



Fall 10-27-2021

## Fata '22 Determines the Work of Sylvia Plath to be 'Zany'

Kailee Galloway  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Galloway, Kailee, "Fata '22 Determines the Work of Sylvia Plath to be 'Zany'" (2021). *News and Events*. 4106.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/4106>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at The Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



# Fata '22 Determines the Works of Sylvia Plath to be 'Zany'

October 27, 2021

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — As a part of her 2021 Eckley Fellowship Project, “\_Plath: Confronting the Tone Policing of Sylvia Plath,” Katie Fata '22 utilized aesthetic categorization of ‘zany’ to redefine the tone of Plath in modern terms.

As one of the five 2021 Eckley Scholars, Fata was given a stipend to pursue her project under the faculty mentorship of Robert Harrington Endowed Professor of English Micheal Theune and through the [Robert S. and Nell B. Eckley Summer Scholars and Artists Program](#).

Fata said, “I determined in my research that the best way to describe Plath was an unexpected way: a modern term works best for a writer that represents a time in the past.”

As an English major and a woman, Fata was interested in the works of and about Plath. Her initial inspiration came from the critical scholarship and polarized descriptions of Plath she felt didn’t fully describe her works.

“The reactionary critical pieces have created a discussion of Sylvia Plath that doesn’t seem to represent her work at all anymore — critics are responding to each other rather than to her,” Fata said. “My intention with this project was to interact with these arguments and find out if there is a more comprehensive way to describe the work of Sylvia Plath that didn’t resort to calling her tone ‘melancholic’ simply because she was a woman writing about darker themes. To do this, I set out to explore what tone actually is and the nuanced ways it appears in literary works.”

Through reviewing Plath’s works and researching tone, Fata began her project with a focus on what the tone of Plath’s works were; however, as her research progressed, Fata revised her original research question into one focused on aesthetic categorization.

“Once I familiarized myself with tone and aesthetic categories, I returned to Plath’s poetry, but with an informed and researched question: what can Plath’s work be defined as? Once I decided on that category, I was able to create a hypothesis and participate in specific research in order to analyze her work,” Fata stated.

‘Zany’ was the category Fata landed on. The zany is featured in theorist Sianne Ngai’s book *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Interesting, Cute*. Fata defines the zany as embodied by “a worker, someone who is precariously close to the edge, constantly attempting success and constantly failing.”

Fata continued, “Reading Plath as zany allows for her tone to exist as something more nuanced than a word like ‘melancholic.’ Her failure to do her jobs — writer, mother, wife, breadwinner, among others — made her poetry more visceral as it shoves the affect of failure in front of the reader and doesn’t let them look away.”

Fata is in the final stages of editing and polishing her project which will be formatted as an article that approximates the length of a graduate dissertation. She plans to continue her project by pursuing honors research next semester and then seeking publication afterwards.



Katie Fata '22

By Kailee Galloway '23

## Read about other 2021 Eckley Scholars:

- [Joey Kiper '22 – “Stimulating Membrane Repair in Neuroblastoma Cells that are Compromised by APP Overexpression”](#)
- [Anjali Patel '23 – “Investigating the Development of the Vascular System in Bird Eyes”](#)
- [Isabel Sperry '22 – “Challenging Narrative Form and Prescriptive Messaging through Ceramic Storytelling”](#)

Eckley Scholar Jenna Ney '22 is studying abroad in Budapest, Hungary, this semester.