

Plath Children – Her Treasured Creations like her poems

Sanam Vaseem Shaikh

Student JJT University, Rajasthan

DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.12.2019.p9696

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.12.2019.p9696>

ABSTRACT:

The title of the paper is “Plath Children- Her Treasured Creation like her poems”. The main intension of the paper is Plath insecurity with regard to the future of her children. It reveals the apprehension, anxiety and uncertainty that Sylvia goes through when it comes to the care of her children. The kind of fondness and minuteness that she has for her poems can also be traced in the upbringing of her children.

KEYWORDS: Children, love, hate, agony, fear

INTRODUCTION:

Motherhood has its artistic tradition in prose and a subject very quickly vulgarized in poetry. It has been always rated a subject for second rate female poet. To write on a subject like this not only one needs accomplishment but also a novelty worth examining. A study of Plath’s poem along with comparison with poetry of Sarojini Naidu on children and on motherhood provide a more approximate judgment of Plath poetic concerns and it also provides an insight into a relatively unexplored area of female psychology.

Treasured Creation- Plath’s Children

“Sitting on her father’s lap in the den---- with her father’s strong arm around her --- she thought she could face the doomsday of the world in perfect safety”

Behind the facade of independent, resolute and efficient smart girl, there still was that helpless girl of nine who had lost her father and was facing the brutal world without guidance. Denied of the father love, Sylvia didn’t want her children to suffer from the same therefore one of the most common theme throughout her writing career was the desire to become a mother. Sylvia was perceived between literary and biological creativities, marrying and having many children was part of her plan for a life of complete fulfillment:

“I will write until I begin to speak of my deep self, and then have children and speak still deeper. The life of the creative minds first then the creative body. For the latter is nothing to me without the first and the first thrives on the rich earth roots of latter”.¹

Plath’s desires to bring her own life cycle to full complete fruition in motherhood is also strongly evinced from the time of her earlier work, only growing more securely rooted as her writing progressed along with maturation. Katha Pollitt writes:

“ the feminists, too, will have to come to terms with the tenderness and purity of Plath’s maternal feelings, as displayed in ‘Brasilia’, ‘Child’, ‘For a fatherless son’ and her radio verse play Three women’

“A Note of Triumph [The collected poems]²

These poems depict first a woman at times almost desperate to have a child, and than a doting, reverent mother. Although certainly the power to create a brand new human being is far and away the highest earth-bound potential. A woman has housewife Dom and forgoing of all work accepts for the loving raising of one’s children goes against the feminist establishment credo that not only women should not have to stay at home, but in fact they should not do so at all, for their own good. Sylvia Plath’s values were just the opposite of these; a year of teaching convinced her that the professional world would only detract from her personal priorities, and thereafter stayed at home, creating her babies and the best poems of her life.

Plath’s realization of her lifelong fearful yet awed and enthralled desire for children made her complete in a way apart from the biological or the domestic as well. After giving birth first to a baby girl names Freida Rebecca Hughes and then a boy names Nicholas Farrar Hughes she was a changed person enjoying herself amidst all this hustle bustle that life actually meant to her as her protagonist Esther Greenwood says in her novel ‘The Bell Jar, “I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all direction myself like the coloured arrows from a fourth of July rocket”.³

After her split with her husband Sylvia Plath did not vengefully shake off the trappings of domestic life and reinvent herself as a new and different women, nor did she sink into herself and become an over harried mother with no time and no energy for her art. She found the balance between the responsibilities of single motherhood and the demands and desires of her art: the poet began to write between four and eight a.m., before her babies had awakened for the day. The poems of this period are the one universally hailed as the strongest, the deepest, the

¹ Dorothea Krook, “Recollections of Sylvia Plath”, Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the work p. 55

² Pollite Katha “A Note of Truimph [The Collected Poems] Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath. Ed. Linda W. Wagner Boston : G.K. Hall and Company, 1984 p. 67-72

³ Sylvia Plath “The Bell Jar” London : William Heinemann, 1963 (published under the pseudonym “Victoria Lucas”) p. 188

most profoundly of all her work and she began to churn them out with astonishing speed. And still, the domestic thread remained. Moreover she was dedicated to her poetry more than ever. Plath wrote more poems about motherhood than about any single subject. No women poet or writer can go straight forward without paying any heed on the subject to children.

