



**Sylvia Plath's Literary Works:  
A Psychological View**

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# Sylvia Plath's Literary Works

## A Psychological View

أعمال أدبية لسيلفيا بلاث: وجهة نظر نفسية

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إلى جامعة الشرق الأوسط

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## Authorization

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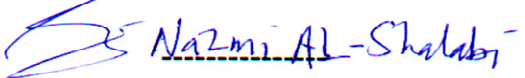
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## Committee Decision

This thesis has been discussed under its title "Sylvia Plath's Poetry:  
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Researcher

## **Dedication**

There are a number of people without whom this thesis might not have been written, and to whom I am greatly indebted.

To my parents who taught me beyond the darkness there is always light and hope. To my father, to whom I harbor love and appreciation throughout all my life, for he incites me to always chase my dreams and to always set my goals especially the academic ones, and teaches me to fulfill my dreams.

To my mother, whom I am indebted to her persistence and constant support and caring, and for her love and continuous efforts.

To my husband whom I am grateful to his existence in my life and being there to motivate me, encourage and love me, and, thus, we work together to realize our dreams.

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This work is finally dedicated to my friends.

Researcher

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**Abstract****Sylvia Plath's Literary Works: A Psychological View****Prepared by**

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The study aims at studying the psychological aspects of the Life of the American poetess and novelist Sylvia Plath which affect her literary production. Analysis will consider three dimensions: her relationship with her father, husband and mother, feminism and psychological therapy dimension that she under went.

The significance of the study summarizes in present a substantial and systematic analysis of a modern writer. The methods and strategies manipulated here can be applied in any serious study. The researcher hopes to develop her knowledge through looking for the technical and artistic stages and manifestations as well as the psychological roots of Plath's problematic situation as a poet.

The researcher selects four works of Sylvia Plath; three volumes: *The Colossus*, *Ariel and Mirror*, and one novel, *The Bell Jar*. These four works are selected because they reveal much about Sylvia Plath, her themes and her linguistic medium. Also they shed illuminating light on the psychological problem in Sylvia Plath's poetry due to experiences and relations with others especially her father and husband.

The study uses the content analysis technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of content. Content analysis is a research tool that focuses on the actual content and internal features.



In conclusion, in Sylvia Plath's poetry, it's clear that such works which are full of past memories of the dead father, appear like a Colossus from time to time. Last of all, in-between the paternal and maternal torturing images, there emerges a new voice which is that of the creative artist, her true self. The imagery she uses in her poetry appears to be a dangerously shifting area of uncertainty and intensive tension. Her poems reflect the search for self in its multiple disguises and the disintegration of the self into pieces, and finally the rebirth of her true self.

## الملخص باللغة العربية

الأعمال الأدبية لسيلفيا بلاث: وجهة نظر نفسية

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تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الجوانب النفسية للشاعرة والروائية الأمريكية سيلفيا بلاث ذات التأثير على مسيرتها الأدبية، حيث تم تحليل هذه الجوانب مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار ثلاثة أبعاد هي: علاقتها مع والدها، وزوجها، وأمها، ونظرتها إلى الحركة النسوية، وأخيراً العلاج النفسي الذي خضعت إليه.

تتلخص أهمية الدراسة في تقديم تحليل جوهري ومنهجي للكاتب المعاصر ، إن الطرق والاستراتيجيات المستخدمة هنا قابلة للتطبيق في أي دراسة جادة، وتأمل الباحثة تطوير معرفتها من خلال النظر والبحث في المراحل التقنية والفنية، بالإضافة إلى الجذور النفسية للشاعرة بلاث.

وقد اختارت الباحثة أربعة أعمال للكاتبة سيلفيا بلاث وهي ثلاثة دواوين شعرية: "الكولوسيس" و"أربيل" و"المرآة"، ورواية واحدة "بيل جار"، حيث تتناول هذه الأعمال حياة الأدبية سيلفيا بلاث بدرجة كبيرة، كما تبين الجوانب النفسية في شعرها وكتاباتنا والتي تعود إلى تجاربها وعلاقتها مع الآخرين وخاصة مع والدها وزوجها.

تستخدم الدراسة أسلوب الوصف الكمي والمنهجي والموضوعي. فتحليل المحتوى هو أداة بحثية تركز على المحتوى الفعلي والخصائص الداخلية.

في الختام يتضح من أعمال سيليفيا بلاث الأدبية أنها ممثلة بالحديث عن الذكريات الماضية لوالدها الراحل تظهر بشكل كبير من وقت لآخر في الكولوسوس ، وأن الفترات الفاصلة لصور تعذيب الأم والأب تندمج في صوت جديد يعكس ذكاء الشاعرة وإبداعها في التعبير عن حقيقة ذاتها. ويتضح التصور الذي استخدمته الشاعرة في شعرها كمرحلة انتقال خطيرة من التوتر وعدم اليقين. كما تعكس أشعارها بحثها عن ذاتها في مظاهرها المتعددة ، وتحلل أجزاء النفس إلى شظايا، وأخيرا إعادة إحياء ذاتها الحقيقية.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1-1 Introduction

This research explores the literary life of an exceptional American woman, writer, novelist and poetess... etc. Sylvia Plath (1932 –1963) became a rich and attractive target for critics and analysis of her own life and literary works. In fact, her tragic suicide at the top of sparkling fame contributed to the dilemmatic elements of Sylvia's own life, consequently adding more suspense and provocation and stimulating writing more and more about Sylvia Plath and her life and literary works.

