appears in the poem. So, we can understand from these lines is that the speaker is moving off across this land on Ariel the horse. Our speaker herself is caught off guard, and, instead of explaining exactly what's happened, she shares

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with us just the vague images she sees flying by in the "substanceless," or thin, blue morning air.

- Notice even more repeated sounds in these lines? Good. The rhyme of "pour" and "tor," and all of the consonance of the S sounds make these lines overflow with repetitive sounds.
- Before we move on, let's take a moment to talk about our speaker. Plath was famous for writing what we now call "confessional poetry"—a type of poetry known to be deeply autobiographical and personal. And we do know that Plath herself once experienced a wild ride akin to the one in the poem. What we don't know is how accurate the poem is—it's not a newspaper article, it's a poem, after all. So we're going to go ahead and refer to the speaker as "the speaker," not as Plath herself. It's always a danger to mix up speaker with poet, so even though they might be closely linked, we'll keep them separate here.
- Finally, before we move to the next stanza, let's take note of "Ariel's" form. The poem is written in three-line stanzas, known as tercets. The lines are short, choppy, and sonically dense. We've already got tons of rhyme, assonance, and consonance, and we've only talked about the first three lines of the poem. (For more on how this poem is put together, check out "Form and Meter.")

Lines 4-9

God's lioness, How one we grow, Pivot of heels and knees!—the furrow

Splits and passes, sister to The brown arc Of the neck I cannot catch,

Were you hoping for a bit more solid ground in these next stanzas?

- Sorry kiddos, it looks like you're out of luck. Ariel has taken off at an uncontrollable gallop, and we're losing our grip on what's happening right along with the speaker. By not explaining her every move, by not filling in all of the details, the speaker brings us right atop Ariel with her for a disorienting ride.

- In other words: feeling like you've lost your grip on the poem is kind of the whole point of the poem.
- So in this stanza, we're actually introduced to Ariel—the speaker's horse. The speaker calls her "God's lioness," perhaps to make her seem fierce, even otherworldly. (Let's face it: lionesses are way fiercer than horses.)
- Then, in the following lines, we are able to put together Ariel's appearance in a piecemeal way. We see the "pivot"—the movement—of the horse's "heels and knees." We see "the brown arc / Of the neck," which is "sister," or somehow alike to, the "furrow" or trail in the ground below. We've got a slightly clearer picture of Ariel now.
- We see these images as flashes, as the speaker does. Remember, we're galloping at a pretty fast pace. And it's hard to hold on; the speaker tells us that she "cannot catch" Ariel's neck. She has literally lost her grip on the horse.
- A brief note on form: did you notice all of Plath's enjambments? The way the lines break weirdly, against the natural grain of the sentence? All of these enjambments give the poem a rushed feel, as if the speaker has no time to compose her lines into neat little contained phrases: "The furrow / Splits and passes, sister to / The brown arc / Of the neck I cannot catch." The form of the poem is really matching up with the content in these lines. The rushed enjambments make us feel like we're being taken on a wild, rushed ride too. (And in a way, we are!) (Check out "Form and Meter" for more on this technique.)
- Before we move on, let's once again note how dense the poem sounds—just check out the thickness of the repeated hard C consonance in "arc," "neck," and "catch," for example. (Check out "Sound Check" for more on this.) Each image that we flash on has a certain sonic depth in addition to a visual depth. This is part of the reason that reading this poem makes us feel like we're actually sitting astride the galloping Ariel, holding on for our lives.

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Hooks—

Black sweet blood mouthfuls, Shadows. Something else

Hauls me through air—

- Images continue to flash by our speaker's eyes as she's on her wide ride. She sees "Nigger-eye / Berries" that "cast dark / Hooks."
- Now, wait a minute, you're probably saying to yourself. "Nigger-eye berries"? Is Ms. Plath a racist? Why is she using such derogatory language?
- Well, as sad as it is, the truth is that the term "nigger," while still derogatory, was much more commonly used (and it was slightly less politically charged) in the 1960s when Plath wrote her poem. Putting the word "nigger" in a poem, while at best was a sign of obliviousness and at worst a sign of racism, probably wasn't particularly scandalous for Plath to do.
- In fact, Plath's just using the word "nigger" to describe some dark-colored berries that she sees fly by her. She's more callous than downright hateful, as she uses the word in an off-handed way as a descriptor. She doesn't use it to refer to African Americans.
- But let's be honest: whatever her intentions, Plath's use of this word is not cool. And by "not cool," we mean: it's racist.
- With that said, these dark berries make a lasting impression on our speaker, as she imagines that they "cast dark / Hooks" into her.
- In the next line, she even imagines that she can taste these sweet berries in "Black sweet blood mouthfuls." Now say that line out loud to yourself. Can you almost feel those berries in your mouth? The heavy alliteration of "black" and "blood" make us feel like we can taste those berries rolling around in our mouths.
- Also, let's be honest: this is a dark, even morbid, way to describe some delicious berries. "Blood mouthfuls"? Our speaker's got death on the mind.

- In the next line, Plath presents us with just one word: "Shadows." Are these the shadows that the speaker sees flying by her from atop her horse? Or are these shadows more metaphorical? Are they shadows of her mind (perhaps summoned by those bloody berries)? Let's keep reading.
- But—before we move along—let's just pause to take in those long em dashes after the words "Hooks—" and "air—": in these dashes we feel the quickness of Ariel's movement. Only these long dashes (and **not words**) can keep pace with the galloping horse.

Lines 15-21

Something else

Hauls me through air Thighs, hair;
Flakes from my heels.

White

Godiva, I unpeel—

Dead hands, dead stringencies.

- In these lines, the speaker turns her attention away from her surroundings and back to her horse Ariel. But again, instead of a clear narrative or description, we get only flashes of jerky images—Ariel's "thighs, hair" which "haul" our speaker "through air."
- We feel a sense of resistance in these lines. The speaker is being "haul ed " by Ariel. The speaker hasn't exactly chosen this wild ride, and it looks like she's dug in her heels so tightly to hang on that either the horse's hair, the skin of her feet, or both is flaking off.
- But, in the next stanza, something changes. The speaker compares herself to Lady Godiva. Who's that, you ask? Could she be the queen of the delicious, decadent chocolates that we all know and love?
- Actually, Lady Godiva is an historical figure; she lived over 1000 years ago, and her story is legendary. The myth of Lady Godiva goes something like this: the town of Coventry, which Lady Godiva's husband ruled, was suffering under burdensome taxes. Lady G.'s

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husband said he'd lift the taxes if his wife proved her devotion by doing something nuts—by riding through the whole town naked! Lady Godiva accepted the challenge, saved her peeps from excessive taxation, and people have been telling the story of her nude ride ever since.

- When the speaker compares herself to Lady Godiva, she's both making herself a kind of folk hero (power to the people, y'all) and alluding to the sexuality of the myth. A beautiful nude lady riding a horse through town? It's a titillating tale.
- The speaker also describes herself as being "white"—or fair, good, and pure, like Godiva. Her whiteness contrasts with the earlier image of the "Nigger-eye / Berries." They, with their "blood mouthfuls," seem to represent death, or at least set up a visual, stark contrast with this whiteness.
- Now comes one of the strangest phrases in the poem; the speaker tells us that she "unpeels s . ." But what does she unpeel? Her clothes? Is our speaker taking a naked ride, too? Or is she talking about something more metaphorical?
- The speaker tells us that she unpeels "dead hands, dead stringencies." Stringencies, b.t.w., are rigorous rules or standards.
- So, as she's on this wild ride, our speaker peels away the constrictions of life. She peels her "dead hands" off from the horse.
- She sheds, like Lady Godiva, the restrictions of a severe culture.
- These lines are all about letting go, about losing your grip—and sort of liking it. This unpeeling is a figurative way to describe how the speaker is feeling free. It's not meant to be literal.
- But don't think that freedom for our speaker means a change in her language. If anything, Plath's language in these lines becomes even more densely packed with repeated sounds, with the rhyme of "air" and "hair," of "heels" and "unpeel." These lines are as tightly packed

as any others. (Check out "Form and Meter" for more on that rhyme in this poem.)

Lines 22-31

And now I Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas. The child's cry melts in the wall. And I Am the arrow, The dew that flies Suicidal, at one with the drive Into the red Eye, the cauldron of morning.

- These last few stanzas of the poem are so interconnected that we're gonna take 'em all on at once. Saddle up, guys.
- In the previous stanza, our speaker has told us that she's found a way to let go of "dead hands, dead stringencies." She's letting go of her mundane life, and submitting to the experience of the wild ride on Ariel.
- And now she's undertaking a serious transformation. She imagines herself as "foam" among the wheat fields she's traveling through. She's "a glitter of seas." The sea is a pretty feminized metaphor—throughout all kinds of literature, the sea has been associated with the cycles of the female body. In this case, the speaker's letting go of her actual body, and imagining herself as becoming one with nature—with the sea, and also, with Ariel.
- Then, she tells us that the "child's cry / Melts in the wall." Whose child is she talking about exactly? Is our speaker a mother?
- Possibly. Is she talking about her own, childlike cry of fear and terror? That's also possible.
- Whatever the answer to these questions is, we know that the speaker's connections to the human world are "melt ing ," even disappearing. The experience of riding on Ariel is overtaking her, and her connections to the human world, her fears of Ariel's wild nature are dissolving.
- The last six lines of the poem form a wonderful, overwhelming, intense conclusion to the poem. The speaker says that "And I / Am the arrow, / The dew that flies Suicidal." Did you hear that

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awesome slant rhyme of "arrow" and "suicidal"? Subtly, these lines are brought closer together, though not in perfect sonic harmony.

- But what do these words actually mean? Well, we now know that the speaker has shed her human connections. In these last lines, it seems like she's become one with Ariel, who is galloping with intense and focused speed.
- The metaphors here are deep and layered; the speaker is so closely intertwined with Ariel that it's as if the two of them together are the arrow, galloping with determined intent. And galloping how? Well, suicidal. (This is a Plath poem, after all).
- Is the speaker talking about actual suicide here? Probably not. She may be on a wild ride, but she doesn't seem to be planning on throwing herself from the galloping horse. Instead, she's using the word "suicidal" more metaphorically. She's talking about extinguishing her sense of self. She's no longer the self she was at the beginning of the poem, riding on her horse with "dead hands." Instead, she's the arrow, Ariel herself. (Notice how similar "arrow" and "Ariel sound"?) She's merged with the horse.
- Our speaker tells us that she is "at one" with "the drive" (Ariel's drive, meaning both her galloping and her instinct). And what's that red eye? Well, it sure reminds us of the red, rising sun. The poem begins in the early morning "substanceless blue," and ends with the speaker riding into flaming sunrise.
- And let's be sure to note that this is not a happy, yellow sun. Plath describes it as a "cauldron of morning," which has distinctly witchy undertones. (Macbeth, anyone?) And we can't help but hear the word "mourning" in this last line too, which doubles the dark feeling that we're getting here.
- All in all, this is an amazingly powerful image. It's an image of power, of control, of speed, of life and death all jumbled up.
- The speaker has shed her human skin (metaphorically, of course), and she's become one with her powerful, galloping horse.

- She's an arrow heading towards the bullseye of the sun. She "flies," "at one with the drive" (notice how the assonance of the long I sound there helps support her idea of oneness) and she's now all instinct, all power.
- In the end, the poem's about learning to let go, and finding power in that kind of release. Pretty intense, ain't it? "Ariel" simultaneously makes us crave, and fear, a wild ride on a horse like Ariel.

THEMES

Transformation

On its surface, "Ariel" is about a wild horseback ride. But when we read just a little bit more closely, we see that the poem is interested less in the actual horseback ride and more in the transformation that happens within the speaker as she's on that horse. The speaker transforms from a woman who tries to hold onto Ariel for dear life, to a woman who summons the power of the horse and who is no longer afraid to lose her grip. She finds freedom in this transformative experience, and learns to channel the wild energy of Ariel. We're not gonna lie: we're a little jealous of the speaker's crazy and transformative ride. We'd kill to be "at one" with a horse, our surroundings, and everything.

Power

When "Ariel" begins, the speaker is powerless. Ariel takes off at a wild gallop, and the speaker can't control her horse at all. The cool thing about the poem, though, is that instead of gaining power by taking control of the horse, the speaker gains her power by submitting to the horse, by becoming "at one" with the horse's will. By giving up her desire and need for control, and learning to let loose, the speaker is able to channel the power of the natural world. Not a bad lesson for an early morning horseback ride, if you ask us.

Man and the Natural World

Man and the natural world? It's more like "woman" and the natural world in this case. "Ariel" tells the story of the speaker's transformative experience when she gets up close and personal with nature, and she

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learns to give up her desire for control and accept the craziness of ol' Mother Nature. While at first the speaker is fearful of Ariel (and who could blame her?), by the end of the poem the speaker becomes "at one" with her horse. She learns that the way to gain power is not to attempt to change Ariel, but to accept her wild nature. Nature's going to do what it's going to do; we're all just along for the wild ride.

Death

Sylvia Plath: Her names almost synonymous with suicide in popular culture, so it's really no surprise that "Ariel" deals with death. But don't get too down when reading this poem; death here is actually a pretty positive thing. It's more of a metaphorical death than a real death—it's about the transformation of a fearful woman into a powerful woman. The death in the poem is the death of the speaker's former, fearful self. Good riddance, if you ask us. As far as Plath's poetry goes, death in "Ariel" is pretty darn optimistic.

ANALYSIS

Sound Check

The best way—actually, the only way—to get the full force of "Ariel" **is** to read it aloud. Seriously. Read it aloud to yourself right now. Don't worry. We'll wait right here while you do.

Back? Great. Do you hear all those repeated sounds? The long I rhyme of "cry" (21) and "I" (23)? The S sound consonance of "Stasis in darkness" (1)? The beginning B alliteration in "Black sweet blood mouthfuls" (13)? Sonic repetitions like these are all over the poem.

So much repetition can be found here, in fact, that reading "Ariel" aloud is like being in an echo chamber. The sounds of the poem don't let go of you—they repeat, disappear, return with a vengeance. And this is particularly interesting because "Ariel" is written in free verse, which means that it doesn't have a regular rhyme scheme. The rhymes in "Ariel" are frequent, but not regular, which means that they are unpredictable. You never know when a sound is going to creep up again in the poem. The repetitions in Plath's poem can catch you off-guard, and

draw you deep into its dense web. In this way, the form of the poem echoes its content perfectly; as Ariel takes our speaker on a wild ride, so the poem "Ariel" takes its readers off on a gallop.

Think we're exaggerating? Listen to Plath's recording of "Ariel." You'll be lucky to make it out of this recording on solid ground.

Tough-o-Meter

We're not going to lie, guys. "Ariel" is a tough poem. It moves so fast, it's hard to tell even what's going on the first time you read it. Never fear, though. We've broken this baby down in our "Summary" section, and we've unpacked all those tricky themes for you over in "Themes." Plath may be on a wild ride in "Ariel," but that doesn't mean that you have to lose your grip too.

What's Up With the Title?

Here's the deal: in real life, Sylvia Plath had a horse named "Ariel." Her husband Ted Hughes explained that, one day, Ariel really did take Plath for a wild, galloping ride:

Ariel was the name of the horse on which she went riding weekly. Long before, while she was a student at Cambridge (England), she went riding with an American friend out towards Grantchester. Her horse bolted, the stirrups fell off, and she came all the way home to the stables, about two miles, at full gallop, hanging around the horse's neck.

Knowing this little biographical tidbit makes all the difference when reading "Ariel." We're not gonna lie: without this biographical fact, we're not sure we'd know what the heck was happening in such an impressionistic blur of a poem. Sometimes, a little bit of information goes a long way.

The cool thing about the title is that "Ariel" also has other connotations, too. Probably the most famous Ariel is the "airy spirit" from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. This Ariel is an androgynous figure who represents creative energy, but who is also a slave to the wizard Prospero.

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So what do you think? Is Plath's Ariel just her horse? Or does her Ariel also embody, or even channel, the creative spirit of Shakespeare's Ariel? It's certainly up for debate, but it makes sense to us that—since this poem is all about transformation, and since Shakespeare's Ariel is a transformative figure, too—this title was written with both horse and play in mind.

Setting

"Ariel" doesn't give us much in terms of setting. The poem begins before dawn, in darkness, and ends as the creepy, red sun is rising. We get only little flashes of the scenery around our speaker—the furrowed ground, the dark berries. Still, the poem uses those brief snippets of landscape to underscore the speaker's transformation from frightened rider to unrestrained spirit merging with creation.

