

# TULIPS

BY SYLVIA PLATH

Sub: American And  
Postcolonial Writing( FE 2)  
By : Farah Faisal  
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## SYLVIA PLATH

- American poet, Novelist and short-story writer
- Proponent of Confessional Poetry
- Best known collection of poems: *The Colossus and Other poems, Ariel.*
- *Bell Jar* : only novel
- Pulitzer prize in poetry: 1982
- Married to Ted Hughes
- Clinically depressed and treated with electroconvulsive therapy
- Mother : Austrian descend and Father: Otto Plath- German
- Her verses attempted to catalogue despair, violent emotion and obsession with death.
- Autobiographical poems.
- Explores her mental anguish and troubled marriage.
- 3 suicide attempts( overdosed on sleeping pills, drowning, carbon monoxide poisoning)
- Died at the age 30 with 2 children left behind



## CONFESSIONAL POETRY( 1950 – 1960)

- Confessional poetry was born as a rebellion against the impersonality of T.S Eliot.
- Modernists believed self had no room for in poetry.
- It involves the physical and psychic opening up of an individual.
- Different from the subjective poems of Romantic Era.
- Aldo differs from the secular religious confessions of St. Augustine.
- Frank and shocking account of the poet's private life.
- Highly Autobiographical.
- Covers taboo subject matters like alcoholism, sexual abuse, drug abuse, mental health etc.
- Robert Lowell coined the term in his *Life Studies*.
- *Uses colloquial speech*, images that reflects the intense psychological experiences.
- Rhythmic
- Other proponents : Anne sexton, Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell, Kamala Das.

## Poem Analysis

- Written in 1961 and published in 1965 in *Ariel*
- First name of the poem *Sickroom Tulips*
- State of being whilst in hospit for an appendectomy.
- Written in free verse.
- Precursor to Plath's novel *Bell Jar* as both the speaker and the protagonist seeks the pureness of death.
- 9 stanzas of 7 lines
- No rhyme
- Subject matter : straightforward
- Contrasts the whiteness and sterility of the hospital room with the liveliness of the tulips
- She surrenders herself to the doctors and nurses thereby wanting to exist devoid of a self
- Personifies the tulips with excitability, loud breathing and eyes that does not rest from watching her.
- Red colour reminds her of her wound ( her past life)
- Hospital allows her to avoid the complications and pains of worldly life.
- Desire for simplicity of death vs tulip's encouragement to live.
- The picture of her family does not encourage her to live.
- Choice to take: embrace death or return to life.
- Calls herself a cargo boat : only a name and an address, lost all other associations.
- Treatment of nurses compared to how water tends to the pebbles , it must run over.

- Subtle tension in opening lines( emotional uncertainty)
- Weeks earlier she suffered miscarriage
- Contrasts: Life and death, warm blood and cold atmosphere, red and white, pain and peace, attachment and freedom.