Plath continued to write poems about children exploring specific domestic details or actual habits of her own children; she mainly focuses on the special relationship based on the Mother –Child theme. Her motherly concern for the newborn’s safety is amazing, as she is conscious that her child is laying bare a simple, innocent being to get hurt, spoiled and corrupted by the offensive critics of the world.

In her last days, she grows fonder of her two babies and her baby poems in her empty sea of existence. The poems written for her children, besides being records of her more positive and calmer moments are also documents refuting the charges of total nihilism of her poetry. All her poems based on babies tell the most –heart rendering tales of a helpless mother who knows that she had to give them up even before, the mature. Being the most pure and innocent creatures the children never ceases of getting her admirations.

The most important things for Plath were always those created: her poems, her children. Even in the aftermath of a disintegrated marriage, which must have been for her the terrible crushing of a long cherished dream, she retained the determination to be not only the great poet she’d so long dreamed of becoming, but also a responsible mother beyond reproach. Perhaps it is in the witness of the struggle to do both and to do both well that feminists, women in search of their sole identities and in search of a liberated independence.

“Brasilia” a poem which Sylvia Plath wrote for her daughter Freida Hughes deals with Sylvia’s concern about her daughter survival in the harsh world. The world outside her lap would really break all her desires which are yet to be developed as expressed in the following lines:

“And my baby a nail

Driven in, driven in”

Brasilia⁴

The world would not let her live as she is a fatherless child. Every one would have a starring eye on her. People wearing the mast of gentleman may cease her and ruin her entire life which would take away her glory. Sylvia Plath poems depict the harsh realities which would be faced her children whereas Sarojini Cradle song too conveys the same mother’s concern for the future of her children. But her poem do not depict harsh realities but a hope of making the future of the child bright. Hence, she seeks blessings from the moon and states:

⁴ Sylvia Plath “ Winter Trees” Brasilia, Harper and Raw Publisher, New York 1972 , p.11

Mother Moon, bless baby,
Let him live a hundred thousand years,
Moon; give him milk and basi,
Let it come swaying this way,
Let it come swaying this way,
And straight into baby's mouth"

"Lullabies and Cradle Songs"⁵

Unlike Sylvia Plath, Sarojini is not afraid of putting her child to the outside world but symbolizes the harmony and beauty the mother wishes for her child, from nature and life. Her imaginative experience extends to the saints from whom she seeks blessing and protection as her child would face in future and to bring harmony in the life of a child without any hurdle.

Sylvia Plath poem titled "Child" is of twelve lines, written in terza rima, consisting of a sentence only and conveys the hurry she is in to finish her duties to the child and her longing to fill the life of her babies with conceivable joy as expressed in the following line:

"Whose names you mediate"

"Child"⁶

Her tenderness follows out generously, cleansing all the fearful, hateful and dismally negative emotions of a person of a high intellectual order. The eternal mother speaks out sharing the common concern of all not –so-extra ordinary mothers all over the globe.

"Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing"

"Child"⁷

Her poetry becomes more and more the search for this "absolutely beautiful" in her last days. As a result, her poetry becomes more searching in pace, more sincere in tone, more desperate in voice to come to terms with the disturbing factors that life presented to her. Plath the mother and Plath the poet are so equipoise that it becomes difficult to serve the two in perfect brackets.