You see, at the end of the poem, the speaker is "at one" with the "arrow" that is Ariel (26-27). Along the way, though, she's also at one with the fields around here: "And now I / Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas" (22-23). Even the sound of the setting is fusing into one with the physical surroundings: "The child's cry / Melts in the wall" (24-25). In the way that the speaker joins the horse in a kind of cosmic fusion, she's anticipating that move by fusing into the setting as well. In a way, the setting is a way for the speaker to deliver the punch line to that old joke: "What did the wise man say to the hotdog vendor? Give up? *Make me one with everything.*"

Speaker

Sylvia Plath is known as a confessional poet, which means that she wrote highly personal, detailed, and emotional poems. For this reason, we might want to assume that the speaker of "Ariel" is Plath herself. (Plus, we also know from Plath's husband that she really did have a horse named Ariel who once took her on a wild ride.

But, all this being said, we've got to admit to ourselves that we can't ever really know how accurately Plath represented herself in her poetry. Did she *actually* become one with her horse Ariel? What would that even

look like? For these reasons, we don't refer to the speaker as Plath herself.

Instead, here's what we do know about our speaker: she (and we're just assuming it's a she) goes through a transformation. When the poem and the horseback ride begin, our speaker's holding on for dear life. But, by the end of the poem, she's loosened—even let go of—her grip. The language at the end is steeped in deathly images. The speaker is "suicidal"—but not in an ordinary way. The speaker metaphorically kills her old self so that she can be born again as a powerful horse-woman. (So cool, right?) The speaker has transcended ordinary human life and summoned the power of nature. She becomes "at one" (26) with her horse's ride into the rising sun. She lets go of her inhibitions and has an Experience (with a capital E).

Not bad for an early morning horseback ride.

Steaminess Rating

There's a whole lot of losing control in "Ariel," but there's nothing overtly sexual in the poem. We feel totally okay with you reading this one out loud to your little sisters and bros.

The Arrow & The Sun

By the end of the poem, the speaker has stopped struggling against Ariel's crazy gallop, and she becomes "at one" with the horse. She embraces this experience, and she casts herself as "the arrow" heading "suicidal" toward the red rising sun. It's an intense and visceral image, and we feel like we're right there with the speaker, atop Ariel, heading into the bright red unknown. It's a moment of death, but also of rebirth: the speaker may have shed parts of herself, but she's become a powerful force of nature.

- Lines 26-28: The speaker calls herself "the arrow," and thus imagines herself in a directed flight. Ariel has given her power and direction. By submitting to Ariel's power, she gains her own power.

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- Lines 29-31: The speaker imagines that, as an arrow, she heads "Into the sun, the "red / Eye, the cauldron of morning." This arrow is heading for a deep red bullseye; we imagine that it's going to pierce that baby and show it whose boss. Or is it? That red cauldron is a pretty deathly image we think. These lines give us two forces colliding.

Death

Though "Ariel" is a poem about a life-changing, transformative horseback ride, it's not a sunny poem filled with rainbows and dreams of the future. It's actually incredibly dark, and it's more than a little morbid. "Ariel" is haunted by death throughout, and it even conceives as the transformation at the end of the poem as a kind of death. Beware: you may need a pick-me-up after reading these morbid lines. Keep a kitten handy.

- Line 1: The poem begins in a dark moment of stasis. Everything is still; nothing is moving or even breathing in these first moments.
- Line 13: Even the berries that Ariel passes are painted with dark words—they're described as "black sweet blood mouthfuls." We think we'll pass on these berries after that description, Ms. Plath.
- Lines 18-20: The speaker says that she "unpeel s .". She strips away "dead hands, dead stringencies." It's a moment of transformation, but it's marked with morbid words. Even this rebirth has a dark tinge to it.
- Lines 26-31: The speaker imagines herself as a suicidal arrow, heading toward the red sun (which seems to us a whole lot like a red bullseye). She's driven, she's become at one with the horse, she's all energy, and she's headed toward that "cauldron of morning," which sounds to us a whole lot like the cauldron of "mourning." In this transformed state, our speaker is speeding toward death.

Ariel

The central figure in "Ariel," other than the speaker, is Ariel the horse. Ariel is strong and fast, and, for some unknown reason, she sets off at a gallop and brings the speaker along for a wild ride through the countryside. By the end of the poem, the speaker becomes "at one" with the "drive," or the will, of the horse. In a way, the speaker becomes Ariel. So, for a terrifying near-death experience, this turns out to be pretty cool, if we do say so ourselves.

- Line 4: The speaker describes Ariel in fierce terms, as "God's lioness." ROAR.
- Lines 6-9: We see Ariel through her movements—through her pivoting "heels and knees," through "the brown arc / of the neck" that the speaker cannot catch. We get to know and understand Ariel through the small, quick glimpses of her body in motion.
- Lines 26-31: At the end of the poem, the speaker becomes "at one" with the horse. She stops struggling against her and, in a weird and crazy way, becomes her. By acknowledging that she has no control over the horse, she is able to summon an even greater power, becoming "at one" with the horse's drive. Neato.

Form and Meter

"Ariel" is written in free verse, which means that it has no regular rhyme scheme or meter. That doesn't mean that "Ariel" is a willy-nilly mess, though.

Plath's poem is organized into tercets, or three-line stanzas. And Plath's lines, though not metered, are almost all short and clipped. The poem itself is 31 lines long, but when you read it aloud, you realize that it goes by pretty darn quickly.

While there is no regular rhyme scheme in "Ariel," there are rhymes all over the poem. Some are full rhymes—like "air" (16) and "hair" (17) and "I" (19) and "cry" (21)—and others are slant rhymes, such as "flies" (25) and "drive" (26). The rhymes may not come regularly in this poem, but they come frequently. "Ariel" is known for the density of its language—

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the way both the sounds and the images pile up in such a confined space—which really adds to the speaker's jumbled sensation as she's bounced around on the top of a runaway horse.

"Ariel" is also known for its enjambments, or line breaks that end before the finished thought, pulling the reader along into the next line. Examples, you demand? Well, there's a pretty extreme enjambment at the end of the poem:

Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning. (30-31)

See how Plath separates the descriptor ("red") from the noun it's describing ("eye")? It's a bold and daring line break (or, to be more exact, a bold and daring stanza break). Enjambments like these add to the hurried, jerky, uncontrollable, and uncontrolled feeling that we get when we read the poem. Plath knew how to make her form echo her content.

Calling Card

Short, Dense Lines

Check out the other poems in Plath's book *Ariel*, and you'll see that our gal Sylvia was a fan of short lines. Seriously, check 'em out: we recommend "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy" for starters. Plath's lines in these poems barely have more than three or four words per line, and some have just one.

But the cool thing about Plath is that, though her lines may look spare on the page, when you read them aloud, you discover that they're actually really dense in terms of their sounds. As we discuss in the "Sound Check," there are tons of rhymes and other kinds of sonic repetition. This rare combo of sparseness and density characterizes many of Plath's poems, and almost all of her best-known poems. Plath really knew how to pack a poetic punch. Pow.

Check your Progress-1

1. Who wrote the poem "Fever 103" ?

2. Who wrote the poem “ Ariel”?

3. When was the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath, published?

11.4 LET US SUM UP

SUMMARY

The poem Ariel by Sylvia Plath begins with a faintly recognizable narration of the incident of riding the horse; we get the impressions that the rider has probably gone to the horse stable and while just trying to ride, the horse scampers with the girl clinging on to its neck.

But in the reeling speed and in the darkness of the dawn, she can have no feeling. It is all stasis; there is no sense of movement. And there is no movement either. Next follows a ‘substances pouring of sights of blue hills in the dawn. She becomes gradually aware of the distance being traversed. In the second stanza, the speaker identifies herself with lady Godiva, a rebellious Irish woman, who rode naked through the streets in protest of her husband’s too high tax on the people.

In stanza three, she sees the horizon (brown arc) made brighter by the coming sun. But the arc is also that of the horse’s neck (line 9). She seems to catch the glimpse of the people passing by: “nigger eyes.....shadows”, and she also hears a child cry on the way (24). She sees furrows of ploughed fields (6), splits and passes (7) berries with thorns (11), seas of wheat fields (23), and finally the flying of evaporating dew, with which she identifies herself (28). These fleeting

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images and sounds are what partial reminiscences she has of the frenzied scurry of the horse. Plath implicitly reinterprets the experience as symbolizing the race of life, the pressure of existence, the struggle to control and overcome many kinds of constraints, the suicidal thrush towards death and the process of growing up into the adult world. More importantly, she makes it symbolize the female protest against the “dead hands, dead stringencies” (21) of the male dominations and inhumanities by identifying herself with Godiva a similar female rebel. This is from where readers enter into the subtext of the feminist theme of protest in the poem. As she wheels by sticking to the horse, she has sensations focusing on the body; she feels as if her mouth is full of blood (signaling death) and her thighs are peeling off. A ‘something else’ also hauls her through the air (16). But at the end of the poem, she feels as if she is evaporating like the morning dew and dissolving into the elements; she says that she is an arrow being shot into the face of the sun (red eye, cauldron of morning). The sun is the symbol of the male traditions which she means to protest and avenge. But the dissolution is not extinction; it is rather a rebirth and salvation of the protesting female. The poem can be read in the context of the feminist uprising of the late twentieth century, like the other poems of the collections *Ariel*.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Ariel is probably Plath's finest single construction because of the precision and depth of its images. In its account of the ritual journey to the center of life and death, Plath perfects her method of leaping from image to image in order to represent mental process.

The sensuousness and concreteness of the poem – the “Black sweet blood mouthfuls” of the berries; the “glitter of seas” – is unmatched in contemporary American poetry. We see, hear, touch, and taste the process of disintegration: the horse emerging from the darkness of the morning, the sun beginning to rise as Ariel rushes uncontrollably across the countryside, the rider trying to catch the brown neck but instead “tasting” the blackberries on the side of the road. Then all the rider's perceptions are thrown together; the horse's body and the rider's merge.

She hears her own cry as if it were that of a child and flies toward the burning sun that has now risen.

The sexual implication of this imagery reinforces this reading and develops as well its use in "Purdah." The female speaker here identifies with the horse, a symbol of masculine sexual potency which, as the arrow, becomes a phallic image that drives into the eye, the circle associated with female sexuality. Far from a desire to transcend the physical, "Ariel" expresses the exultation of a sex act in which the speaker is both the driving arrow and the receiving cauldron. "God's lioness" in "Ariel" calls upon both strands of the female mythological lioness: as an arrow she is associated with battle. And in her merger with the sun, she absorbs its fertility. Destroyer-creator, masculine-feminine, the spirit with which the speaker identifies in "Ariel" is whole, entire in itself. The fires that burn in honor of and through this spirit are emblematic of its passion and ecstasy.

The difficulty with this poem lies in separating one element from another. Yet that is also its theme; the rider is the one with the horse, the horse is the one with the furrowed earth, and the dew on the furrow is one with the rider. The movement of the imagery, like that of the perception, is circular. There is also another peculiarity; although the poem is nominally about riding a horse, it is curiously 'substanceless'- to use her own word. You are made to feel the horse's physical presence, but not to see it. The detail is all inward. It is as though the horse itself was in an emotional state. So finally the poem is not just about the stallion 'Ariel'; it is about what happens when the 'states in darkness' ceases to be static, when the potential violence of the animal is unleashed and also the violence of the rider. This speed is the escape from everyday life. The speed takes her away from the pain of existence of higher, existence. She becomes the portion of universal energy. So it is a kind of movement of the poem from non-existence to existence. That is the important thing about the poem. The darkness of existence is left behind. In this way the poet creates images of limitless speed. God's lioness is like Blake's Tyger, angry and full of rebellious strength. The speed is so fast that the poet becomes a part of the horse. The rider and the ridden have become one. God's lioness is showing the anger and the strength of

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the God, his energy and his anger. The horse is going so fast that she is unable to catch the horse's neck. The horse has to pass through the berries, which are like hooks that stop the horse. There's connotation of blood black, red berries. The stop is only for a short time. The berries, try to hold her back, but she's pulled forcibly by the energy of speed.

'Godiva' according to Irish mythology is a naked lady who rode through the streets of Coventry in order to persuade her husband, the local lord to lower the taxes. She protested against her husband. The poet becomes Godiva as she throws away all her existence and flies away. She becomes united with nature no longer the human. She passes through a wheat field. She becomes the part of the nature. She passes through the wheat field, she has now become a part of the nature. The wheat field seems like a glittering ocean. The child's cry is the most important song.

"Arrow" stands for movement, whereas "dew" stands for the bright symbol of impermanence or transitoriness. She becomes just a red mist. She falls into a vast cauldron of morning. It renews her life: that is regenerated passing from non- existence to existence. She's free to live at a higher level of existence. There is transformation through motion. The suicide is not annihilation, but transcendence.

Ariel is the representation of a person caught in the world which denies her humanity by defining her sexuality. As a female, she has no substantial freedom or self- definition. The poem studies the resulting state of mind: we experience how she feels. Descriptions of scenery, for example, tell us not so much how the world looks, as how the world symbolizes her feelings. Not surprisingly, images concerned with the body secure throughout 'Ariel.' 'Ariel' gives us the world in which destructive feelings and pain are grounded in real causes. As the poem develops, the treatment of these themes became explicit, and is rooted in women's place in a man's hostile world. The biological prison, the preoccupation with physical pain and deadness are intimate consequences of a prominent social ordeal. Inexorably trapped, the persona sharpens finds an escape. Her defensive passivity, her search for dissolution into primordial sea and air, lead her forward to a single answer, a single way out.

To treat “Ariel” as a confessional poem is to suggest that its actual importance lies in the horse-ride taken by its author, in the author’s psychological problems, or in its position within the bibliographical development of the author. None of these issues are as significant as the imagistic and thematic development rendered by the poem itself. “Ariel” is probably Plath’s finest single construction because of the precision and depth of its images. In its account of the ritual journey to the center of life and death, Plath perfects her methods of leaping from image to image in order to represent mental process. The sensuousness of the poem—the “Black, sweet blood mouthfuls” of the berries; the “glitter of seas”—is unmatched in contemporary American poetry. We see, hear, touch and taste the process of disintegration: the horse emerging from the darkness of the morning, the sun beginning to rise as the horse, Ariel, rushes uncontrollably across the countryside, the rider trying to catch the brown neck but instead “tasting” the blackberries on the side of the road. Then all the rider’s perceptions are thrown together: the horse’s body and the rider’s merge. She hears her own cry as if it were that of a child and flies towards the burning sun that has now risen.

11.5 KEYWORDS

- **Pithy:** terse, but substantive
- **Ponderous:** heavy and slow-moving
- **Rondo:** an instrumental composition; here, a dance
- **Stasis:** lack of movement
- **Swaddlings:** clothes an infant is enveloped/wrapped in

11.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Write a summary of the poem “Fever 103” by Sylvia Plath.
- Summarize the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath.
- Write themes of the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath.
- Analyze the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath.

11.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

Notes

- Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath – a marriage examined. From The Contemporary Review. Essay by Richard Whittington-Egan 2005 accessed July 9, 2010
- Gifford (2008) p. 15
- Kirk (2004) p. xxi
- Cooper, Brian (June 2003). "Sylvia Plath and the depression continuum". J R Soc Med. 96 (6): 296–301. doi:10.1258/jrsm.96.6.296. PMC 539515. PMID 12782699.
- The Dedalus Book of Literary Suicides: Dead Letters (2008) Gary Lachman, Dedalus Press, University of Michigan p. 145

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

The poem “Fever 103°” was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 1)**

The poem “Ariel” was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 2)**

The poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath was published in the year before she finally committed a 'successful' suicide. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q 3)**

UNIT-12 SYLVIA PLATH- POINT SHIRLEY, THE COLOSSUS, DADDY, FEVER 103, ARIEL, PURDAH, LADY LAZARUS - 5

STRUCTURE

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Purdah

12.3 Lady Lazarus

12.4 Let us sum up

12.5 Keywords

12.6 Questions for Review

12.7 Suggested Reading and References

12.8 Answers to Check your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- You would learn about the poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath and,
- You would also learn about the poem “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

PURDAH

The poem was published posthumously in the anthology *Winter Trees* in 1971. However, according to Ted Hughes this particular poem was meant to be published in the anthology *Ariel*. After all it was dated by Plath as 29th October 1962.

LADY LAZARUS

Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath is written in the explosive productivity of the last months of Sylvia Plath's life and published posthumously in *Ariel* (1965), this poem is both a promise and a curse. The poem articulates the furious despair necessary to commit suicide, combining the need to get out of life with the energy to act on that need.

