

Abstract

Sylvia Plath acquires a conspicuous position among recent poets since she straddles two important modes of poetry i.e. Confessional poetry and Feminist poetry. Generally she is categorized as a confessional poet while the feminist content of her poetry is often overlooked. But a comparative study of her poetry against both the confessional and feminist modes helps to determine her real status. Though ostensibly she conforms to some canons of confessional poetry, but in her thematic concerns she exudes a true feminist spirit.

A close study of her work reveals that unlike the social and realistic settings of confessional poetry, her poems take the reader to strange surrealistic settings. Moreover her personas have their own distinct, separate identities and one generally doesn't get the impression that the poet is directly making a confession before the reader.

Another distinctive quality of her poetry is that she never uses her biographical details in the manner of Robert Lowell or Anne Sexton and what is most important is her ability to transform these details into autonomous poetic forms. Thus a real incident may ignite a certain poem but this initial thought is so transformed in the course of the poem that the real value of the poem lies not so much in the experience that occasioned it, but the way it has been treated by the poet.

What strikes the observant reader is the feminist anger embedded in her work. Her protest against and the rejection of patriarchal traditions and restricting roles for women are registered in one poem after another. Though she shows an uncommon affection for her children, which is quite unusual in feminist poetry but it is because she considers women as the guardians and protectors of new life while men are found to be essentially guilty of destruction. Thus each line of her verse is lacerated with the consciousness of pain, anguish and suffering which is an inevitable part of a woman's life.

The following pages will illustrate not only the feminist content of her work but also show her divergence from confessional mode by comparing her work with other confessional and feminist poets.