

BA English

II SEM

THE MODERN AGE – PART I

SPOORTHI C S ASST PROFESSOR, JSSCACS MYSURU-25



The Arrival of the Bee Box

POEM BY SYLVIA PLATH

Background of Sylvia Plath

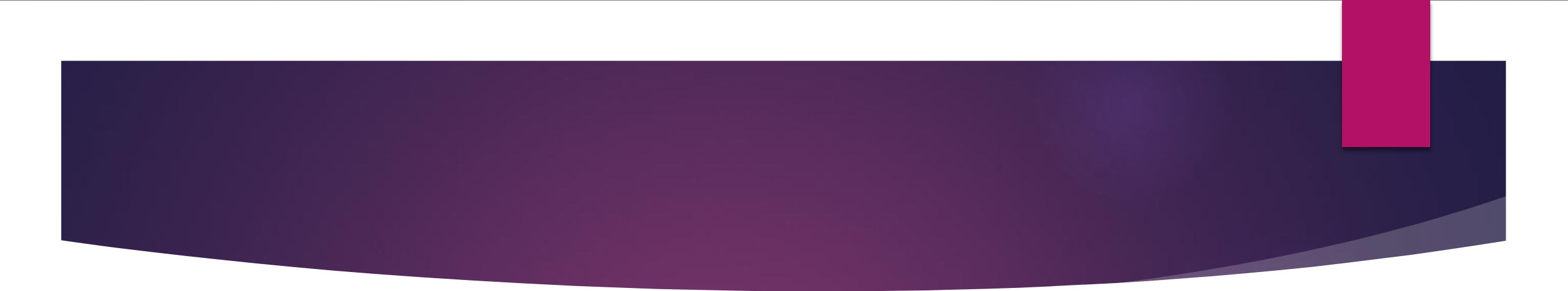
- ▶ Born: October 27, 1932 in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts
- ▶ Died: February 11, 1963 in London, England

Family

- ▶ Her father, Otto Emil Plath, was a professor and German immigrant and mother, Aurelia Schober Plath, was his former student
- ▶ Otto died in 1940 when Sylvia was 8 years old
- ▶ Married Ted Hughes, a fellow student she meets at Newnham college later on in life.

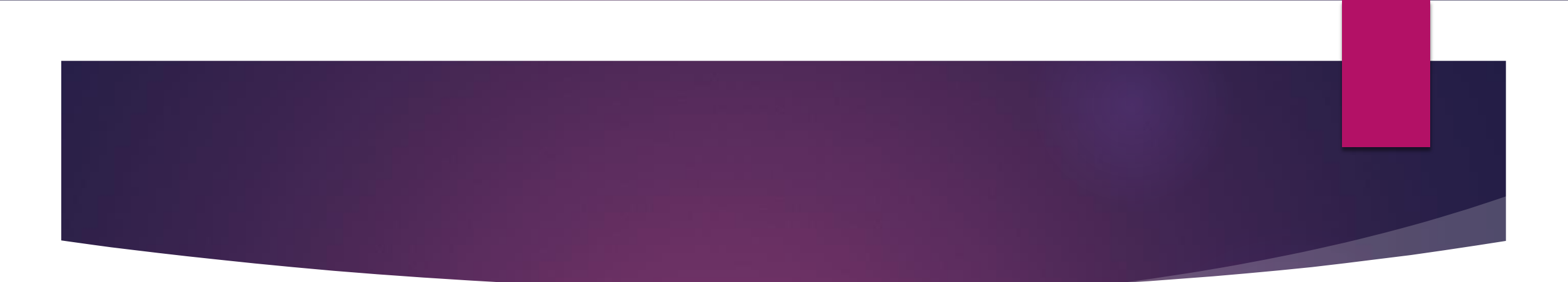
Schooling

- ▶ Attended Smith College where she studied vigorously
- ▶ Later went to Newnham college in Cambridge, England.