It is a poignant expression of her resentment, even vengeance, against the male-dominated society, for all the oppression upon women like the speaker of the poem, and also the many kinds of violence for which man is responsible. The speaker expresses her rage against everyone around her; the physical setting of the poem can be imagined to be the deathbed of Plath herself when she was nervously broken and bedridden after the unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

But the people, especially the males that she mentions in the poem, must be taken as a symbol of generic the male and the symbolic representations like the brutal force and violence like that of the German Nazis with their monstrous Hitler, war and genocide, oppression and atrocity, science and bleak rationality, as well as a symbol of more general inhuman agents of oppression in the world. The male, whether it is daddy or a doctor or even god, in Plath's poems usually symbolizes these destructive agents; the feminine persona, on the other hand, is also a symbol of generic, universal female, the creative force, humility, love and humanity in general.

In this poem a disturbing tension is established between the seriousness of the experience described and the misleadingly light form of the poem. The vocabulary and rhythms which approximate to the colloquial simplicity of conversational speech, the frequently end-stopped lines, the repetitions which have the effect of mockingly counteracting the violence of the meaning, all establish the deliberately flippant note which this poem strives to achieve.

12.2 PURDAH

The poem "Purdah" (CP 242-244) written on 29 October 1962, is about the woman behind the purdah, which is a veil, hides the beautiful woman

and inside the beautiful woman hides the murderous, vengeful woman. In “Purdah” the woman behind the purdah or the veil is beautiful, mysterious. She is “Priceless and quiet”. The word “Jade” has different connotations. It a hard, tough, greenish or white silicate, an old, worn-out horse, a worthless person, a woman (Macmillan English Dictionary 2002):

Jade—

Stone of the side,

The agonized

Side of green Adam, I

Smile, cross-legged,

Enigmatical,

Since the poet says “Jade--/Stone of the side,..”, it is the hard, tough, stone. Eve is said to be created from Adam’s rib in the biblical story. But in this poem the woman is “Jade” from “The agonized/Side of green Adam...” The woman behind the veil looks submissive but she is “Jade”, a hard, tough one. She smiles, sitting cross-legged, but enigmatical.

The woman behind the purdah is “shifting my clarities”, quiet, but nursing a grudge, seething with rage, and waiting for a chance to escape from her bondage. Jo Gill describes the poem as “the defiant „Purdah“ with its resounding „shriek“ of identity wrested from oppression” (Gill 70). The enigmatical nature of woman underlies the ambivalence about woman because what the man thinks about woman is different from what the woman really is. This is the dichotomy between man and woman. In the poem the man considers the woman his property, a „jewelled Doll“ while the woman dreams of murder. She is a prized possession just like the exotic creatures that he keeps for his entertainment. She is fodder to his ego:

I am his.

Even in his

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Absence, I

Revolve in my

Sheath of impossibles,

Priceless and quiet

Among these parakeets, macaws!

But this state is intolerable to the woman behind the veil. She conspires to unloose all hell:

I shall unloose —

From the small jeweled

Doll he guards like a heart—

The next stanza refers to the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra on his return from Troy. When Agamemnon went to the bathroom in order to change his clothes, Clytemnestra, conspiring with her lover Aegisthus, threw a net around him, making him an easy target for Aegisthus's axe:

The lioness,

The shriek in the bath,

The cloak of holes.

12.3 LADY LAZARUS

SUMMARY

The poem is spoken by Lady Lazarus, a speaker who shares a lot of similarities with the poet herself. Lady Lazarus begins by telling us that she has done "it" again. What is this "it"? We don't know at first. She compares herself to a Holocaust victim, and tell us that's she's only thirty years old, and that she has nine lives, like a cat. We soon figure out that "it" is dying; but, like the cat, she keeps returning to life.

She tells us about the first two times that she almost died, and tells us that dying "is an art." She says that dying is a theatrical event, and

imagines that people come and see her do it. In fact, it starts to seem as if she's performing a third death in front of a crowd at a circus or carnival. She compares herself again to Holocaust victims, and imagines that she's been burned to death in a concentration camp crematorium. At the end of the poem, she resurrects (or returns to life from death) once again, and she "eat s men like air."

Lines 1-3

I have done it again. One year in every ten

I manage it—

- The poem begins on a strange note. A speaker—Lady Lazarus—tells us that she's "done it again." But what has she done? What is this mysterious "it"? Why does she do this "it" every ten years?
- We won't actually find out the answer to these questions for a little while, so just hold your horses.
- In the meantime, let's think about the speaker. Lady Lazarus is a fictional creation by the poet Sylvia Plath. We have to admit: Lady Lazarus has a whole lot in common with Plath herself (which you'll see as you keep reading). But Plath clearly takes pains to separate her real self from her poetry, so we're going to always refer to the speaker as Lady Lazarus.
- Plath is getting all Biblical on us in this poem. Lazarus is a character from the New Testament who dies, and who Jesus brings back to life in the Gospel of John.
- So why is our speaker named Lady Lazarus? Has she perhaps been resurrected (or brought back from the dead)? Let's read on to get some answers. (And for more on Lady L, check out what we have to say in the "Speaker" section of this learning guide).
- And let's think about the poem's form for just a second. It's written in short, three-line stanzas (also known as tercets) with super-short lines.

Notes

- The poem is quick, clipped, brusque. There's not a lot of lingering over words. Lady Lazarus isn't into long drawn out lines or sentences. She moves quickly through language.
- One last thing: you may have noticed that we have a rhyme going on in this first stanza (with the words "ten" and "again"). As you read on, you'll see that the poem has a lot of rhymes, but that they don't follow a specific pattern. If you're interested in form, head over to the "Form and Meter" section for the real skinny.

Lines 4-9

A sort of walking miracle, my skin Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot A paperweight, My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

- Now Lady Lazarus starts to describe herself, and it's, well, horrifying.
- The first of these lines show us that, whatever she's managing to do, it makes her a walking miracle, which takes us back to the title; Lazarus was miraculously raised from the dead by Jesus. So, if we can make that connection, it's coming back from the dead that our speaker is managing every ten years, and that's what she's managed to do again.
- Note that, between lines four and five, we see an example of enjambment—a thought being split between two lines. The split, in this case, divides the lines between the image of skin and the disturbing image of the Nazi lampshade.
- Yep, that's right. Lady Lazarus compares herself to a "Nazi lampshade," to a "paperweight" and to "Jew linen."
- What's up with all of the Holocaust references? Well, the poem was written in 1962, so World War II and the Holocaust weren't that far in the past. The atrocities of the Nazis still reverberated intensely in the world's imagination.
- So let's break these comparisons down. Lady Lazarus is comparing herself to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The Nazis used the

dead bodies of the slaughtered Jews in the production of objects, including (according to the rumors) lampshades and paperweights. (Are you feeling disgusted? We're not surprised; this is some pretty sick stuff we're dealing with.)

- Lady Lazarus is making a whole bunch of metaphors and similes here. She is a living version—a "walking miracle"—of a lampshade made out of the bodies of murdered human beings. Sick.
- The things for which her body is being used are so mundane that it's insulting—lampshades, paperweights. Her body is dead, torn apart to furnish someone else's living room or office.
- Are you thinking to yourself: whoa, Lady L, that is a seriously intense metaphor? Have you been through a Holocaust? Do you really want to compare yourself to the Jewish victims of the Nazis? If you are thinking those thoughts, well, you're not alone. Some people think that Plath goes too far in her Holocaust metaphors. Some people disagree and think that they are the best way for her to express her pain.

Lines 10-15

Peel off the napkin O my enemy. Do I terrify?—
the nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth? The sour breath
will vanish in a day.

- Lady Lazarus knows she's freaking us out in this poem, and addresses us—her audience—directly. She tells us to "peel off the napkin," to (figuratively) reveal her face. She calls us her "enemy." Thanks, Lady L, for making us feel welcome in your poem.
- And for you Bible scholars out there, line 11 may be using a biblical allusion to Micah 7:8, in a moment in which the Jews address an enemy and then say: "Though I have fallen / I will rise." It's one of the many moments in the poem in which Lady Lazarus imagines that she has an intense connection with the Jewish people, although we're not quite sure who her enemy is—the Nazis? Death? Us? (Yikes.)

Notes

- This address to the audience is called an apostrophe. Lady Lazarus speaks to several different audiences throughout the poem, but in this moment, she seems to be talking directly to us (shiver).
- She then asks if she terrifies us, and our answer is: yes, obviously. Lady Lazarus knows how to wield power. We're quaking in our boots over here.
- And, Lady L keeps at it. She describes what she looks like, and even this simple act takes on a grotesque tone. She figures herself as a kind of living corpse, with "eye pits" instead of eyeballs, and "sour breath" that will disappear once she's actually dead—in a day.
- This is some pretty intense imagery, if we do say so ourselves. Apparently, it's the zombie apocalypse, and Plath's here to tell us all about it.

Lines 16-24

Soon, soon the flesh The grave cave ate will be At home on me And I a smiling woman. I am only thirty. And like the cat I have nine times to die. This is Number Three. What a trash To annihilate each decade.

- The poem really starts to come together in these stanzas. Earlier, we had a whole bunch of grotesque bodily descriptions and references to Nazis. Now, Lady Lazarus gets more specific.
- She's telling us that, soon—just as soon as the stale breath vanishes, we're guessing—the flesh that was eaten by her grave will feel at home on her.
- In coming close to dying, it's like her grave ate her flesh. She has already started to rot. Lovely.
- She tells us her age—thirty—and that she's smiling. What in the world does Lady L have to smile about? Maybe she's talking about how people *see* her. Maybe they're mistaking her grimace for a grin. Either way, it's a disturbing image in a poem about death.
- Then she drops a little simile on us: she is like a cat. (Remember that old wives tale that says that cats have nine lives? That's what Plath is

referring to here.) But instead of talking about the number of lives she has, she's talking about the number of deaths. Emo alert.

- Lady Lazarus tells us that "this" is "Number Three." So she is somehow (in the imaginary time of the poem) experiencing her third death. If we think back to the first lines of the poem, we now know that the "it" is death.
- But if she's dead, how is she speaking to us? And if she's alive, is she just playing dead? If she's just playing, where are her eyeballs? Why all the corpse imagery if she's alive? What's up with this flesh-consuming cave?
- Unfortunately, we can't answer these questions. Fortunately, we're not supposed to! Plath's ambiguity here is so strong that it's impossible to decide if Lady L is dead or alive, and we think that's precisely the point.
- We have to go with the poem's crazy logic and accept that the speaker can be dead and alive at the same time. In the world of the poem, even death is ambiguous.
- Now, the speaker is giving more detail about her third time dying. Annihilation is a really cool word for destruction, so we're guessing that she feels as if she's been destroyed, once a decade.
- Yet, she exclaims that she's trash. Her life, which is destroyed once every ten years, is nothing but trash in the first place. "Why not annihilate something worth destroying?" these lines seem to ask.
- And let's not forget about form here. Notice all of the internal rhymes in these stanzas, in words like "grave," "cave," and "ate," and in "nine" and "die." There are so many rhymes that it feels like the poem is collapsing in on itself. Like Lady Lazarus's world is shrinking, and everything now sounds the same to her.

Lines 25-34

What a million filaments. The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see Them unwrap me hand and foot—

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The big strip tease. Gentlemen, ladies These are my hands
My knees. I may be skin and bone,
Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.

- Though this line is in stanza 9, at first glance it could fit with either stanza 8 or stanza 9, sense-wise. Read a little more of the poem though, and it looks like this line elaborates on "What a trash," from line 23.
- Regardless of where this line fits in the context of the poem, you might be asking, what in the world does it mean?
- Well, filaments are like tiny little strings. You can have filaments of gold, filaments of hair, filaments of wire, filaments of cells. A filament can also be a tiny part of a flower, or the wire inside a light bulb, which is the part that actually lights up.
- We think that, though our speaker took all of those meanings into account, she's imagining her own body as a million little strands of fine linen.
- And, as she said in lines 23 and 24, these filaments are trash, to be annihilated each decade.
- Now Lady Lazarus imagines that she's in front of a "peanut-crunching crowd." We're imagining she's at a circus or a carnival. And, it turns out, she's the main event. Folks are so excited, they're shoving their way in to see her.
- The crowd unwraps her clothing, and she's forced into an imaginary striptease. They can see her body parts—her hands, her knees, her skin and bone.
- This is another violent set of stanzas. In this imaginary scene, Lady Lazarus loses control of her body. It seems fun for the crowd—they are crunching peanuts, after all, but this is a violent experience for Lady L. She is an object of spectacle for a hungry crowd.

- But, she tells us, she is the "same, identical woman." What does Lady L mean here? We can think of two options:
- One, she's the same naked as she was clothed, which means that she is the same before and after her public stripping. In other words, this experience hasn't changed her.
- Or, we could take a different tack. She is the same woman now as she was before her death. (This scene, after all, is happening in the kind of life-death limbo that Lady L is imagining.)
- Our speaker is stressing that though she's come back from the dead, she hasn't changed. There has been no metamorphosis, and yes, it's truly her, coming back again, and not some twin pretending to be her. Her feat, of coming back from the dead, was real.
- Finally, note the weird power dynamic going on in this poem. Lady L seems so in control of her precise, curt language, but this contrasts with the powerlessness that she feels as an object (or even a victim) of the crowd. And let's not forget that she casts herself not just as the object of a circus spectacle, but also as a Holocaust victim.
- So who ultimately has the power in the poem? It's up for you to decide!

Lines 35-42

The first time it happened I was ten. It was an accident.

The second time I meant To last it out and not come back at all.

I rocked shut As a seashell.

They had to call and call And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

- Here, Lady Lazarus decides to fill us in a bit on her first two lives, or really, her first two deaths.
- Once again, we have that mysterious "it"—but now we know that that "it" equals "death."
- Or, does it? We might try to be a bit more accurate. We find out in these lines that Lady L's first "death" was an accident. Her second

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death was on purpose, though. She "meant" to "not come back at all."
But, she was found and brought back to life.

- With all of this information in mind, it's a little clearer what's going on. Lady L is talking about all of the times that she *almost* died. She doesn't actually have nine lives, not even in the world of the poem.
- To sum up, she once came close to death because of an accident when she was ten. Then, she tried to commit suicide and failed.
- Sylvia Plath, by the way, tried to commit suicide during her college years. She took a whole bunch of sleeping pills and then hid in the crawl space of her mother's house. (She writes about this incident in her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*.)
- Plath uses a pretty powerful simile here; she says that she "rocked shut / as a seashell." She creates a powerful image of Lady Lazarus, all curled up, trying to shut the world out, trying to harden and die.
- Then "they"—those who want to rescue her, have to repeatedly call for her, and pick worms off of her as if they're pearls. Are the worms real? Are they in her imagination? We can't know for sure, but the simile comparing worms to "sticky pearls" creates another image in our minds—this time of an oyster, all shut up. And it connects that shut-up sea creature with death, when a body becomes worm food, not to put too fine a point on it. It's as if, even though she survived, she was already dead, just for a little bit. The worms were already eating her.

Lines 43-50

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.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.

It's easy enough to do it and stay put.

- Here, Lady Lazarus tells us what is perhaps the greatest truth of this poem: dying is an art. It may not be an art for everyone, or even for anyone other than Lady L, but she certainly turns her death into art (i.e., she turns it into this poem).
- These line breaks, which use enjambment, are genius. When we read "dying" on the first line of this stanza, we'd expect something depressing to follow.
- Instead, when we jump down to the next line, we hear that dying is an art and apparently that everything else is an art, too. This means that brushing your teeth, driving to school or work, even going to the bathroom—that's art. Imagine an entire reality T.V. show, dedicated to the art of brushing one's teeth.
- But the focus here is on death—if life is art, these lines suggests, then death must be art, too. And our speaker says she's an artistic genius at dying—she does it very well.
- Or...wait a second. If she's come close, but not quite made it to death three times, she's actually quite awful at the art of dying.
- So, dying isn't necessarily the art she does well—it's coming back from being almost dead she's a rock star at.
- Things start getting really rhythmic here. The poem doesn't have a strict meter, but in this moment, patterns emerge. We have the rhymes of "well" and "hell" and all of the slant rhymes of "real," "call," and "cell."
- The beginning of the lines repeat each other (this is called anaphora) and have similar word choice (also known as diction), which means they have the same rhythm. The rhythm is fast and biting. We almost feel like Lady Lazarus is taunting us—like she's daring at us to challenge her.
- This is a lady who knows how to be forceful when she needs to be (which is apparently right now).

