



Sylvia Plath's "The Colossus"

SECE4370F: Secondary English Education

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Plath's Background

- ❖ Plath's father died in 1940, when she was only eight years old.
- ❖ Married poet Ted Hughes in 1956.
- ❖ Had two children, one born in 1960, the other in 1962.
- ❖ Her first collection of poems, coincidentally called "The Colossus," was published in 1960.
- ❖ Hughes left Plath for another woman in 1963.
- ❖ Plath died in 1963 by suicide.

Time to challenge your knowledge!

You have all received a copy of Sylvia Plath's poem "The Colossus." You will have 5 minutes to do the following:

- ❖ Read through the poem with a partner
- ❖ Pick out and annotate as many poetic devices as you can identify
- ❖ Try to identify a further meaning below the surface level of the words

You don't have to be incredibly thorough, we will discuss as a class after 5 minutes.

The Colossus - Plath

I shall never get **you** put together entirely,

Directly addresses the audience in place of the subject - immersive.

Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

Mule-bray, pig-grunt and **bawdy cackles**

Imagery that depicts something that was previously broken, but has been fixed.

Proceed from your great lips.

It's worse than a barnyard.

Intimidating diction depicts a negative force laughing, almost taunting.

The Colossus - Plath

Diction implies that the subject seems to be all-knowing. Could be an allusion to the Oracle of Delphi in Greek mythology.

Perhaps you consider yourself an **oracle,**

Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.

The subject could possibly be deceased-very direct imagery and diction.

Thirty years now I have labored

To dredge the **silt from your throat,**

Exact time frame, almost lines up to her father's death-a possible connection?

I am none the wiser.

Imagery indicates that the subject is buried. Possibly in a grave?

The Colossus - Plath

Alliteration of 'P'-draws the audience's attention to the immense cleanliness.

Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pails of lysol,

I crawl like an ant in the morning

Over the weedy acres of your brow

To mend the immense skull plates and clear

The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

Simile demeans the persona's presence, compares them as if they were tiny as an ant.

This imagery depicts the subject as being something bigger than human, one with nature.

The Colossus - Plath

A blue sky out of the **Oresteia**

An allusion to Aeschylus's Greek tragedy in which Electra mourns her father Agamemnon

Arches above us. **O father,** all by yourself

Phrasing almost implies worship, and directly mentions the person's father, or higher power.

You are pithy and historical **as the Roman Forum.**

Simile and allusion combined allow for the declaration of how impactful this individual is.

I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress.

Your fluted bones and **acanthine hair** are littered

Metaphorical imagery compares to the acanthus plant/leaves- further connects to nature.

The Colossus - Plath

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.

It would take more than a lightning-stroke

Hyperbole exaggerates the amount of power that the loss of the subject has upon the persona.

To create such a ruin.

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia

The cornucopia is symbolic of abundance, in this case it could represent the abundance of knowledge lost with this subject.

Of your left ear, out of the wind,

Further imagery of this individual being one with nature.

The Colossus - Plath

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.

The sun rises under the **pillar of your tongue.**

Imagery indicates the importance of the words that were said by the subject.

My hours are married to shadow,

Metaphor indicates that the persona is only experiencing dark times.

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel

On the **blank stones** of the landing.

Imagery through diction allows for the persona to display the great loss that was experienced through the loss of the subject.

Do you have any
thoughts on the
deeper meaning of this
poem? Is there one?

Possible Connections:

- ❖ The Colossus could represent the lost hope of the persona for finding love/happiness
- ❖ This poem could also indicate the loss of the persona's sense of self after losing the subject of the poem
- ❖ The subject of this poem is almost certainly a father-figure, as it is implied that there was great knowledge and impact, with allusions to parental forces
- ❖
- ❖ The most reasonable connection to Plath's personal life is the loss of her father and the impact that it had on her life in the following years.

Supporting Research

- ★ Dissertation written by Stephanie Fowler for the University of South Carolina in Summer 2019
- ★ This study examined the impact of annotation on students' critical thinking skills
 - The sample population 8 high school juniors and seniors enrolled in an English IV-Honors course
- ★ The data was derived from surveys taken both before and after the study, interviews, student work, teacher observation, rubrics and responses to specific questions regarding the topic of poetry annotation
- ★ The outcome of this particular research was stated as the following: "The data revealed that practice, collaborative opportunities, and reflection led to growth in participants' self-efficacy, confidence, use of poetry annotations, and critical thinking skills as reflected in the rubrics."

References

Academy of American Poets. (n.d.). Sylvia Plath. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://poets.org/poet/sylvia-plath>

Fowler, S. J. (2019). The Impact of Poetry Annotations on the Critical Thinking Skills of High School Juniors and Seniors at a School in a Southeastern State. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/5466>