Unlike Plath, Sarojini's poems reveal with a profound depth and meaning a truly Indian mother, who rocks the cradle while putting her child to sleep in her "Cradle Song" with a tender warmth she sings sweet wallaby and remarks:

⁵ Hem Berua, "Lullabies and Cradle Songs", *Folk songs of India*, New Delhi, 1963. Ch.4, p.55

⁶ Sylvia Plath "Winter Trees", Child, Harper and Raw Publishers, New York, 1972, p.18

⁷ Sylvia Plath "Winter Trees", Child, Harper and Raw Publishers, New York, 1972, p.18

Dear eyes, good night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam:
On you I press
With soft caress
A little lovely dream”

“Cradle Song”⁸

Sarojini captures the maternal sentiments in this cradle song, set amidst in this cradle song, set amidst the harmony and beauty, peace and response in nature’s bower of bliss. Her aesthetic experience enriches the lovely dreams with a sweet spontaneity of mother’s concern for the child. Even Sylvia’s trouble disappear when she milks her babies, which is so every well expressed here:

This is the fluid, in which we meet each other,
This haloev radiance that seems to breath”

“By Candle Light”⁹

The poems “By candle light” speaks of an apprehensive tenderness of voice haloes when she floats in the milk of her filial kindness. Her babies, her only source of happiness in this miserably despondent life which she got as a legacy from her husband “who was a source of love and hate to her”.

Likewise Sarojini’s “To My Fairy Fancies” depict now the aesthetic perceptions embellish her thought and attempts to communicate the human experience in new veins of imagery. Therefore, she bids good bye to her fancies and voices with a certain maturity her own realization in a multitude of images:

Nay, no longer I may hold you,
In my spirits soft caresses
Fair fancies, fly away
To the white cloud-widerness,
Fly away
Nay, no longer ye may Unger
With you laughter lighted faces,
Now I am a thought worn singer,

⁸ Sarojini Naidu, “Cradle Song”, *The Sceptred Flute* p. 17

⁹ Sylvia Plath “Winter Trees” By Candle Light Harper and Row Publisher, New York, 1972 p.29

In life's high and lonely places

Fairly Fancies, Fly away

“To My Fair Fancies”¹⁰

Here the multitude of images expose the so more introspective facet of Sarojini's personality. It is over here that the girlish ecstasy has passed and that a graver music has taken its place. These revelations shadow the dazzling emotional imagery of the 'lyric child' with a realization of lives deeper problems. In other words, a design and a purpose in the cosmic process of existence.

Contrary to Sarojini Naidu world is the world of Sylvia Plath where she knows very well the condition of a fatherless child in this hostile world and when the same things happened to her own darlings. She could not hold back the bitterness the helplessness, the hatred that destroyed her by burning her whole being which found an expression in the poem “For a Fatherless son”

Even critics have found this poem as one of the cruelest poem indeed, where she has projected the cruelty of the outer world to her own child:

“One day you may touch what's wrong
The small skills, the smashed blue hills, the
God-awful hush
Till then you smiles are found money”
“For a Fatherless Son”.¹¹

As the ways of the world poison the innocent tootles smile, the child grows up to throw open the cupboard of hidden skeleton touching live wire accidentally or knowingly. Even her earlier poem like “Magic”, “You're”, “Morning Song”, “Candles” to name a few deals with the theme of motherhood and reveal her concern for the innocent babies.

Unlike Plath Sarojini's “The Lonely Child” portrays the emotional overtones which deepens the quest and the child in the poem cries out in despair.

Birds and bees
And flowers have one another
The lambkin and the lark
The grey mouse and the squirrel and the deer----

¹⁰ Sarojini Naidu, “To My Fair Fancies”, *The Sceptred Flute*, p.26

¹¹ Sylvia Plath “Winter Trees” *For a Fatherless Son*, Harper and Row publisher, New York, 1972 p. 33

Does God forget
How much I want a mother
To hold me in the dark
And whisper lovely secrets in my ear?"

“The Lonely Child”¹²

The visual image of the lonely child reflects the predominant passion of ecstasy and pain. Hence they release into the reader a special poetic emotion, which is awakened by pathos. This sensuous picture is to some degree metaphorical, for it conveys an under note of some human emotion in the context which the poetess intends to communicate in visual pattern.