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- ▶ She published her poem when she was eight named “Circus In Three Rings”
 - ▶ In 1953 her short story “Sunday at the Mintons” won first prize in a *Mademoiselle* contest.
 - ▶ *The Bell Jar* is her autobiographical novel.
 - ▶ *The Collossus* her first book, a collection of poems
 - ▶ on feb 11 1963 she killed herself with cooking gas at the age of 30
 - ▶ Her depression, suicide attempts and family all played roles in her writing
 - ▶ She was basically a confessional writer
 - ▶ Common themes of her writings are depression relationships and anger

The Arrival of the Bee Box

- ▶ In the poem, Sylvia Plath expresses a desire to be in control. She feels she has to deal with dangerous situation. At first she is not in control, she panics, she has a debate with herself and then she makes a calm decision
- ▶ On one level, Plath is recalling a personal incident. The story of the poem concerns a task with a bee box. In the first stanza she states that it looks like “square”, like a midget’s coffin, heavy and noisy.
- ▶ In the second stanza, the bee box both frightens and attracts Plath. She stares in at the bees through a little wire grid.
- ▶ ‘Such a din in it’. The word ‘coffin’ suggests death. The overall description of the bee box is strange and disturbing.

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- ▶ In the third stanza, she regards the bees as angry slaves that seek of a rise and revenge: 'black on black, angrily clambering'. Through the wire she sees darkness. She imagines the bees are like army division of blackness that she associates with the Swarmy feeling of African hands.
 - ▶ In the fourth stanza, the buzzing noise puts her off releasing the bees. She fears their bee language and how regards them as an aggressive Roman mob. She describes their language as 'unintelligible syllables'.
 - ▶ In the fifth stanza she sidesteps the problem: 'I am not a Caesar'. She means she is not all powerful. She also means that she doesn't have to understand the bees.
 - ▶ In the poem Plath expresses a desire to be in control. She feels she has to deal with dangerous situation. By the end of poem she no longer feels threatened: 'they might ignore me... I no source of honey'
 - ▶ Feeling newly empowered Plath decides to exercise her power in a positive way: 'Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free, the box is only temporary'.

Themes

- ▶ Desire to be in control: ' Tomorrow I will be sweet God'
- ▶ Mental Anguish: 'I have to live with it overnight And I cant keep away from it.'
- ▶ Tone of horror: 'with the Swarmy feeling of African hands'
- ▶ Emptiness and lack of concern: 'They can be sent back. They can die'
- ▶ Power: 'I am the owner'
- ▶ Death and psychological Turmoil: 'square baby', 'roman mob', 'forgotten'.

Figurative language and poetic devices

- ▶ Simile – she compares the box to a square chair: ‘square as a chair’
- ▶ Simile: ‘it is like a Roman mob’
- ▶ Parallel images – she calls black bees as black slaves, a Roman mob and maniacs.
- ▶ Metaphor : ‘I would say it was the coffin of a midget or a square baby’
- ▶ Surreal image: ‘African slaves’
- ▶ Blank verse- the poem has been composed in blank verse with no set of rhyme pattern. The poem follows the rhythm of natural speech.

Setting of the poem

- ▶ On the outside, the poem is set around a literal bee box bought by the speaker in an attempt to undertake bee keeping for the first time. Metaphorically, the poem revolves around mental illness and the suffering, the setting of the poem being the speaker's minds occupied with troubling thoughts, the bee box representative of the troubled mind.

Tone of the poem

- ▶ The tone of the poem is calm with the undertone of fear and power play that runs throughout the poem.

conclusion

- ▶ The Arrival Of The Bee Box is an amazing poem by Sylvia Plath. Like most of her major writings, this poem also revolves around the genre of psychological diseases and mental illness. The poem can be understood in a both, literal and metaphorical sense, depending on the perspective of the reader.
- ▶ This skilful composition by Sylvia Plath brilliantly portrays the horrifying experience of a person suffering from depression and anxiety. The notions of helplessness, fear, anger, defeat, hope and strength are articulately conveyed through vivid imagery and excellent use of metaphor.