The researcher is no exception to this tendency among English Literature students conducting research. Thus, Sylvia Plath becomes the theme of the current study, consisting in approaching selected works from psychological perspective.

The poetry and writings of Sylvia Plath occupy a special position in American poetry due to its nature, topics, treatment and imagery. Her life and bitter experiences have affected her poetry and the presentation of her material. She is widely recognized as one of the most important American poets of the twentieth century. She was married to the English poet Ted Hughes, and together they had two children, Frieda and Nicholas. Plath committed suicide in London in 1963, and was buried in the churchyard at Heptonstall, West Yorkshire (Stahlberg, 2006).

The major event in this short career is of course her pathetic suicide, an event that has been caused and precipitated by circumstances related to her family life (especially her relationship with her father, and unsuccessful marriage to Ted Hughes).

Both father and husband caused much grief and pain to Sylvia who has transformed this distress into poems are full of pain, challenge and anger.

Given these facts, it is not surprising to realize that Plath belongs to those confessional poets who are feminists as well such as Anne Sexton, W.D. Snodgrass (Board of Regents of University of Wisconsin, 1996).

Plath is one of those feminists who have sought to represent the suffering of women in a particular world. Focusing on feminist issues through the lens of her own experience, she was equally driven by a desire to achieve this while coping with a desperate lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem. The loss of her father at an early age contributed to her fears of abandonment and insecurity.

The point that will receive much emphasis throughout the present study is her psychological state and its drastic consequences. Nearly all her poems convey a sense of melancholy, gloom and death. In a case like this, poetry is a kind of temporary bulwark against mounting despair and pain

## **1-2 Statement of Problem**

This research aims to shed light on the problem of Sylvia Plath's poetry, raising many questions about the writer, her experiences and relations with others especially her father and husband. Due to the highly painful situations she finds herself involved in, Plath resorts to poetry and one novel (*The Bell Jar*) to find some relief for those intolerable pains. Thus, her poetry reveals much about her as a writer. It also reveals her themes and linguistic medium. The study will concentrate on these points.

This study will highlight the excessive sensitivity of Sylvia's character and her psychological attitudes throughout all her life. Her childhood's stage affected her and

was reflected in her literary works in early stages and after the marriage to Ted Hughes. In fact, her relationship with her husband and the unpredictable developments in the relationship especially after Ted's betrayal with another woman led to drastic consequences which ended with the suicidal act of Sylvia.

The problematic issue raised here was how two poets could not understand and support each other, in spite of the high sensitivity they both enjoyed. They both enjoyed good reputation and witnessed the success of their works. However, they did not succeed together especially in healing the inner wounds of Sylvia's past.

The estrangement feelings, which Sylvia experienced and her isolation from society added to the inner torture she experienced and accumulated in herself. Melancholy and depressed tone here were reflected in her works especially the last ones, which interjected with the ambitions and liberation she determined to achieve. All added disappointments to her creative soul and contributed to the tragedy of her life.

### **1-3 Research Questions**

The researcher attempts to answer the following main question from which a number of sub questions follow:

What is the comprehensive view of the poetry of the American Sylvia Plath?

The following sub-questions will serve and lead to unfolding the ambiguity and disputable issues that accompanied Sylvia Plath's life and works:

1. What is the rationale behind choosing Sylvia Plath's recurrent topics and imagery as well as her characteristic style?
2. What are the conflicts of Sylvia Plath, which began with her relationship with her father and continued with her husband?

3. Comment on Sylvia Plath's sense of oppression and her battle to come to grips with the issues of this power imbalance!
4. What is the inner struggle of Sylvia Plath that many women face in a male-dominated society?

### **1-4 Research Hypotheses**

This study will be a psychoanalytical study in which the researcher will attempt to detect the relationships between the writings of Sylvia Plath and her life.

In fact, the researcher hypothesizes that her life can be decoded by means of analyzing her literary works. The hypotheses of this study are:

1. Sylvia Plath's recurrent topics and imagery as well as her characteristic style will be shown through her psychological state
2. Inner conflicts in Sylvia Plath's personality began with her relationship with her father and continued with her husband.
3. Sylvia Plath has her own independent feelings and attitudes toward oppression.
4. Sylvia Plath, like any other woman, struggled in a male-dominated society and suffered from this experience.

### **1-5 Research Aims**

As stated earlier, the current study will choose some of Sylvia Plath's literary works and analyze them in terms of psychoanalysis.