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- And she tells us that she does "it" (again, that mysterious "it") so that it "feels like hell" and "feels real." Or, in other words, she comes close to death—or, to be more explicit, she attempts suicide—so that she can feel something. She's drawn to death; she has "a call."
- Usually, death is something that happens to us; it's not something that we have control over or choose to do. But here, Lady Lazarus is taking control over her own death. Perhaps she's using suicide to express her control over her life. It's a strange way of thinking about death, that's for sure, but we wouldn't put it past ol' Sylvia.
- We can now be sure that we're listening to the thoughts of an extremely depressed and disturbed person. Of course, part of the wonderfulness of the poem is its grotesqueness, but in moments like these, it's hard to forget that behind these lines is probably severe mental illness.

Lines 51-64

It's the theatrical Comeback in broad day
To the same place, the same face, the same brute
Amused shout:
"A miracle!"
That knocks me out.
There is a charge
For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart—
It really goes.
And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood
Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.

- Now we are back in the realm of the circus or carnival; Lady Lazarus tells us that she's making a theatrical comeback. She represents her resurrection—her coming back to life—as a circus act. She's quite the spectacle.

- Someone—a brute—shouts that she's a "miracle." Well, we heard that before, way back in stanza 2.
- She says that this "knocks her out." Usually this phrase is a metaphor for being surprised or amazed, but in this moment in the poem, it takes on a violent undertone, as if she's in a boxing match.
- As Lady L says, "there is a charge." That means people have to drop some dough to see the spectacle she puts on. If people want to see her scars, they have to pay. They have to pay to hear her heart beat, and they have to pay a whole lot of money to hear her speak, to touch her, or to take a bit of her blood, hair, or clothes.
- The items that she's "charging" forget increasingly more personal. The lowest "charges" are just for looking at her; the largest ones are for an actual piece of her (her blood, her hair).
- We think that Lady Lazarus is being figurative here. She's not actually at a circus, and she's not actually charging money for people to come and see her.
- But the important thing is that this is how Lady L *feels*. She feels like she's in a circus act, like everyone wants to gaze upon her pain for their enjoyment. She feels like everyone wants a piece of her—her hair, her clothes, her heartbeat, her blood.
- Notice that Lady Lazarus is always casting herself as a victim. First, she's a victim of the Nazis, who use her skin to make lampshades. Now, she's a circus freak who everyone wants to see to admire her pain. She may seem like a miracle to everyone else, but it sounds like our Lady just wants to be left alone. And there's once again a contrast between Lady L's powerful voice, and the powerless roles in which she casts herself.
- Is she a powerful woman? A hapless victim? Can she be both at the same time?
- And we can't forget to mention the sounds, too. We've got the rhyme of "shout" and "out," plus the slant rhyme of "scars,"

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"charge," and "heart." Once again, there's kind of a closed-in feeling in these stanzas. The sounds repeat themselves, just as our speaker keeps repeating this spectacle—dying and coming back to life.

Lines 65-72

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

- Lady Lazarus's fixation on the Nazis returns in these lines. She addresses a Nazi figure—a doctor and enemy—and once again represents herself as a Jewish person in relation to him. ("Herr" is a German word that translates to "Mr." or "Sir.")
- During the Holocaust, Nazi doctors performed a ton of cruel and lethal experiments on Jewish people. They also placed millions of Jews in gas chambers and crematoriums, and gassed or burned them alive. This is what Plath is referring to in these lines; she's setting herself up as a victim of the Nazis. She imagines that she's burning along with the Jews.
- It also tells us who her enemy is—the doctor. Sure, she could just be figuratively speaking here, but we might assume that our speaker, who's clearly suffering from some sort of mental illness, is no fan of the doctors who keep bringing her back from the dead.
- Lady L makes a whole bunch of metaphors to get her point across again. She's an "opus" (or piece of literary or musical work). She's a valuable. She's a "pure gold baby" "that melts to a shriek." (When gold melts, it doesn't melt into a shriek, and our speaker isn't actually a pure gold baby. But that's what she feels like, and we're betting, with all the pain she's feeling, she's doing a good bit of real-life shrieking.)

- Lady L is continuing the references to the Nazi crematoriums, in which the Nazis burned the possessions of the Jews along with the human beings. She's also describing herself as something that belongs to others, once again casting herself as a victim with no control over her life.
- These lines make us think, if the speaker is so valuable to the doctor, then maybe she's not the one charging for little pieces of herself after all. Maybe, it's the doctor who is charging people, and letting them take little bits of the speaker. He's reaping all of the profits of her pain. This aligns with the view of the doctor as German—during World War II, the Germans profited from the possessions and labor of the Jewish people whom they massacred.
- And the final line here is ironic; Plath knows that Nazis were not concerned for the well-being of the Jews.
- Did you notice that intense rhyme of "burn" and "concern"? The rhyme underlines the fact that the Nazis, in fact, have absolutely no concern for the burning and gassing of millions.
- What do you make of the fact that Plath, through Lady Lazarus, is making all of these references to the Holocaust? Is she trivializing a horrific event that led to the death of millions? Or is she making a legitimate comparison in an attempt to convey to us how terrible her pain really is? It's a question that's ripe for debate.

Lines 73-81

Ash, ash—

You poke and stir.

Flesh, bone, there is nothing there—

A cake of soap,

A wedding ring,

A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

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- Lady Lazarus extends the Holocaust metaphor even further here. She imagines that in this, her third death, she has been burned alive in a concentration camp crematorium.
- She imagines a Nazi looking through the crematorium after it has burned its victims; there's only "ash, ash." There is no flesh or bone.
- There are few remnants of the human beings burned alive inside: just a wedding ring and a gold filling. The Nazis used to turn whatever remains they could find into soap (we can't help but experience revulsion over here), and Lady L imagines that the Nazi sees the future soap he will make out of these ashes and traces of human bodies. Ugh.
- Lady Lazarus's tone here starts to change. Earlier in the poem, she seemed pretty powerless. Everyone was watching her, or so she imagined. But now that she's dead, she imagines herself in a position of power. Instead of being watched by Nazis, she herself is watching the Nazis poke around in the crematorium. She is the seer, not the object to be seen.
- And she seems to be building to a crescendo in these lines; she says "beware / beware"—as if she is about to warn the Nazis of something. Plus, Herr Doktor has transformed into Herr God, Herr Lucifer. In other words, she's comparing this doctor to both God and the devil—all male figures who seem to have power over her in some way. At least for now.
- These bewares, by the way, may be a reference to Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan," which features the lines "And all who heard should see them there, / And all should cry, Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!"
- Lady Lazarus just might be comparing herself to Kubla Khan—the wild man with flashing eyes—in this famous Romantic poem.
- The speaker's voice is taking on some serious strength here. She's straight-up warning God *and* the devil. What exactly does she have planned?

Lines 82-84

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair And I eat men like air.

- This is what we've been waiting for: Lady Lazarus rises again. Boom goes the dynamite. Take that, Herr Doktor.
- She imagines that she's been burnt to death by the Nazis, but here she resurrects. She stays true to her name. But unlike the Lazarus in the Bible, she doesn't need Jesus (or anyone) to make her resurrection happen. She does it all on her own.
- She may share her name with Lazarus the Bible character, but here, Lady L seems a lot more like the phoenix, a mythical bird that bursts into flames and then is reborn out of its ashes.
- And then, once she has resurrected, what does she do? She "eat s men like air." Does this mean that she eats men as if they were nothing, like air is nothing? Do they taste like nothing to her? Does she eat only unsubstantial men? Does this line refer to men and only men, or does it encompass women, too (as in, mankind)?
- And why does she eat these men? Is she hungry? (Probably not.) Is this her way of gaining power and control? Is this a way for her to control the meaning of her own death? Perhaps she refuses to be killed by the Nazis again in her next life, and vows to take control of her death and plan it her way.
- There are lots of ambiguities at the end of this poem, which leaves a lot of room for interpretation, so get cracking, folks.

Critical Analysis

This poem Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath like many other protest poems should be analyzed from a psychological point of view, as an outpour of a neurotic energy through the channel of creative art, or poetry. It is in a sense a kind of therapy.

- Though it is slightly autobiographical, the poem must be interpreted symbolically and psychologically without limiting it to the poetess's

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life experience alone. The extremity of anger in this poem is not justifiable as something possible with a normal person in real life. We should understand that this is partly due to the neurosis that Plath was actually suffering from. Besides, it is essential to understand from the psychoanalytical point of view, that the poem does not literally express reality alone: it is the relieving anger and frustration, and an alternative outlet of the neurotic energy in the form of poetic expression. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the anger as being directed against the general forces of inhumanity, violence and destruction only symbolized by the males in the poem. By a process of association and surrealism, the protest moves from common males to Hitler, his experimenting doctor, the scavengers of gold on dead Jews, the dentists who had a turn before the corpses were disposed for leather, soap, nightshades and fertilizer! The individual is associatively linked to inhumanity and oppression. Sylvia Plath said that her “Personal experience is very important, but I believe poetry should be relevant to larger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on.” This means that the frustration and anger against a dominating father, or anyone for that matter, becomes a starting point or central symbol for larger issues including Hitler, torture and inhumanity. The poem is, therefore, also about the victimization of modern war. The persona is not only real people: they are types. The poem is less autobiographical than it is universal. In fact, the theme of universal female protest in the modern world is the most striking theme in the poem. The female speaker represents the creative force and she is angry with the destructive forces symbolized by males. The allusions of the Second World War are all real. The anger against the German soldiers, Hitler and his Nazi party is not too much. The reader will justify this anger if he tries to imagine the inhumanity of Hitler.

- Though the speaker intended to die, just yielding to death will not annihilate her. She completes the poem with a final comeback. The poem is technically a (bitter) dramatic monologue. The title ironically identifies a female Lazarus; whereas the original Lazarus was male, whom Christ brought back to life, the present speaker is identifying

herself with a Lazarus different in sex, behavior, and everything. Plath's persona is a figure who wants to subvert all that she can of the tradition that attempts to bring you back and torture, rather than let you choose death and die! This female figure also represents the oppressed modern woman conscious of the fact that the male society will bring her back to life, because it needs to satisfy itself by oppressing the woman. The poem destroys the myth; it borrows it to reject and state an antithesis. The poem's persona does not conform to society's traditional idea of lady-like behavior. She is angry and she wants to take revenge in every way. She owes only to herself, not to Jesses. Self-destruction pervades the poem as it did Plath's life. As confession mutates to myth, subjectivity inclines to generalized feeling. Having taken up the battle with the enemy on his terms, she concluded by warning the male deity and demon that when she rises from the ashes, she will consume men as fire does; she will return from death like the sphinx and eat men like vampire, or fire. It is psychologically and symbolically about the aspiration to revenge that is felt by all the female victims of male domination, once they become conscious of the domination. The revenge would be against the institutions that dominate women. The poem is about a woman's wish to turn the tables on the father and his kind. Its dramatic overstatement of male evil may sound intolerable to some readers, but it must be taken to poetically express the resentment in the female mind that was suppressed for ages against all kinds of injustice upon them by male society and traditions, rather than by individual males upon individual female. The anger will be justified if one thinks of the extremity of long-borne suffering of women through the ages. The myth of Lazarus is transformed in this poem into the myth of the reincarnating phoenix, the bird which immolates itself every five hundred years but rises whole and rejuvenated from its ashes. Besides, the bird has become a being that reincarnates not just to remain immortal, but to take revenge on its adversaries. Sylvia Plath provided a self-explication during a radio reading. "The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only

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trouble is, she has to die first. She is the phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will.”

- The poem is written in 28 stanzas that are suggestive of the 28 days of the normal female menstrual cycle, or in a sense, their rebirth. The reproductive cycle echoes the creativity of the female poet; but here the creativity is also destructive of that entire stand against the female pursuit, including her freedom to die. The poem is said to evolve from many kinds of losses and tragedies that Plath experienced and wanted to turn into positive advantages; this poem can be called an attempt to interpret her suicidal attempt as a process to transform herself, whether she succeeded or failed. Plath experienced many losses, including abortion, miscarriage, childbirth, severe postpartum depression, divorce, and the like. She probably wanted to convert these into achievements, as a source of illumination and energy to fight against the adverse forces in order to survive.
- Lady Lazarus defines the central aesthetic principles of Plath’s late poetry. First, the poem derives its dominant effects from the colloquial language. From the conversational opening (“I have done it again”) to the clipped warnings of the ending (“Beware/ Beware”). Lady Lazarus appears as the monologue of a woman speaking spontaneously out of her pain and psychic disintegration. The Latinate terms (“annihilate,” “filaments,” “opus,” “valuable”) are introduced as sudden contrasts to the essentially simple language of the speaker. The obsessive repetition of key words and phrases gives enormous power to the plain style used throughout. As she speaks, Lady Lazarus seems to gather up her energies for an assault on her enemies, and the staccato repetitions of phrases build up the intensity of feelings.
- This is language poured out of some burning inner fire, though it retains the rhythmic precision that we expect from a much less intensely felt expression. It is also a language made up almost entirely of monosyllables. Plath has managed to adapt a heightened conversational stance and a colloquial idiom to the dramatic monologue form.

THEMES**Death**

If we had to sum up "Lady Lazarus" in just one word, what do you think we'd say? The speaker is obsessed with death, both literal and figurative. She's attempted to commit suicide in the past, and she keeps playing out scenarios in her mind in which she's a victim of the Holocaust. Lady Lazarus is not in a good mental place in the poem, that's for sure.

Violence

"Lady Lazarus" is an undeniably violent poem. It's filled with mangled bodies, fierce circus crowds, and murderous Nazis. The best way that Lady Lazarus (and, for that matter, Sylvia Plath) can communicate her deep depression to us is through violent imagery and imagined experiences. We don't know much about Lady L's life outside of the poem, but her imagined life of brutal circuses and concentration camps is a violent, horrific place.

Suffering

"Lady Lazarus" is full of fun times, huh? Oh wait. The big, controlling metaphor of the poem is Lady Lazarus's comparison of herself with the fate of the Jews who were slaughtered (all six million of them) during the Holocaust. She compares her emotional suffering to their physical suffering (and deaths). She takes on their suffering to explain their own. Obviously, this daring move makes us ask a whole lot of questions, but it's also a reminder that every line of this poem is going to be majorly depressing. So have a rom-com ready for when you're done.

Check your Progress-1

1. Who wrote the poem "Purdah" ?

2. Who wrote the poem " Lady Lazarus"?

3. When was the poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath written?

4. What is the poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath all about?

12.4 LET SUM UP

In this unit we learned about the poems “Purdah” and “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath.

12.5 KEYWORDS

- **Swaddlings:** clothes an infant is enveloped/wrapped in
- **Tendrils:** something suggestive of a tendril (slender leaf that attaches a plant to its support)
- **Tor:** a rough, craggy hill
- **Troublous:** a form of the word troubling; stormy

12.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Write the summary of the poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath.
- Summarize the poem “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath.
- Analyze the poem “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath.
- Write the themes of the poem “Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath.

12.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

The poem “Purdah” was written by Sylvia Plath. **(Answer to check your progress – 1 Q1)**

The poem “Lady Lazarus” was written by Sylvia Plath. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q2)**

The poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath was written on 29 October 1962. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q3)**

The poem “Purdah” by Sylvia Plath is about the woman behind the purdah, which is a veil, hides the beautiful woman and inside the beautiful woman hides the murderous, vengeful woman. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q4)**

UNIT-13 FAULKNER-THE SOUND AND THE FURY -1

STRUCTURE

13.0 Objectives

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Life and Career

13.3 Writing

13.4 Legacy

13.5 Awards

13.6 Collections

13.7 Audio Recordings

13.8 Let us sum up

13.9 Keywords

13.10 Questions for Review

13.11 Suggested Reading and References

13.12 Answers to Check your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about William Cuthbert Faulkner's life,
- you would also learn about his career,
- you would also go through his various writing, legacy,
- and finally you would also go through the list of awards he has received, collections and audio recordings.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

William Cuthbert Faulkner was an American writer and Nobel Prize laureate from Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, screenplays, poetry, essays, and a play. He is primarily known for his novels and short stories set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, based on Lafayette County, Mississippi, where he spent most of his life.

Faulkner is one of the most celebrated writers in American literature generally and Southern literature specifically. Though his work was published as early as 1919 and largely during the 1920s and 1930s, Faulkner's renown reached its peak upon the publication of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner* and his 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, making him the only Mississippi-born Nobel winner. Two of his works, *A Fable* (1954) and his last novel *The Reivers* (1962), each won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked his 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury* sixth on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century; also on the list were *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Light in August* (1932). *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) appears on similar lists.

