

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POETRY

Integrity and fragmentation are ideas which connect Ariel and Birthday Letters. How are these ideas shaped and reshaped in these texts?

1,321 Words

The ambiguous concept of integrity is shaped and reshaped in protest against the insanity and fragmentation of the self and wider world. Sylvia Plath's modernist collection of poems 'Ariel' (1963) explore the intricate complexities of relationships, psychological dramas and cultural expectations to achieve contextual and personal liberation. Conversely, Ted Hughes' confessional collection of poetry 'Birthday letters' (1998), reshape and communicate with Plath's integral themes. Attempting to accomplish liberation from his paradoxical post-war context and the psychological legacy of Plath. The poets share a profoundly confessional style within their intense and complex conversation. Reflecting the wider masculine and feminine tensions during the 20th century and the rise of modernist experimentation. In response to modernist, psychological and ideological pandemonium, Plath and Hughes define and debate ideals of integrity and fragmentation to achieve liberation.

Different notions of integrity are constructed within historical, cultural and ideological frameworks. Plath's 'Ariel', perpetuates this notion in a reflective and provocative voice within a dramatic monologue. Feeling the weight of 20th century patriarchal oppression and post-war anxieties, Plath ponders the integrity of hope, truth and liberation, "O my enemy. / Do I terrify?", 'Lady Lazarus' is Plath's testimony to personal empowerment and oppressional decay. The biblical allusion to Lazarus' rebirth represents a cultural replenishment in favour of feminist ideals. Contrastingly, Hughes uses childish diction, "you had a real ailment. You had eaten a baddie. You lay helpless and a little bit crazy", to reshape Plath's formidable persona into a delusional and fragile reflection, this power of belittlement resonates with the patriarchal values that Plath detests. The dysfunctional tensions between feminist ideals and oppressive patriarchal practices within Plath's world abolish the presence of textual, psychological and cultural integrity. Arousing a trepidation fuelled depiction of the post-war fate. Plath nihilistically capitulates, "Let the stars plummet to their dark address". Alluding to Shakespeare's, "star crossed lovers" to portray her anxieties of a dystopian fate in absence of integrity. Resonating with Hughes' farcical retrospection on Plath's condition in, 'A picture of Otto'. "I was a whole myth too late to replace you", declaring Hughes' inability to embody the omnipresence of Plath's father, Otto. Reflecting government ideologies of totalist power in retaliation to the cold war and modernist movement. A catalyst for the abolishment of integrity, complimenting Plath's artistic articulation of post-war apprehension. Thus, the integrity of hope, truth and liberation is sought throughout Plath's 'Ariel' to obtain stability in a tumultuous psychological, post-war, patriarchal context. "love, love... roll from me like Isadora's scarves, I'm in a fright".

Integrity is reclaimed through controlling truth and replenishing hope, to silence psychological anxieties. Hughes' 'birthday letters' is an intensely confessional and mythopoeic retrospection. Reflecting in patriarchal first-person upon his turbulent relationship with Plath. Hughes appropriates the Orpheus myth of reclamation in 'A Picture of Otto'. Casting his patriarchal persona as the Sacred King and Plath with the betrayed and vengeful goddess. "dark adit/ where I have come looking for your daughter". The dark and ominous atmosphere echoes images of hell, igniting understanding of the historical and cultural dichotomy of vitality and death. Resonating with Plath's identification as a non-autonomous victim, "I think I may well be a Jew", sustaining the tension between vitality and death through alluding to the historical suffering brought by the Holocaust. Evoking a persona craving patriarchal salvation, facilitating Hughes' patriarchy. The collection offers an open-ended meditation upon the integrity of relationships in a modernist and secularised

society. Hughes' 'fever', metaphorically discusses Plath's physical impairments, to reveal her deeper psychological adversity. He uses historical allusion to the philosophical enlightenment, "I promised you, this had saved Voltaire from the plague. I had to saturate and flush you", charting the journey towards integrity within their relationship. This reverberates an anticipation for a revolution of enlightenment to salvage humanity. Deeply contradictory to Plath's antagonistic perspective, "your body/ hurts me as the world hurts god.". Hughes' collection challenges integrity to reinstate control over the truth and arouse hope of liberation.