Except for this poem, all other poems of Sarojini’s are emotionally charged and convey the hope of a radiant future for her babies as against the harsh world of Sylvia Plath where she is little hesitant of putting her babies to the outside world. Sarojini’s little child evokes her fairy fancies into the realms of the unknown. She primarily responds to a world of golden thresholds and softly embraces the dream world of her infant soul.

In most of the poems dedicated to children in Sylvia Plath and Sarojini Naidu poetry, they are (children) sleeping or just waking. He/she never does anything. They are as if a “Clean State” also totally passive, receptive and vulnerable. Most infants are of course most often sleeping: but the predominance of the sleeping child in Plath’s as well as Naidu’s poem as interesting as a continuation of concerns evident in the poems about their own childhood. While Sylvia Plath earlier poems about her mother were particularly resentful about the victimization of the child, Sarojini Naidu poetry emerges as a figure of purity, radiance and zest, amidst the dream world of fairy fancies and childish ecstasies. Sylvia Plath later poems about her own children underscore the fact that all children are victims. She does not minimize her fears that as a mother, she too will be a victimizer. Her child will inherit hours of blackness from her. But she more often sees the child as the victim of the world’s evil and blackness.

Sarojini Naidu on the other conveys her imagination, her frolics of fancy and strength of prime, with a purity, radiance and zest of life. It is through these multitudes of images she unconsciously gives herself away. Her images though conventional, are most rooted in her own personal experience and hence they expose their own identity and a certain maturity in design.

On the whole, Sylvia Plath poems on motherhood lies in their exploration of a relatively uncharted area of experience. The cluster of maternal feelings surrounding the birth of a child has never been adequately described

¹² Sarojini Naidu

and traditional attitudes do not serve. The view of the woman as a vessel through which the man provides himself with heirs is everywhere denied in the creative act. The passive, dependent wife is at the opposite extreme from the active, life giving mother caretaker of hearth and the mother who is often care ridden by the very great dangers from which her child will not be sheltered by his father. Plath writes with an awareness of her own inadequacies as a mother and a sense of the difficulties of nurturing another human being, but she is also aware of the inadequacies of the world. She talks here as a creator in an increasingly destructive world and her fears are the well founded fears of all mothers. Her poems on motherhood opens up the subject for serious consideration. If she limits herself on private and taboo areas, she is also concerned with universal questions about creation and nurturing.

References:

1. Dorothea Krook, "Recollections of Sylvia Plath", *Sylvia Plath : The Woman and the Work* p. 55
2. Pollitte Katha "A Note of Triumph [The collected poems] critical essay on Sylvia Plath Tel Linda w. Wagner Boston: G.K. Hall and company 1984 p 67-72
3. Plath Sylvia "The Bell Jar", London: William Heinemann, 1963 (published under the pseudonym "Victoria Lucas") p 188
4. Plath Sylvia "Brasilia", *Winter Trees*, Harper and Raw Publisher, New York 1972, p-11
5. Hem Berua, "Lullabies and Cradle Songs" *Folk songs of India*, New Delhi, 1962, Ch. 4, p-55.
6. Plath Sylvia "Child" *Winter Trees*, Harper and Raw Publishers, New York, 1972, p-18
7. Plath Sylvia "Child" *Winter Trees*, Harper and Raw Publishers, New York, 1972, p-18
8. Naidu Sarojini "Cradle Song", *The Sceptred Flute*, p-17
9. Plath Sylvia "By Candle light", *Winter Trees* Harper and Raw Publisher, New York, 1972, p – 29
10. Naidu Sarojini "To my Fair Fancies", *The Sceptred Flute*, p -26
11. Plath Sylvia "For a Fatherless son ", *Winter Trees*, Harper and Raw Publisher, New York 1972, p-33