13.2 LIFE AND CAREER

Born William Cuthbert Falkner in New Albany, Mississippi, William Faulkner was the first of four sons of Murry Cuthbert Falkner (August 17, 1870 – August 7, 1932) and Maud Butler (November 27, 1871 – October 16, 1960). He had three younger brothers: Murry Charles "Jack" Falkner (June 26, 1899 – December 24, 1975), author John Faulkner (September 24, 1901 – March 28, 1963), and Dean Swift Falkner (August 15, 1907 – November 10, 1935).

Soon after his first birthday, his family moved to Ripley, Mississippi, where his father Murry worked as the treasurer for the family-owned Gulf & Chicago Railroad Company. Murry hoped to inherit the railroad from his father, John Wesley Thompson Falkner, but John had little confidence in Murry's ability to run a business and sold it for \$75,000. Following the sale of the railroad business, Murry proposed a plan to get a new start for his family by moving to Texas and becoming a

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rancher. Maud disagreed with this proposition, however, and they moved instead to Oxford, Mississippi, where Murry's father owned several businesses, making it easy for Murry to find work. Thus, four days prior to William's fifth birthday, the Falkner family settled in Oxford, where he lived on and off for the rest of his life.

His family, particularly his mother Maud, his maternal grandmother Lelia Butler, and Caroline "Callie" Barr (the African American nanny who raised him from infancy) crucially influenced the development of Faulkner's artistic imagination. Both his mother and grandmother were avid readers as well as painters and photographers, educating him in visual language. While Murry enjoyed the outdoors and encouraged his sons to hunt, track, and fish, Maud valued education and took pleasure in reading and going to church. She taught her sons to read before sending them to public school and exposed them to classics such as Charles Dickens and Grimms' Fairy Tales.

Faulkner's lifelong education by Callie Barr is central to his novels' preoccupations with the politics of sexuality and race.

As a schoolchild, Faulkner had success early on. He excelled in the first grade, skipped the second, and did well through the third and fourth grades. However, beginning somewhere in the fourth and fifth grades of his schooling, Faulkner became a much quieter and more withdrawn child. He began to play hooky occasionally and became somewhat indifferent to his schoolwork, instead taking interest in studying the history of Mississippi on his own time beginning in the seventh grade. The decline of his performance in school continued, and Faulkner wound up repeating the eleventh and twelfth grade, never graduating from high school.

Faulkner spent his boyhood listening to stories told to him by his elders including those of the Civil War, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Falkner family. Faulkner's grandfather would also tell him of the exploits of William's great-grandfather and namesake, William Clark Falkner, who was a successful businessman, writer, and Civil War hero. Telling stories about "Old Colonel", as his family called him, had already become something of a family pastime when Faulkner was a boy.

According to one of Faulkner's biographers, by the time William was born, his great-grandfather had "been enshrined long since as a household deity."

When he was 17, Faulkner met Phil Stone, who became an important early influence on his writing. Stone was four years his senior and came from one of Oxford's older families; he was passionate about literature and had already earned bachelor's degrees from Yale and the University of Mississippi. Faulkner also attended the latter, joined the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, and pursued his dream to become a writer. Stone read and was impressed by some of Faulkner's early poetry, becoming one of the first to recognize and encourage Faulkner's talent. Stone mentored the young Faulkner, introducing him to the works of writers such as James Joyce, who influenced Faulkner's own writing. In his early 20s, Faulkner gave poems and short stories he had written to Stone in hopes of their being published. Stone would in turn send these to publishers, but they were uniformly rejected.

The younger Faulkner was greatly influenced by the history of his family and the region in which he lived. Mississippi marked his sense of humor, his sense of the tragic position of "black and white" Americans, his characterization of Southern characters, and his timeless themes, including fiercely intelligent people dwelling behind the façades of good ol' boys and simpletons. Unable to join the United States Army due to his height (he was 5' 5½"), Faulkner enlisted in a reservist unit of the British Army in Toronto. Despite his claims, records indicate that Faulkner was never actually a member of the British Royal Flying Corps and never saw active service during the First World War.

In 1918, Faulkner's surname went from "Falkner" to Faulkner. According to one story, a careless typesetter simply made an error. When the misprint appeared on the title page of his first book, Faulkner was asked whether he wanted the change. He supposedly replied, "Either way suits me."

In adolescence, Faulkner began writing poetry almost exclusively. He did not write his first novel until 1925. His literary influences are deep and wide. He once stated that he modeled his early writing on the

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Romantic era in late 18th- and early 19th-century England. He attended the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss") in Oxford, enrolling in 1919, going three semesters before dropping out in November 1920.

William was able to attend classes at the university because his father had a job there as a business manager. He skipped classes often and received a "D" grade in English. However, some of his poems were published in campus publications.

Although Faulkner is identified with Mississippi, he was residing in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1925 when he wrote his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*. After being directly influenced by Sherwood Anderson, he made his first attempt at fiction writing. Anderson assisted in the publication of *Soldiers' Pay* and *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner's second novel, set in New Orleans, by recommending them to his publisher.

The miniature house at 624 Pirate's Alley, just around the corner from St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, is now the site of Faulkner House Books, where it also serves as the headquarters of the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society.

During the summer of 1927, Faulkner wrote his first novel set in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, titled *Flags in the Dust*. This novel drew heavily on the traditions and history of the South, in which Faulkner had been engrossed in his youth. He was extremely proud of the novel upon its completion and he believed it to be a significant step up from his previous two novels. However, when submitted for publication, it was rejected by the publishers Boni & Liveright. Faulkner was devastated by this rejection, but he eventually allowed his literary agent, Ben Wasson, to significantly edit the text, and the novel was published in 1929 as *Sartoris*.

In the autumn of 1928, just after his 31st birthday, he began working on *The Sound and the Fury*. He started by writing three short stories about a group of children with the last name Compson, but soon began to feel that the characters he had created might be better suited for a full-length novel. Perhaps as a result of disappointment in the initial rejection of *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner had now become indifferent to his publishers

and wrote this novel in a much more experimental style. In describing the writing process for this work, Faulkner would later say, "One day I seemed to shut the door between me and all publisher's addresses and book lists. I said to myself, 'Now I can write.'" After its completion, Faulkner insisted that Ben Wasson not do any editing or add any punctuation for clarity.

In 1929, Faulkner married Estelle Oldham, Andrew Kuhn serving as best man at the wedding. Estelle brought with her two children from her previous marriage to Cornell Franklin and Faulkner hoped to support his new family as a writer. Faulkner and Estelle later had a daughter, Jill, in 1933. He began writing *As I Lay Dying* in 1929 while working night shifts at the University of Mississippi Power House. The novel would be published in 1930. Beginning in 1930, Faulkner sent out some of his short stories to various national magazines. Several of his stories were published, which brought him enough income to buy a house in Oxford for his family to inhabit, which he named Rowan Oak. He made money on his 1931 novel, *Sanctuary*, which was widely reviewed and read (but widely disliked for its perceived criticism of the South).

By 1932, Faulkner was in need of money. He asked Wasson to sell the serialization rights for his newly completed novel, *Light in August*, to a magazine for \$5,000, but none accepted the offer. Then MGM Studios offered Faulkner work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Although not an avid moviegoer, he needed the money, and so accepted the job offer and arrived in Culver City, California, in May 1932. There he worked with director Howard Hawks, with whom he quickly developed a friendship, as they both enjoyed drinking and hunting. Howard Hawks' brother, William Hawks, became Faulkner's Hollywood agent. Faulkner would continue to find reliable work as a screenwriter from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Faulkner served as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville from February to June 1957 and again in 1958.

William Faulkner's Underwood Universal Portable typewriter in his office at Rowan Oak, which is now maintained by the University of Mississippi in Oxford as a museum

Personal life

As a teenager in Oxford, Faulkner dated Estelle Oldham (1897–1972), the popular daughter of Major Lemuel and Lida Oldham, and believed he would someday marry her. However, Estelle dated other boys during their romance, and in 1918 one of them, Cornell Franklin, proposed marriage to her before Faulkner did. Estelle's parents insisted she marry Cornell, as he was an Ole Miss law graduate, had recently been commissioned as a major in the Hawaiian Territorial Forces, and came from a respectable family with whom they were old friends. Estelle's marriage to Franklin fell apart ten years later, and they divorced in April 1929.

Two months later, Faulkner and Estelle wed in June 1929 at College Hill Presbyterian Church just outside Oxford, Mississippi. They honeymooned on the Mississippi Gulf Coast at Pascagoula, then returned to Oxford, first living with relatives while they searched for a home of their own to purchase. In 1930, Faulkner purchased the antebellum home Rowan Oak, known at that time as The Shegog Place from Irish planter Robert Shegog. After his death, Estelle and their daughter, Jill, lived at Rowan Oak until Estelle's death in 1972. The property was sold to the University of Mississippi that same year. The house and furnishings are maintained much as they were in Faulkner's day. Faulkner's scribblings are preserved on the wall, including the day-by-day outline covering a week he wrote on the walls of his small study to help him keep track of the plot twists in his novel, *A Fable*.

The quality and quantity of Faulkner's literary output were achieved despite a lifelong drinking problem. He rarely drank while writing, preferring instead to binge after a project's completion.

Faulkner had several extramarital affairs. One was with Howard Hawks's secretary and script girl, Meta Carpenter, later known as Meta Wilde. The affair was chronicled in her book *A Loving Gentleman*. Another, from 1949–53, was with a young writer, Joan Williams, who made her relationship with Faulkner the subject of her 1971 novel, *The Wintering*.

When Faulkner visited Stockholm in December 1950 to receive the Nobel Prize, he met Else Jonsson (1912–1996), widow of journalist Thorsten Jonsson (1910–1950), reporter for *Dagens Nyheter* in New York from 1943–46, who had interviewed Faulkner in 1946 and introduced his works to Swedish readers. Faulkner and Else had an affair that lasted until the end of 1953. At the banquet where they met in 1950, publisher Tor Bonnier introduced Else as the widow of the man responsible for Faulkner's winning the prize.

Death

On June 17, 1962, Faulkner suffered a serious injury in a fall from his horse, which led to thrombosis. He suffered a fatal heart attack on July 6, 1962, at the age of 64, at Wright's Sanatorium in Byhalia, Mississippi. Faulkner is buried with his family in St. Peter's Cemetery in Oxford, alongside the grave of an unidentified family friend, whose stone is marked only with the initials "E.T."

13.3 WRITING

From the early 1920s to the outbreak of World War II, Faulkner published 13 novels and many short stories. Such a body of work formed the basis of his reputation and earned him the Nobel Prize at age 52. Faulkner's prodigious output includes his most celebrated novels such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Faulkner was also a prolific writer of short stories.

His first short story collection, *These 13* (1931), includes many of his most acclaimed (and most frequently anthologized) stories, including "A Rose for Emily", "Red Leaves", "That Evening Sun", and "Dry September". Faulkner set many of his short stories and novels in Yoknapatawpha County — based on, and nearly geographically identical to, Lafayette County, of which his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, is the county seat. Yoknapatawpha was Faulkner's "postage stamp", and the bulk of work that it represents is widely considered by critics to amount to one of the most monumental fictional creations in the history of

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literature. Three of his novels, *The Hamlet*, *The Town* and *The Mansion*, known collectively as the Snopes Trilogy, document the town of Jefferson and its environs, as an extended family headed by Flem Snopes insinuates itself into the lives and psyches of the general populace.

His short story "A Rose for Emily" was his first story published in a major magazine, the *Forum*, but received little attention from the public. After revisions and reissues, it gained popularity and is now considered one of his best.

Faulkner was known for his experimental style with meticulous attention to diction and cadence. In contrast to the minimalist understatement of his contemporary Ernest Hemingway, Faulkner made frequent use of "stream of consciousness" in his writing, and wrote often highly emotional, subtle, cerebral, complex, and sometimes Gothic or grotesque stories of a wide variety of characters including former slaves or descendants of slaves, poor white, agrarian, or working-class Southerners, and Southern aristocrats.

In an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1956, Faulkner remarked:

Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique. There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no shortcut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him.

Another esteemed Southern writer, Flannery O'Connor, stated that "the presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what the writer can and cannot permit himself to do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the same track the Dixie Limited is roaring down".

Faulkner wrote two volumes of poetry which were published in small printings, *The Marble Faun* (1924), and *A Green Bough* (1933), and a collection of mystery stories, *Knight's Gambit* (1949).

13.4 LEGACY

Faulkner's work has been examined by many critics from a wide variety of critical perspectives.

The New Critics became very interested in Faulkner's work, with Cleanth Brooks writing *The Yoknapatawpha Country* and Michael Millgate writing *The Achievement of William Faulkner*. Since then, critics have looked at Faulkner's work using other approaches, such as feminist and psychoanalytic methods. Faulkner's works have been placed within the literary traditions of modernism and the Southern Renaissance.

According to critic and translator Valerie Miles, Faulkner's influence on Latin American fiction is considerable, with fictional worlds created by Gabriel García Márquez (*Macondo*) and Juan Carlos Onetti (*Santa Maria*) being "very much in the vein of" *Yoknapatawpha*: "Carlos Fuentes's *The Death of Artemio Cruz* wouldn't exist if not for *As I Lay Dying*".

13.5 AWARDS

Faulkner was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature for "his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel". It was awarded at the following year's banquet along with the 1950 Prize to Bertrand Russell. Faulkner detested the fame and glory that resulted from his recognition. His aversion was so great that his 17-year-old daughter learned of the Nobel Prize only when she was called to the principal's office during the school day.

He donated part of his Nobel money "to establish a fund to support and encourage new fiction writers", eventually resulting in the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and donated another part to a local Oxford bank, establishing a scholarship fund to help educate African-American teachers at Rust College in nearby Holly Springs, Mississippi. The government of France made Faulkner a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur in 1951.

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Faulkner was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for what are considered "minor" novels: his 1954 novel *A Fable*, which took the Pulitzer in 1955, and the 1962 novel, *The Reivers*, which was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer in 1963. (The award for *A Fable* was a controversial political choice. The jury had selected Milton Lott's *The Last Hunt* for the prize, but Pulitzer Prize Administrator Professor John Hohenberg convinced the Pulitzer board that Faulkner was long overdue for the award, despite *A Fable* being a lesser work of his, and the board overrode the jury's selection, much to the disgust of its members.) He also won the U.S. National Book Award twice, for *Collected Stories* in 1951 and *A Fable* in 1955. In 1946 he was one of three finalists for the first Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Award and placed second to Rhea Galati.

The United States Postal Service issued a 22-cent postage stamp in his honor on August 3, 1987. Faulkner had once served as Postmaster at the University of Mississippi, and in his letter of resignation in 1923 wrote:

As long as I live under the capitalistic system, I expect to have my life influenced by the demands of moneyed people. But I will be damned if I propose to be at the beck and call of every itinerant scoundrel who has two cents to invest in a postage stamp. This, sir, is my resignation.

13.6 COLLECTIONS

The manuscripts of most of Faulkner's works, correspondence, personal papers, and over 300 books from his working library reside at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, where he spent much of his time in his final years. The library also houses some of the writer's personal effects and the papers of major Faulkner associates and scholars, such as his biographer Joseph Blotner, bibliographer Linton Massey, and Random House editor Albert Erskine.

Southeast Missouri State University, where the Center for Faulkner Studies is located, also owns a generous collection of Faulkner materials, including first editions, manuscripts, letters, photographs, artwork, and many materials pertaining to Faulkner's time in Hollywood. The university possesses many personal files and letters kept by Joseph

Blotner, along with books and letters that once belonged to Malcolm Cowley, another famous editor for William Faulkner. The university achieved the collection due to a generous donation by Louis Daniel Brodsky, a collector of Faulkner materials, in 1989.

Further significant Faulkner materials reside at the University of Mississippi, the Harry Ransom Center, and the New York Public Library.

The Random House records at Columbia University also include letters by and to Faulkner.