Fragmentation is employed to differentiate personal suffering from cultural turmoil. Plath's 'Ariel', uses incandescent voice to muse a brilliantly abstract and fragmented interpretation of the world. Influenced by countercultural movements and the ideological departure from conservatism. Further, fragmentation within the piece illuminates Plath's dualism of herself and detachment from the outer world. Evidently the impression of psychoanalyst Robert Laing and his ideology of the divided self and societal madness. Plath's epitome of empowerment, 'Lady Lazarus' uses sardonic tone, "the peanut crunching crowd.../ unwrap me hand and foot -/ The big strip tease.". This portrays the deterioration of Plath's disguise as she indulges in the confessional mode, "I do it so it feels like hell. / ...so it feels real". Her critique of American consumerism and its sexualisation of women is supported by Hughes' Epiphany of Plath's humanity, "you rushed to me, your dream-time veil off,/ your ghost-proof gloves off". Plath's fragmentation from the world is reshaped, revealing its abilities to prolong her humanity and resolve intense dichotomies between ideals of liberation and consumerist oppression. The fragmentation of personal and contextual suffering is furthered in Plath's maternal anthem, 'Nick and the candle stick', "the pain you wake to is not yours... I have hung our cave with roses". The primitive cave setting represents the unbridled ferocity of WWII, contrasting Plath's operation within the 'ascendant domestic ideology'. Sustained through Hughes' caricature portrayal, "your exaggerated American/ Grin for the cameras, the judges, the strangers, the frighteners.", Plath's anxieties and necessity to appease outer consumerist masses is felt through the accumulation of words. Hence, Plath's exercise of fragmentation attempts to salvage inner tranquillity, disparate to cultural suffering. "is it possible for you to let something go and have it go whole?".

Political and individual suffering induces a fragmented and distorted perspective. Hughes' 'Birthday Letters', is an open-ended tragedy that ponders the philosophical ideals of western culture. His elegiac tone scrutinizes the 'alienation of man from his inner life' and complains that the 'human spirit was not a mechanical business of nuts and bolts'. The tragic form invades our comfort to upheave rationality and abolish habitual barriers within our existence. The anecdote within 'Fulbright scholars', details Hughes' first observation of Plath. Hughes uses metaphor to reveal his retrospective consciousness, "the first peach I had ever tasted... I was dumbfounded afresh/ by my ignorance at the simplest of things", alluding to Plath's fallible nature as the catalyst for his adversity and vexation. Sparking the odyssey toward the ideals of the transcendental phenomenon. Plath qualifies this distorted view with tactile images, "with the swamy feeling of African hands... shrunk for export", images of slavery and commodification, a capitalist fantasy. This advances the fragmentation between political and individual suffering. Reshaping his disillusioned world order. Hughes identifies myths as 'visionary narratives', that formulate an archetypal pattern to inspire the resolution of his spiritual crisis. He alludes to the Ariel 'lion of god' myth, "the thunderhead of your new selves/ tending your golden mane.", allegorically reflecting Plath's dualism as a quest for transformation and wholeness. Plath perpetuates this through her biblical allusion to Lazarus' rebirth, "I rise with my red hair./ I eat men like air", identifying with her alter-ego to highlight the disillusion and fragmentation between reality and appearance that Hughes desperately tries to resolve. In a final act of mythic alchemy, Hughes manifests salvation, "only the bookshelves escaped into whiteness", encapsulating Hughes' poetic consciousness and the wholeness of poetry. The imaginatively transformed narrative of

Hughes' relationship forces the recognition of the fragmentation and absurdity of existence, igniting a spiteful awakening.

Thus, the profoundly complex and exceedingly intimate conversation between 'Ariel' and 'birthday letters' frames and reimagines integrity and fragmentation. The reader is indulged in philosophical enlightenment. Is our world the apocalyptic fantasy that is depicted? Perhaps our integrity has been reshaped to reflect the fragmented ideals of secularisation and modernisation. The collections unite to repel the annihilation of universal integrity, "small, taken one by one, but my god, together!", sparking the intrinsic fight for consciousness to salvage "the last of Victoriana".

- Truth is commonly disputed with their dissonant perspectives on relationship, fate and loss.
- Using emphatic tone to shift responsibility for the loss of integrity within their lives from his conscience to her psychological impairments. Transcending time to bring an awareness of the fragile human condition and accentuate the tumultuous conversation of culpability and loss.
- Hughes employs a pastiche of influences including Carl Jung and his mythological influences.
- Epistolary mode.
- Using biblical allusion to the Lazarus story of rebirth, Plath comments on the cultural state of oppression that the human condition allows. Also reverberating the detrimental repetition of an ignorant culture.
- Hugh pushes the boundary between truth and mythology.
- Through an imaginatively transformed form.
- Elucidating.
- Ominous dichotomies.