13.7 AUDIO RECORDINGS

- Yoknapatawpha Pronunciation by Faulkner
- 'Ole Miss 1949 Nobel Prize acceptance speech and excerpts from *As I Lay Dying*, *The Old Man and A Fable*, plus readings by Debra Winger ("A Rose for Emily", "Barn Burning"), Keith Carradine ("Spotted Horses") and Arliss Howard ("That Evening Sun", "Wash"). Winner of AudioFile Earphones Award.
- William Faulkner Reads: The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Selections from *As I Lay Dying*, *A Fable*, *The Old Man*. Caedmon/Harper Audio, 1992. Cassette. ISBN 1-55994-572-9
- William Faulkner Reads from His Work. Arcady Series, MGM E3617 ARC, 1957. Faulkner reads from *The Sound and The Fury* (side one) and *Light in August* (side two). Produced by Jean Stein, who also did the liner notes with Edward Cole. Cover photograph by Robert Capa (Magnum).
- From 1957 to 1958, William Faulkner was the University of Virginia's Writer in Residence (the first). There are audio recordings of his time at the University of Virginia, and they have now been made available online.

Check your Progress-1

1. Where was William Faulkner born?

2. What was the name of William Faulkner's father?

3. What was the name of William Faulkner's mother?

13.8 LET US SUM UP

William Faulkner, in full William Cuthbert Faulkner, original surname Falkner, (born September 25, 1897, New Albany, Mississippi, U.S.—died July 6, 1962, Byhalia, Mississippi), American novelist and short-story writer who was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Youth And Early Writings

As the eldest of the four sons of Murry Cuthbert and Maud Butler Falkner, William Faulkner (as he later spelled his name) was well aware of his family background and especially of his great-grandfather, Colonel William Clark Falkner, a colourful if violent figure who fought gallantly during the Civil War, built a local railway, and published a popular romantic novel called *The White Rose of Memphis*. Born in New Albany, Mississippi, Faulkner soon moved with his parents to nearby Ripley and then to the town of Oxford, the seat of Lafayette county, where his father later became business manager of the University of Mississippi. In Oxford he experienced the characteristic open-air upbringing of a Southern white youth of middle-class parents: he had a pony to ride and was introduced to guns and hunting. A reluctant student, he left high school without graduating but devoted himself to “undirected reading,” first in isolation and later under the guidance of Phil Stone, a

family friend who combined study and practice of the law with lively literary interests and was a constant source of current books and magazines.

In July 1918, impelled by dreams of martial glory and by despair at a broken love affair, Faulkner joined the British Royal Air Force (RAF) as a cadet pilot under training in Canada, although the November 1918 armistice intervened before he could finish ground school, let alone fly or reach Europe. After returning home, he enrolled for a few university courses, published poems and drawings in campus newspapers, and acted out a self-dramatizing role as a poet who had seen wartime service. After working in a New York bookstore for three months in the fall of 1921, he returned to Oxford and ran the university post office there with notorious laxness until forced to resign. In 1924 Phil Stone's financial assistance enabled him to publish *The Marble Faun*, a pastoral verse-sequence in rhymed octosyllabic couplets. There were also early short stories, but Faulkner's first sustained attempt to write fiction occurred during a six-month visit to New Orleans—then a significant literary centre—that began in January 1925 and ended in early July with his departure for a five-month tour of Europe, including several weeks in Paris.

His first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926), given a Southern though not a Mississippian setting, was an impressive achievement, stylistically ambitious and strongly evocative of the sense of alienation experienced by soldiers returning from World War I to a civilian world of which they seemed no longer a part. A second novel, *Mosquitoes* (1927), launched a satirical attack on the New Orleans literary scene, including identifiable individuals, and can perhaps best be read as a declaration of artistic independence. Back in Oxford—with occasional visits to Pascagoula on the Gulf Coast—Faulkner again worked at a series of temporary jobs but was chiefly concerned with proving himself as a professional writer. None of his short stories was accepted, however, and he was especially shaken by his difficulty in finding a publisher for *Flags in the Dust* (published posthumously, 1973), a long, leisurely novel, drawing extensively on local observation and his own family history, that he had confidently counted upon to establish his reputation and career. When the novel eventually did appear, severely truncated, as *Sartoris* in 1929, it

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created in print for the first time that densely imagined world of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County—based partly on Ripley but chiefly on Oxford and Lafayette county and characterized by frequent recurrences of the same characters, places, and themes—which Faulkner was to use as the setting for so many subsequent novels and stories.

The Major Novels

Faulkner had meanwhile “written his guts” into the more technically sophisticated *The Sound and the Fury*, believing that he was fated to remain permanently unpublished and need therefore make no concessions to the cautious commercialism of the literary marketplace. The novel did find a publisher, despite the difficulties it posed for its readers, and from the moment of its appearance in October 1929 Faulkner drove confidently forward as a writer, engaging always with new themes, new areas of experience, and, above all, new technical challenges. Crucial to his extraordinary early productivity was the decision to shun the talk, infighting, and publicity of literary centres and live instead in what was then the small-town remoteness of Oxford, where he was already at home and could devote himself, in near isolation, to actual writing. In 1929 he married Estelle Oldham—whose previous marriage, now terminated, had helped drive him into the RAF in 1918. One year later he bought Rowan Oak, a handsome but run-down pre-Civil War house on the outskirts of Oxford, restoration work on the house becoming, along with hunting, an important diversion in the years ahead. A daughter, Jill, was born to the couple in 1933, and although their marriage was otherwise troubled, Faulkner remained working at home throughout the 1930s and '40s, except when financial need forced him to accept the Hollywood screenwriting assignments he deplored but very competently fulfilled.

Oxford provided Faulkner with intimate access to a deeply conservative rural world, conscious of its past and remote from the urban-industrial mainstream, in terms of which he could work out the moral as well as narrative patterns of his work. His fictional methods, however, were the reverse of conservative. He knew the work not only of Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Dickens, and Herman Melville but also of

Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, and other recent figures on both sides of the Atlantic, and in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), his first major novel, he combined a Yoknapatawpha setting with radical technical experimentation. In successive “stream-of-consciousness” monologues the three brothers of Candace (Caddy) Compson—Benjy the idiot, Quentin the disturbed Harvard undergraduate, and Jason the embittered local businessman—expose their differing obsessions with their sister and their loveless relationships with their parents. A fourth section, narrated as if authorially, provides new perspectives on some of the central characters, including Dilsey, the Compsons’ black servant, and moves toward a powerful yet essentially unresolved conclusion. Faulkner’s next novel, the brilliant tragicomedy called *As I Lay Dying* (1930), is centred upon the conflicts within the “poor white” Bundren family as it makes its slow and difficult way to Jefferson to bury its matriarch’s malodorously decaying corpse. Entirely narrated by the various Bundrens and people encountered on their journey, it is the most systematically multi-voiced of Faulkner’s novels and marks the culmination of his early post-Joycean experimentalism.

Although the psychological intensity and technical innovation of these two novels were scarcely calculated to ensure a large contemporary readership, Faulkner’s name was beginning to be known in the early 1930s, and he was able to place short stories even in such popular—and well-paying—magazines as *Collier’s* and *Saturday Evening Post*. Greater, if more equivocal, prominence came with the financially successful publication of *Sanctuary*, a novel about the brutal rape of a Southern college student and its generally violent, sometimes comic, consequences. A serious work, despite Faulkner’s unfortunate declaration that it was written merely to make money, *Sanctuary* was actually completed prior to *As I Lay Dying* and published, in February 1931, only after Faulkner had gone to the trouble and expense of restructuring and partly rewriting it—though without moderating the violence—at proof stage. Despite the demands of film work and short stories (of which a first collection appeared in 1931 and a second in 1934), and even the preparation of a volume of poems (published in 1933 as *A Green Bough*), Faulkner produced in 1932 another long and

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powerful novel. Complexly structured and involving several major characters, *Light in August* revolves primarily upon the contrasted careers of Lena Grove, a pregnant young countrywoman serenely in pursuit of her biological destiny, and Joe Christmas, a dark-complexioned orphan uncertain as to his racial origins, whose life becomes a desperate and often violent search for a sense of personal identity, a secure location on one side or the other of the tragic dividing line of colour.

Made temporarily affluent by *Sanctuary* and Hollywood, Faulkner took up flying in the early 1930s, bought a Waco cabin aircraft, and flew it in February 1934 to the dedication of Shushan Airport in New Orleans, gathering there much of the material for *Pylon*, the novel about racing and barnstorming pilots that he published in 1935. Having given the Waco to his youngest brother, Dean, and encouraged him to become a professional pilot, Faulkner was both grief- and guilt-stricken when Dean crashed and died in the plane later in 1935; when Dean's daughter was born in 1936 he took responsibility for her education. The experience perhaps contributed to the emotional intensity of the novel on which he was then working. In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) Thomas Sutpen arrives in Jefferson from "nowhere," ruthlessly carves a large plantation out of the Mississippi wilderness, fights valiantly in the Civil War in defense of his adopted society, but is ultimately destroyed by his inhumanity toward those whom he has used and cast aside in the obsessive pursuit of his grandiose dynastic "design." By refusing to acknowledge his first, partly black, son, Charles Bon, Sutpen also loses his second son, Henry, who goes into hiding after killing Bon (whom he loves) in the name of their sister's honour. Because this profoundly Southern story is constructed—speculatively, conflictingly, and inconclusively—by a series of narrators with sharply divergent self-interested perspectives, *Absalom, Absalom!* is often seen, in its infinite open-endedness, as Faulkner's supreme "modernist" fiction, focused above all on the processes of its own telling.

Later Life And Works

The novel *The Wild Palms* (1939) was again technically adventurous, with two distinct yet thematically counterpointed narratives alternating,

chapter by chapter, throughout. But Faulkner was beginning to return to the Yoknapatawpha County material he had first imagined in the 1920s and subsequently exploited in short-story form. The *Unvanquished* (1938) was relatively conventional, but *The Hamlet* (1940), the first volume of the long-uncompleted “Snopes” trilogy, emerged as a work of extraordinary stylistic richness. Its episodic structure is underpinned by recurrent thematic patterns and by the wryly humorous presence of V.K. Ratliff—an itinerant sewing-machine agent—and his unavailing opposition to the increasing power and prosperity of the supremely manipulative Flem Snopes and his numerous “poor white” relatives. In 1942 appeared *Go Down, Moses*, yet another major work, in which an intense exploration of the linked themes of racial, sexual, and environmental exploitation is conducted largely in terms of the complex interactions between the “white” and “black” branches of the plantation-owning McCaslin family, especially as represented by Isaac McCaslin on the one hand and Lucas Beauchamp on the other.

For various reasons—the constraints on wartime publishing, financial pressures to take on more scriptwriting, difficulties with the work later published as *A Fable*—Faulkner did not produce another novel until *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), in which Lucas Beauchamp, reappearing from *Go Down, Moses*, is proved innocent of murder, and thus saved from lynching, only by the persistent efforts of a young white boy. Racial issues were again confronted, but in the somewhat ambiguous terms that were to mark Faulkner’s later public statements on race: while deeply sympathetic to the oppression suffered by blacks in the Southern states, he nevertheless felt that such wrongs should be righted by the South itself, free of Northern intervention.

Faulkner’s American reputation—which had always lagged well behind his reputation in Europe—was boosted by *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), an anthology skillfully edited by Malcolm Cowley in accordance with the arresting if questionable thesis that Faulkner was deliberately constructing a historically based “legend” of the South. Faulkner’s *Collected Stories* (1950), impressive in both quantity and quality, was also well received, and later in 1950 the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature catapulted the author instantly to the peak of world fame and

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enabled him to affirm, in a famous acceptance speech, his belief in the survival of the human race, even in an atomic age, and in the importance of the artist to that survival.

The Nobel Prize had a major impact on Faulkner's private life. Confident now of his reputation and future sales, he became less consistently "driven" as a writer than in earlier years and allowed himself more personal freedom, drinking heavily at times and indulging in a number of extramarital affairs—his opportunities in these directions being considerably enhanced by a final screenwriting assignment in Egypt in 1954 and several overseas trips (most notably to Japan in 1955) undertaken on behalf of the U.S. State Department. He took his "ambassadorial" duties seriously, speaking frequently in public and to interviewers, and also became politically active at home, taking positions on major racial issues in the vain hope of finding middle ground between entrenched Southern conservatives and interventionist Northern liberals. Local Oxford opinion proving hostile to such views, Faulkner in 1957 and 1958 readily accepted semester-long appointments as writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Attracted to the town by the presence of his daughter and her children as well as by its opportunities for horse-riding and fox-hunting, Faulkner bought a house there in 1959, though continuing to spend time at Rowan Oak.

The quality of Faulkner's writing is often said to have declined in the wake of the Nobel Prize. But the central sections of *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) are challengingly set out in dramatic form, and *A Fable* (1954), a long, densely written, and complexly structured novel about World War I, demands attention as the work in which Faulkner made by far his greatest investment of time, effort, and authorial commitment. In *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959) Faulkner not only brought the "Snopes" trilogy to its conclusion, carrying his Yoknapatawpha narrative to beyond the end of World War II, but subtly varied the management of narrative point of view. Finally, in June 1962 Faulkner published yet another distinctive novel, the genial, nostalgic comedy of male maturation he called *The Reivers* and appropriately subtitled "A Reminiscence." A month later he was dead, of a heart attack, at the age

of 64, his health undermined by his drinking and by too many falls from horses too big for him.

Legacy

By the time of his death Faulkner had clearly emerged not just as the major American novelist of his generation but as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, unmatched for his extraordinary structural and stylistic resourcefulness, for the range and depth of his characterization and social notation, and for his persistence and success in exploring fundamental human issues in intensely localized terms. Some critics, early and late, have found his work extravagantly rhetorical and unduly violent, and there have been strong objections, especially late in the 20th century, to the perceived insensitivity of his portrayals of women and black Americans. His reputation, grounded in the sheer scale and scope of his achievement, seems nonetheless secure, and he remains a profoundly influential presence for novelists writing in the United States, South America, and, indeed, throughout the world.

13.9 KEYWORDS

- **Abnegation:** self-denial
- **Acrimony:** harshness
- **Adulant:** Faulkner's variant of "adulatory": here, one who praises excessively
- **Adze:** a cutting tool that has a thin arched blade set at right angles to the handle and is used chiefly for shaping wood
- **Ague-fit:** shivering due to a malarial fever

13.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Write a note on William Faulkner's life and career.
- Mention the works of William Faulkner.
- Write a short note on the awards given to William Faulkner.
- Write a short note on the legacy of William Faulkner.

13.11 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

- "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1949: Documentary". Nobelprize.org. Archived from the original on August 31, 2009. Retrieved July 25, 2009.
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- "National Book Awards – 1951". National Book Foundation. Retrieved 2012-03-31. (With essays by Neil Baldwin and Harold Augenbraum from the Awards 50- and 60-year anniversary publications.)
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13.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q1)**

William Faulkner's father's name was Murry Cuthbert Falkner. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q2)**

William Faulkner's mother's name was Maud Butler. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q3)**

UNIT-14 FAULKNER-THE SOUND AND THE FURY -2

STRUCTURE

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Plot

14.3 Characters

14.4 Style and Structure

14.5 Title

14.6 Reception

14.7 Literary Significance'

14.8 Adaptations

14.9 Limited Edition

14.10 Context and Analysis

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14.12 Motifs

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14.14 Let us sum up

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14.17 Suggested Reading and References

14.18 Answers to Check your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

Notes

Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about the plot of “The Sound and the Fury” by William Faulkner,
- further you would also learn about the Characters of “The Sound and the Fury” by William Faulkner.
- You would also go through the style, structure, themes, motifs, symbols used in “The Sound and the Fury” by William Faulkner.
- And finally you would also go through the title, reception, literary significance, adaptations, limited edition, context and analysis, of “The Sound and the Fury” by William Faulkner.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The Sound and the Fury is a novel written by the American author William Faulkner. It employs a number of narrative styles, including stream of consciousness. Published in 1929, The Sound and the Fury was Faulkner's fourth novel, and was not immediately successful. In 1931, however, when Faulkner's sixth novel, Sanctuary, was published—a sensationalist story, which Faulkner later claimed was written only for money—The Sound and the Fury also became commercially successful, and Faulkner began to receive critical attention.

In 1998, the Modern Library ranked The Sound and the Fury sixth on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.

The Sound and the Fury is set in Jefferson, Mississippi. The novel centers on the Compson family, former Southern aristocrats who are struggling to deal with the dissolution of their family and its reputation. Over the course of the 30 years or so related in the novel, the family falls into financial ruin, loses its religious faith and the respect of the town of Jefferson, and many of them die tragically.

The novel is separated into four distinct sections. The first, April 7, 1928, is written from the perspective of Benjamin "Benjy" Compson, an intellectually disabled 33-year-old man. Benjy's section is characterized by a highly disjointed narrative style with frequent chronological leaps.

The second section, June 2, 1910, focuses on Quentin Compson, Benjy's older brother, and the events leading up to his suicide. This section is written in the stream of consciousness style and also contains frequent chronological leaps.

In the third section, set a day before the first, on April 6, 1928, Faulkner writes from the point of view of Jason, Quentin's cynical younger brother. In the fourth and final section, set a day after the first, on April 8, 1928, Faulkner introduces a third person omniscient point of view. The last section primarily focuses on Dilsey, one of the Compsons' black servants. Jason and "Miss" Quentin Compson (Caddy's daughter) are also a focus in the section, but Faulkner presents glimpses of the thoughts and deeds of everyone in the family.

In 1945, Faulkner wrote a "Compson Appendix" to be included with future printings of *The Sound and the Fury*. It contains a 30-page history of the Compson family from 1699 to 1945.

14.2 PLOT

Part 1: April 7, 1928

The first section of the novel is narrated by Benjamin "Benjy" Compson, a source of shame to the family due to his diminished mental capacity; the only characters who show a genuine care for him are Caddy, his older sister; and Dilsey, a matronly servant. His narrative voice is characterized predominantly by its nonlinearity: spanning the period 1898–1928, Benjy's narrative is a series of non-chronological events presented in a stream of consciousness. The presence of italics in Benjy's section is meant to indicate significant shifts in the narrative. Originally Faulkner meant to use different colored inks to signify chronological breaks. This nonlinearity makes the style of this section particularly challenging, but Benjy's style develops a cadence that, while not chronologically coherent, provides unbiased insight into many characters' true motivations. Moreover, Benjy's caretaker changes to indicate the time period: Luster in the present, T.P. in Benjy's teenage years, and Versh during Benjy's infancy and childhood.

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In this section we see Benjy's three passions: fire, the golf course on land that used to belong to the Compson family, and his sister Caddy. But by 1928 Caddy has been banished from the Compson home after her husband divorced her because her child was not his, and the family has sold his favorite pasture to a local golf club in order to finance Quentin's Harvard education. In the opening scene, Benjy, accompanied by Luster, a servant boy, watches golfers on the nearby golf course as he waits to hear them call "caddie"—the name of his favorite sibling. When one of them calls for his golf caddie, Benjy's mind embarks on a whirlwind course of memories of his sister, Caddy, focusing on one critical scene. In 1898 when their grandmother died, the four Compson children were forced to play outside during the funeral. In order to see what was going on inside, Caddy climbed a tree in the yard, and while looking inside, her brothers—Quentin, Jason and Benjy—looked up and noticed that her underwear was muddy. This is Benjy's first memory, and he associates Caddy with trees throughout the rest of his arc, often saying that she smells like trees. Other crucial memories in this section are Benjy's change of name (from Maury, after his uncle) in 1900 upon the discovery of his disability; the marriage and divorce of Caddy (1910), and Benjy's castration, resulting from an attack on a girl that is alluded to briefly within this chapter when a gate is left unlatched and Benjy is out unsupervised.

Readers often report trouble understanding this portion of the novel due to its impressionistic language necessitated by Benjamin's mental abilities, as well as its frequent shifts in time and setting.

Part 2: June 2, 1910

Quentin, the most intelligent of the Compson children, gives the novel's best example of Faulkner's narrative technique. We see him as a freshman at Harvard, wandering the streets of Cambridge, contemplating death, and remembering his family's estrangement from his sister Caddy. Like the first section, its narrative is not strictly linear, though the two interweaving threads, of Quentin at Harvard on the one hand, and of his memories on the other, are clearly discernible.

Quentin's main obsession is Caddy's virginity and purity. He is obsessed with Southern ideals of chivalry and is strongly protective of women, especially his sister. When Caddy engages in sexual promiscuity, Quentin is horrified. He turns to his father for help and counsel, but the pragmatic Mr. Compson tells him that virginity is invented by men and should not be taken seriously. He also tells Quentin that time will heal all. Quentin spends much of his time trying to prove his father wrong, but is unable to do so. Shortly before Quentin leaves for Harvard in the fall of 1909, Caddy becomes pregnant by a lover she is unable to identify, perhaps Dalton Ames, whom Quentin confronts. The two fight, with Quentin losing disgracefully and Caddy vowing, for Quentin's sake, never to speak to Dalton again. Quentin tells his father that they have committed incest, but his father knows that he is lying: "and he did you try to make her do it and i i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldn't do any good" . Quentin's idea of incest is shaped by the idea that, if they "could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us" , he could protect his sister by joining her in whatever punishment she might have to endure. In his mind, he feels a need to take responsibility for Caddy's sin.

Pregnant and alone, Caddy then marries Herbert Head, whom Quentin finds repulsive, but Caddy is resolute: she must marry before the birth of her child. Herbert finds out that the child is not his, and sends Caddy and her new daughter away in shame. Quentin's wanderings through Harvard (as he cuts classes) follow the pattern of his heartbreak over losing Caddy. For instance, he meets a small Italian immigrant girl who speaks no English. Significantly, he calls her "sister" and spends much of the day trying to communicate with her, and to care for her by finding her home, to no avail. He thinks sadly of the downfall and squalor of the South after the American Civil War. Tormented by his conflicting thoughts and emotions, Quentin commits suicide by drowning.

While many first-time readers report Benjy's section as being difficult to understand, these same readers often find Quentin's section to be near impossible. Not only do chronological events mesh together irregularly, but often (especially at the end) Faulkner completely disregards any semblance of grammar, spelling, or punctuation, instead writing in a

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rambling series of words, phrases, and sentences that have no separation to indicate where one thought ends and another begins. This confusion is due to Quentin's severe depression and deteriorating state of mind, and Quentin is therefore arguably an even more unreliable narrator than his brother Benjy. Because of the staggering complexity of this section, it is often the one most extensively studied by scholars of the novel.

Part 3: April 6, 1928

The third section is narrated by Jason, the third child and his mother Caroline's favorite. It takes place the day before Benjy's section, on Good Friday. Of the three brothers' sections, Jason's is the most straightforward, reflecting his single-minded desire for material wealth. This desire is made evident by his (bad) investments in cotton, which become symbolic of the financial decline of the south. By 1928, Jason is the economic foundation of the family after his father's death. He supports his mother, Benjy, and Miss Quentin (Caddy's daughter), as well as the family's servants. His role makes him bitter and cynical, with little of the passionate sensitivity that we see in his older brother and sister. He goes so far as to blackmail Caddy into making him Miss Quentin's sole guardian, then uses that role to steal the support payments that Caddy sends for her daughter.

This is the first section that is narrated in a linear fashion. It follows the course of Good Friday, a day in which Jason decides to leave work to search for Miss Quentin (Caddy's daughter), who has run away again, seemingly in pursuit of mischief. Here we see most immediately the conflict between the two predominant traits of the Compson family, which Caroline attributes to the difference between her blood and her husband's: on the one hand, Miss Quentin's recklessness and passion, inherited from her grandfather and, ultimately, the Compson side; on the other, Jason's ruthless cynicism, drawn from his mother's side. This section also gives us the clearest image of domestic life in the Compson household, which for Jason and the servants means the care of the hypochondriac Caroline and of Benjy.

Part 4: April 8, 1928

April 8, 1928, is Easter Sunday. This section, the only one without a single first-person narrator, focuses on Dilsey, the powerful matriarch of the black family servants. She, in contrast to the declining Compsons, draws a great deal of strength from her faith, standing as a proud figure amid a dying family.

On this Easter Sunday, Dilsey takes her family and Benjy to the "colored" church. Through her we sense the consequences of the decadence and depravity in which the Compsons have lived for decades. Dilsey is mistreated and abused, but nevertheless remains loyal. She, with the help of her grandson Luster, cares for Benjy, as she takes him to church and tries to bring him to salvation. The preacher's sermon inspires her to weep for the Compson family, reminding her that she's seen the family through its destruction, which she is now witnessing.

Meanwhile, the tension between Jason and Miss Quentin reaches its inevitable conclusion. The family discovers that Miss Quentin has run away in the middle of the night with a carnival worker, having found the hidden collection of cash in Jason's closet and taken both her money (the support from Caddy, which Jason had stolen) and her money-obsessed uncle's life savings. Jason calls the police and tells them that his money has been stolen, but since it would mean admitting embezzling Quentin's money he doesn't press the issue. He therefore sets off once again to find her on his own, but loses her trail in nearby Mottson, and gives her up as gone for good.

After church, Dilsey allows her grandson Luster to drive Benjy in the family's decrepit horse and carriage to the graveyard. Luster, disregarding Benjy's set routine, drives the wrong way around a monument. Benjy's hysterical sobbing and violent outburst can only be quieted by Jason, who understands how best to placate his brother. Jason slaps Luster, turns the carriage around, and, in an attempt to quiet Benjy, hits Benjy, breaking his flower stalk, while screaming "Shut up!" After Jason gets off the carriage and Luster heads home, Benjy suddenly becomes silent. Luster turns around to look at Benjy and sees Benjy holding his drooping flower. Benjy's eyes are "empty and blue and serene again."

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In 1945, Faulkner wrote an appendix to the novel to be published in the then-forthcoming anthology *The Portable Faulkner*. At Faulkner's behest, however, subsequent printings of *The Sound and the Fury* frequently contain the appendix at the end of the book; it is sometimes referred to as the fifth part. Having been written sixteen years after *The Sound and the Fury*, the appendix presents some textual differences from the novel, but serves to clarify the novel's opaque story.

The appendix is presented as a complete history of the Compson family lineage, beginning with the arrival of their ancestor Quentin Maclachlan in America in 1779 and continuing through 1945, including events that transpired after the novel (which takes place in 1928). In particular, the appendix reveals that Caroline Compson died in 1933, upon which Jason had Benjy committed to the state asylum, fired the black servants, sold the last of the Compson land, and moved into an apartment above his farming supply store. It is also revealed that Jason had himself declared Benjy's legal guardian many years ago, without their mother's knowledge, and used this status to have Benjy castrated.

The appendix also reveals the fate of Caddy, last seen in the novel when her daughter Quentin is still a baby. After marrying and divorcing a second time, Caddy moved to Paris, where she lived at the time of the German occupation. In 1943, the librarian of Yoknapatawpha County discovered a magazine photograph of Caddy in the company of a German staff general and attempted separately to recruit both Jason and Dilsey to save her; Jason, at first acknowledging that the photo was of his sister, denied that it was she after realizing the librarian wanted his help, while Dilsey pretended to be unable to see the picture at all. The librarian later realizes that while Jason remains cold and unsympathetic towards Caddy, Dilsey simply understands that Caddy neither wants nor needs to be saved from the Germans, because nothing else remains for her.

The appendix concludes with an accounting for the black family who worked as servants to the Compsons. Unlike the entries for the Compsons themselves, which are lengthy, detailed, and told with an omniscient narrative perspective, the servants' entries are simple and

succinct. Dilsey's entry, the final in the appendix, consists of two words: "They endured."

14.3 CHARACTERS

- **Jason Compson III** – father of the Compson family, a lawyer who attended the University of the South: a nihilistic thinker and alcoholic, with cynical opinions that torment his son, Quentin. He also narrates several chapters of *Absalom, Absalom!*.
- **Caroline Bascomb Compson** – wife of Jason Compson III: a self-absorbed neurotic who has never shown affection for any of her children except Jason, whom she seems to like only because he takes after her side of the family. In her old age she has become an abusive hypochondriac.
- **Quentin Compson III** – the oldest Compson child: passionate and neurotic, he commits suicide as the tragic culmination of the damaging influence of his father's nihilistic philosophy and his inability to cope with his sister's sexual promiscuity. He is also a character in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The bridge over the Charles River, where he commits suicide in the novel, bears a plaque to commemorate the character's life and death.
- **Candace "Caddy" Compson** – the second Compson child, strong-willed yet caring. Benjy's only real caregiver and Quentin's best friend. According to Faulkner, the true hero of the novel. Caddy never develops a voice, but rather allows her brothers' emotions towards her to develop her character.
- **Jason Compson IV** – the bitter, racist third child who is troubled by monetary debt and sexual frustration. He works at a farming goods store owned by a man named Earl and becomes head of the household in 1912. Has been embezzling Miss Quentin's support payments for years.
- **Benjamin (nicknamed Benjy, born Maury) Compson** – the mentally disabled fourth child, who is a constant source of shame and grief for his family, especially his mother, who insisted on his name change to Benjamin. Caddy is the only family member who shows any genuine love towards him. Luster, albeit begrudgingly, shows

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care for him occasionally, but usually out of obligation. Has an almost animal-like "sixth sense" about people, as he was able to tell that Caddy had lost her virginity just from her smell. The model for Benjy's character may have had its beginning in the 1925 New Orleans Times Picayune sketch by Faulkner entitled "The Kingdom of God".

- **Dilsey Gibson** – the matriarch of the servant family, which includes her three children—Versh, Frony, and T.P.—and her grandchild Luster (Frony's son); they serve as Benjamin's caretakers throughout his life. An observer of the Compson family's destruction.
- **Miss Quentin Compson** – daughter of Caddy who goes to live with the Compsons under Jason IV's care when Herbert divorces Caddy. She is very wild and promiscuous, and eventually runs away from home. Often referred to as Quentin II or Miss Quentin by readers to distinguish her from her uncle, for whom she was named.

14.4 STYLE AND STRUCTURE

The four parts of the novel relate many of the same episodes, each from a different point of view and therefore with emphasis on different themes and events. This interweaving and nonlinear structure makes any true synopsis of the novel difficult, especially since the narrators are all unreliable in their own way, making their accounts not necessarily trustworthy at all times. Also in this novel, Faulkner uses italics to indicate points in each section where the narrative is moving into a significant moment in the past. The use of these italics can be confusing, however, as time shifts are not always marked by the use of italics, and periods of different time in each section do not necessarily stay in italics for the duration of the flashback. Thus, these time shifts can often be jarring and confusing, and require particularly close reading.

14.5 TITLE

When Faulkner began writing the story that would develop into *The Sound and the Fury*, it "was tentatively titled 'Twilight' narrated by a fourth Compson child", but as the story progressed into a larger work, he

renamed it *The Sound and the Fury*. The title of the novel is taken from Macbeth's famous soliloquy of act 5, scene 5 of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.

Immediately obvious is the notion of a "tale told by an idiot," in this case Benjy, whose view of the Compsons' story opens the novel. The idea can be extended also to Quentin and Jason, whose narratives display their own varieties of idiocy. More to the point, the novel recounts "the way to dusty death" of a traditional upper-class Southern family. The last line is, perhaps, the most meaningful: Faulkner said in his speech upon being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature that people must write about things that come from the heart, "universal truths." Otherwise, they signify nothing.

14.6 RECEPTION

The novel has achieved great critical success and a prominent place among the greatest of American novels. It played a role in William Faulkner's receiving the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature.

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It is near-unanimously considered a masterpiece by literary critics and scholars, but the novel's unconventional narrative style frequently alienates new readers. Although the vocabulary is generally basic, the frequent switches in time and setting, as well as the occasional lack of regard for sentence structure grammar have proven it to be a difficult read—even for many fans of Faulkner.

14.7 LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

The Sound and the Fury is a widely influential work of literature. Faulkner has been praised for his ability to recreate the thought process of the human mind. In addition, it is viewed as an essential development in the stream-of-consciousness literary technique. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked *The Sound and the Fury* sixth on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.

14.8 ADAPTATIONS

A film adaptation was released in 1959 directed by Martin Ritt and starring Yul Brynner, Joanne Woodward, Margaret Leighton, Stuart Whitman, Ethel Waters, Jack Warden, and Albert Dekker. The movie bears little resemblance to the novel.

Another adaptation, *The Sound and the Fury* (2014), was directed by James Franco and starred Franco as Benjy Compson, Jacob Loeb as Quentin Compson, Joey King as Miss Quentin, Tim Blake Nelson as Mr. Compson, Loretta Devine as Dilsey, Ahna O'Reilly as Caddy Compson, Scott Haze as Jason Compson, Kylene Davis as Luster, Seth Rogen as a Telegraph Operator, Danny McBride as a Sheriff, and Logan Marshall-Green as Dalton Ames. It made its premiere at the 71st Venice International Film Festival, where it screened out-of-competition.

14.9 LIMITED EDITION

In 2012, The Folio Society released an edition, limited to 1,480 copies, of *The Sound and the Fury*. This edition is the first to use colored ink to represent different time sequences for the first section of the novel. This

limited edition is also sold with a special commentary volume edited by Faulkner scholars Stephen Ross and Noel Polk. According to The Folio Society, "We can never know if this edition is exactly what Faulkner would have envisaged, but the result justifies his belief that colored inks would allow readers to follow the strands of the novel more easily, without compromising the 'thought-transference' for which he argued so passionately."

14.10 CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The *Sound and the Fury* was written (and is set) in the postbellum American South, in the period after Reconstruction (1865–77). At this critical moment in American history, the South was in the process of redefining itself and its values in the absence of slavery. Certain Southern families (typically old landed families) refused to participate in this process. Instead, they turned inward; they clung to their traditions and values—to vague notions of honor, purity, and virginity.

The *Sound and the Fury* documents the decline of these families. The Compsons, as Faulkner casts them, are direct descendants of the planter-aristocrats. They are the inheritors of their values and traditions, on whom the survival (or ultimate extinction) of this Southern aristocracy depends. The Compsons, for the most part, shirk this responsibility. Quentin, however, does not. The burden of the past falls heavily upon Quentin, who, as the eldest son, feels he must preserve and protect the Compson family honor. Quentin identifies his sister as the principal bearer of the honor he is to protect. When he fails to protect that honor—that is, when Caddy loses her virginity to Dalton Ames and becomes pregnant—Quentin elects to commit suicide. Quentin's suicide, in conjunction with Caddy's pregnancy, precipitates the fall of the Compson family. Still, for nearly two decades, the family survives. Its death knell is tolled on April 8, 1928, by Miss Quentin, who "swung herself by a rain pipe" to the locked window of her uncle's bedroom, took her mother's money, "climbed down the same rain pipe in the dusk," and vanished, taking with her not only the money but the last semblance of the Compson family honor. At the end of the novel, the

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Compson family is in ruins and, on a larger scale, the Southern aristocracy is too.

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The Sound and the Fury's form is distinctly Modernist: Faulkner employs a number of narrative techniques, including unreliable narrators, interior monologues, and unconventional syntax, that are recurrent features of literary Modernism. Faulkner's conception of time, particularly as expressed in his nonlinear representation of time, is a cause of disagreement among scholars, who argue over which different philosophies influenced Faulkner and to what extent. A number of scholars, for example, have made the case for a link between Faulkner's conception of time and the theory of duration formulated by French philosopher Henri Bergson. Such an argument places Faulkner among a number of Modernist writers influenced by Bergson, including Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot. The title of Faulkner's novel alone expresses Faulkner's concern with time. The Sound and the Fury takes its name from a soliloquy given by the title character of William Shakespeare's play Macbeth. In that soliloquy, Macbeth reflects on time and the meaninglessness of life:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time.

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.

Macbeth's words echo throughout *The Sound and the Fury*, and some scholars have noted that they are made literal through the three Compson brothers: Benjy is the "idiot" to whom Macbeth refers; Quentin, the "walking shadow" who "frets his hour" and then "is heard no more"; and Jason, the "poor player," full of "fury."

14.11 THEMES

The Corruption of Southern Aristocratic Values

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a number of prominent Southern families such as the Compsons. These aristocratic families espoused traditional Southern values. Men were expected to act like gentlemen, displaying courage, moral strength, perseverance, and chivalry in defense of the honor of their family name. Women were expected to be models of feminine purity, grace, and virginity until it came time for them to provide children to inherit the family legacy. Faith in God and profound concern for preserving the family reputation provided the grounding for these beliefs.

The Civil War and Reconstruction devastated many of these once-great Southern families economically, socially, and psychologically. Faulkner contends that in the process, the Compsons, and other similar Southern families, lost touch with the reality of the world around them and became lost in a haze of self-absorption. This self-absorption corrupted the core values these families once held dear and left the newer generations completely unequipped to deal with the realities of the modern world.

We see this corruption running rampant in the Compson family. Mr. Compson has a vague notion of family honor—something he passes on to Quentin—but is mired in his alcoholism and maintains a fatalistic belief that he cannot control the events that befall his family. Mrs. Compson is just as self-absorbed, wallowing in hypochondria and self-pity and remaining emotionally distant from her children. Quentin's obsession with old Southern morality renders him paralyzed and unable to move past his family's sins. Caddy tramples on the Southern notion of feminine purity and indulges in promiscuity, as does her daughter. Jason

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wastes his cleverness on self-pity and greed, striving constantly for personal gain but with no higher aspirations. Benjy commits no real sins, but the Compsons' decline is physically manifested through his retardation and his inability to differentiate between morality and immorality.

The Compsons' corruption of Southern values results in a household that is completely devoid of love, the force that once held the family together. Both parents are distant and ineffective. Caddy, the only child who shows an ability to love, is eventually disowned. Though Quentin loves Caddy, his love is neurotic, obsessive, and overprotective. None of the men experience any true romantic love, and are thus unable to marry and carry on the family name.

At the conclusion of the novel, Dilsey is the only loving member of the household, the only character who maintains her values without the corrupting influence of self-absorption. She thus comes to represent a hope for the renewal of traditional Southern values in an uncorrupted and positive form. The novel ends with Dilsey as the torchbearer for these values, and, as such, the only hope for the preservation of the Compson legacy. Faulkner implies that the problem is not necessarily the values of the old South, but the fact that these values were corrupted by families such as the Compsons and must be recaptured for any Southern greatness to return.

Resurrection and Renewal

Three of the novel's four sections take place on or around Easter, 1928. Faulkner's placement of the novel's climax on this weekend is significant, as the weekend is associated with Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter Sunday. A number of symbolic events in the novel could be likened to the death of Christ: Quentin's death, Mr. Compson's death, Caddy's loss of virginity, or the decline of the Compson family in general.

Some critics have characterized Benjy as a Christ figure, as Benjy was born on Holy Saturday and is currently thirty-three, the same age as Christ at the crucifixion. Interpreting Benjy as a Christ figure has a

variety of possible implications. Benjy may represent the impotence of Christ in the modern world and the need for a new Christ figure to emerge. Alternatively, Faulkner may be implying that the modern world has failed to recognize Christ in its own midst.

Though the Easter weekend is associated with death, it also brings the hope of renewal and resurrection. Though the Compson family has fallen, Dilsey represents a source of hope. Dilsey is herself somewhat of a Christ figure. A literal parallel to the suffering servant of the Bible, Dilsey has endured Christlike hardship throughout her long life of service to the disintegrating Compson family. She has constantly tolerated Mrs. Compson's self-pity, Jason's cruelty, and Benjy's frustrating incapacity. While the Compsons crumble around her, Dilsey emerges as the only character who has successfully resurrected the values that the Compsons have long abandoned—hard work, endurance, love of family, and religious faith.

The Failure of Language and Narrative

Faulkner himself admitted that he could never satisfactorily convey the story of *The Sound and the Fury* through any single narrative voice. His decision to use four different narrators highlights the subjectivity of each narrative and casts doubt on the ability of language to convey truth or meaning absolutely.

Benjy, Quentin, and Jason have vastly different views on the Compson tragedy, but no single perspective seems more valid than the others. As each new angle emerges, more details and questions arise. Even the final section, with its omniscient third-person narrator, does not tie up all of the novel's loose ends. In interviews, Faulkner lamented the imperfection of the final version of the novel, which he termed his "most splendid failure." Even with four narrators providing the depth of four different perspectives, Faulkner believed that his language and narrative still fell short.

14.12 MOTIFS

Time

Notes

Faulkner's treatment and representation of time in this novel was hailed as revolutionary. Faulkner suggests that time is not a constant or objectively understandable entity, and that humans can interact with it in a variety of ways. Benjy has no concept of time and cannot distinguish between past and present. His disability enables him to draw connections between the past and present that others might not see, and it allows him to escape the other Compsons' obsessions with the past greatness of their name. Quentin, in contrast, is trapped by time, unable and unwilling to move beyond his memories of the past. He attempts to escape time's grasp by breaking his watch, but its ticking continues to haunt him afterward, and he sees no solution but suicide. Unlike his brother Quentin, Jason has no use for the past. He focuses completely on the present and the immediate future. To Jason, time exists only for personal gain and cannot be wasted. Dilsey is perhaps the only character at peace with time. Unlike the Compsons, who try to escape time or manipulate it to their advantage, Dilsey understands that her life is a small sliver in the boundless range of time and history.

Order and Chaos

Each of the Compson brothers understands order and chaos in a different way. Benjy constructs order around the pattern of familiar memories in his mind and becomes upset when he experiences something that does not fit. Quentin relies on his idealized Southern code to provide order. Jason orders everything in his world based on potential personal gain, attempting to twist all circumstances to his own advantage. All three of these systems fail as the Compson family plunges into chaos. Only Dilsey has a strong sense of order. She maintains her values, endures the Compsons' tumultuous downfall, and is the only one left unbroken at the end.

Shadows

Seen primarily in Benjy's and Quentin's sections, shadows imply that the present state of the Compson family is merely a shadow of its past greatness. Shadows serve as a subtle reminder of the passage of time, as they slowly shift with the sun through the course of a day. Quentin is

particularly sensitive to shadows, a suggestion of his acute awareness that the Compson name is merely a shadow of what it once was.

14.13 SYMBOLS

Water

Water symbolizes cleansing and purity throughout the novel, especially in relation to Caddy. Playing in the stream as a child, Caddy seems to epitomize purity and innocence. However, she muddies her underclothes, which foreshadows Caddy's later promiscuity. Benjy gets upset when he first smells Caddy wearing perfume. Still a virgin at this point, Caddy washes the perfume off, symbolically washing away her sin. Likewise, she washes her mouth out with soap after Benjy catches her on the swing with Charlie. Once Caddy loses her virginity, she knows that no amount of water or washing can cleanse her.

Quentin's Watch

Quentin's watch is a gift from his father, who hopes that it will alleviate Quentin's feeling that he must devote so much attention to watching time himself. Quentin is unable to escape his preoccupation with time, with or without the watch. Because the watch once belonged to Mr. Compson, it constantly reminds Quentin of the glorious heritage his family considers so important. The watch's incessant ticking symbolizes the constant inexorable passage of time. Quentin futilely attempts to escape time by breaking the watch, but it continues to tick even without its hands, haunting him even after he leaves the watch behind in his room.

Check your Progress-1

1. Who wrote "The Sound and the Fury"?

2. Who is Dilsey Gibson?

3. Who is Miss Quentin Compson?

14.14 LET US SUM UP

The Sound and the Fury is a dramatic presentation of the decline of the once-aristocratic Compson family of Yoknapatawpha County, in northern Mississippi. Divided into four sections, the history is narrated by three Compson brothers — Benjamin, Quentin, and Jason — followed by a section by an omniscient narrator.

Section One is seen through the sensitivities of Benjamin (Benjy), Compson, on April 7, 1928, when Benjy is thirty-three years old. The youngest of the Compson children, Benjy was christened Maury in honor of his uncle, but by the time he reached the age of five, it became apparent that he was retarded. Out of the family's respect for his namesake, he was thereafter called Benjy.

The eight scenes that comprise the Benjy section jump about in time, from one of his earliest memories (when, in fact, he was still called Maury) and extend to the present (1928). Because of his impaired mental facilities, Benjy is literal, simplistic, and sensual. This section of the novel centers on his impressions of his sister Candace (Caddy), the only one in his family who was truly solicitous of him, and arguably one of the most significant characters in the novel.

Benjy's earliest depicted memory, from 1898 (when he was three years old), establishes the essence of Caddy's character. This early appearance of Caddy introduces two major themes — Caddy's mud-soiled underwear, and water — that will replay through the novel.

The Compson children are ignorant of the death of their grandmother. Caddy is the only one of the Compson children brave enough to climb the pear tree and look through the window to "spy" on the visitors who have come to attend what she realizes is the funeral wake. While Caddy does this, her brothers stand below, gazing up at her muddy underwear, which were soiled earlier when they were playing in a creek adjoining the Compson estate. Faulkner uses the muddy underwear as an emblem of Caddy's incipient sexuality; he frequently introduces bathing scenes in which water is used as a cleansing and purifying agent.

Many of Benjy's other memories focus on Caddy, including when she uses perfume (1905), when she loses her virginity (1909), and her wedding (1910). Benjy also has impressions of his name change (from Maury to Benjamin) in 1900, his brother Quentin's suicide in 1910, and the horrific sequence of events at the gate that lead to his being castrated, also in 1910.

Section Two is seen from Quentin Compson's mind on June 2, 1910, the day he prepares for and eventually commits suicide. Alone in his regard for the illustrious history and tradition of the Compson family, Quentin's reflections on time introduce another significant theme. Just as Benjy did, Quentin reflects on Caddy, her emerging sexuality, and the mortification he experiences at the implications of her unwed pregnancy. In many ways, Quentin represents pre-Civil War views of honor, Southern womanhood, and virginity. He cannot accept his sister's growing sexuality, just as he cannot accept his father's notion that "virginity" is merely an invention by men. Just as many of Benjy's flashbacks directly concern his involvement in Caddy's sexual maturation, so do Quentin's. The flashbacks dramatize just how ineffectual Quentin is in his dealings with his family, his Harvard studies, and his belief that the Compsons can return to their earlier days of Southern tradition.

Section Three is told by the third Compson brother, Jason, a day before Benjy, on Good Friday, April 6, 1928. Unlike his brothers, Jason is much more focused on the present, offering fewer flashbacks — though he does have a few, and he refers frequently to events in the past. The tone

Notes

of Jason's section is set instantly by the opening sentence: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say." A redneck and a sadist, Jason serves to demonstrate how low the Compson family has descended from its former stature, specifically illustrated in the comparison between Quentin's obsessions over heritage, honor, and sin to Jason's near-constant cruelty, complaints, and scheming.

Also present in this section is another ironic comparison: In residence in the Compson home is another Quentin, Caddy's daughter, who appears to be heading in the same direction of sexual freedom as her mother. Jason is, in his way, as preoccupied with young Quentin's emerging sexuality as his brother Quentin was with Caddy's. Among the surprises and revelations in this section: Quentin drowned himself (the suicide itself was not depicted in Quentin's section); Benjy is brutally castrated to prevent him from fathering any impaired children"; Caddy has been divorced. Banished from the family home, she has taken up residence in a neighboring county and has been sending money to her daughter. Because Mrs. Compson has forbidden Caddy's name from being mentioned in the house, she has likewise forbidden her money from entering the house. To overcome this hurdle, Jason forges copies of Caddy's checks sent to cover expenses and treats for Miss Quentin. Jason gives his mother the forgeries, which Mrs. Compson ceremoniously burns. Meanwhile, Jason cashes the actual checks and pockets the money, giving little or none of it to his niece.

Section Four has an omniscient or authorial viewpoint. The time is the present, which, in terms of the novel, is Easter Sunday, April 8, 1928. All traces of Caddy, including her daughter and even the very mention of her name, have been removed. Jason pursues his niece, Miss Quentin, who has discovered his ongoing use of the money sent for her support and has managed to steal \$7,000 from him. Jason pursues her, hopeful of recovering some of the money she has taken from him.

The section is sometimes referred to as "Dilsey's Section" after Dilsey Gibson, matriarch of the black family that has served the Compsons over the years, because of her prominence in this section. The Dilsey Section focuses on Dilsey's attendance at an Easter church service, at which a

preacher from St. Louis, Reverend Shegog, delivers a sermon that stirs in Dilsey an epiphany of doom for the Compson family. After the sermon, Dilsey says, "I've seed de first en de last . . . I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin."

In this omniscient fourth section of the novel, the two narrative lines of Benjy and Jason converge to produce the ending when the two brothers meet outside the town hall and Benjy experiences a sense of elation he'd first known when he was only three — a time when everything seemed returned to its proper order.

14.15 KEYWORDS

- **Animal magnetism:** a paranormal belief that humans and other organisms produce a magnetic force
- **Apotheosis:** exaltation to divine rank, deification
- **Asbestos:** a fireproof material. Quentin may be referring to the fire curtain in old theaters, but "Asbestos" was also a brand name found on flat-irons (like the ones he uses to weigh himself down in the river).
- **Beardsley:** British illustrator whose black and white, often erotic drawings were both highly individual and typical of the art nouveau style
- **Beast with two backs:** a phrase meaning partners engaged in sexual intercourse

14.16 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

- Critically analyze "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner.
- Summarize "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner.
- Write the themes of "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner.
- Write the motifs and symbols of "The Sound and the Fury" by William Faulkner.

14.17 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

Notes

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14.18 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

The *Sound and the Fury* was written by William Faulkner. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q1)**

Dilsey Gibson is the matriarch of the servant family. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q2)**

Miss Quentin Compson is the daughter of Caddy who goes to live with the Compsons under Jason IV's care. **(answer to check your progress – 1 Q3)**