The major objective of this study is to provide a detailed and comprehensive view of the verse of the American Sylvia Plath, apart from giving analysis and appreciation of the individual poems and their possible meanings and interpretations

through stressing the biographical sides in order to verify the hypotheses already mentioned.

This study will analyze and examine research hypotheses to answer research questions by selecting three major works written in very critical stages in Sylvia Plaths' life, namely: *Ariel*, *The Colossus*, *The Mirror* and *The Bell Jar*. The wholly and comprehensive perceptions and analysis of these works will prevent the distraction of thoroughly detailed psychoanalysis of each work. Thus, conclusions will generally cover the different aspects of Sylvia's life and personality as well as her literary works which are the main issue in the present study.

## **1- 6 Research Methodology**

- **Study Method:**

The study will use content analysis technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the material in question. Content analysis is a research tool that focuses on the actual content and internal features of media. It is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts and to quantify their presence in an objective manner.

Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, and conversations; advertisement and internal conversation also fall under this category., informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language.



To conduct a content analysis on a text, the text is decoded, or broken down into manageable categories on a variety of levels: word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme. Then, it's examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. The results are then used to make inferences about the messages within the text(s), the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are part.

- **Study Sample:**

The researcher has selected three works of Sylvia Plath and a novel, three volumes: *The Colossus*, *Ariel*, *The Mirror* and one novel, *The Bell Jar*. These three works were selected because they reveal much about the writer (Sylvia Plath), her themes and her linguistic medium. Also they shed illuminating light on the psychological problem in Sylvia Plath's poetry due to experiences and relations with others, especially her father and husband.

## **1-7 Significance of the Study**

It is hoped that the present study will present a substantial and systematic analysis of a modern writer. Literature review could be beneficial for all those concerned in this field, including Arabic literature. The methods and strategies adopted here can be applied in any serious study.

By means of study, the researcher hopes to develop her knowledge through looking for the technical and artistic stages and manifestations as well as the psychological roots of Plath's problematic situation as a poet.

## 1-8 Definition of Terms

Below are the major terms which will be dominant throughout papers in this research:

- **Poetry:** a form of literary art in which language is used for its aesthetic and evocative qualities in addition to, or in lieu of, its apparent meaning. Poetry may be written independently, as discrete poems, or may occur in conjunction with other arts, as in verse drama, hymns, lyrics, or prose poetry (Tizhoosh & Sahba & Dara, 2008).

- **Psychological root:** the study of mental awareness or influence of external objects without the interaction of a known physical means (Hergenhahn, 2005,).

- **Artistic style:** a characteristic or group of characteristics that we can identify as constant, recurring, or coherent. Moreover, it is the sum of constant, recurring or coherent traits identified with a certain individual or group (Stanfield, 2010).

- **Morbid:** Characterized by preoccupation with unwholesome thoughts or feelings (Hoad, 2010). It is the condition of a patient's personality prior to the definitive onset of a disorder such as schizophrenia. (Cooper, 2003)

- **Psychopath:** a personality disorder characterized by an abnormal lack of empathy combined with strongly amoral conduct, masked by an ability to appear outwardly normal (Hare, 1993).

- **Trauma:** Any injury, whether it's physically or emotionally inflicted. "Trauma" has both a medical and a psychiatric definition. Medically, "trauma" refers to a serious or critical bodily injury, wound, or shock. This definition is often associated with trauma medicine practiced in emergency rooms and represents a popular view of the term. In psychiatry, "trauma" has assumed a different meaning and refers to an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects (Medical Dictionary, online).

- **Feminism:** a political, cultural, and economic movement that aims at establishing greater rights and legal protection for women. Feminism includes some of the sociological theories and philosophies concerned with the issues of gender difference (Heywood & Drake, 1997).

- **Paranoia:** a thought process heavily influenced by anxiety or fear, often to the point of irrationality and delusion. Paranoid thinking typically includes persecutory beliefs concerning a perceived threat towards oneself. Historically, this characterization was used to describe any delusional state (Kantor, 2004).

## **1-9 Study Limitations**

The limitation of this study is attributed to the nature of methodology and the study sample.

**Time:** The time of the study will be limited to Sylvia Plath's lifetime 1932-1963.

**Place:** The place of the study will be limited to Sylvia Plath's life in America and England.

**Sample selected:** The sample will be confined to four works: *Ariel*, *The Colossus*, *The Mirror* and *The Bell Jar*.

**Objectives:** The study will exclusively concentrate on the psychological and literary sides of the works in question.

## **1-10 Review of Literature**

1. McNay (1984) conducted a study entitled *Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar and the Problem of Critical Response*. This study discusses the criticism and reviews of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The major criticism and reviews of the study demonstrate the ways in which preconceived assumptions about autobiographical facts, cultural milieu, and ironic voice inform, and perhaps to a great extent, determine responses to the novel and characters. The ways in which these assumptions work themselves out in readings parallel the ways in which Plath's own narrative limits, defines, and controls the life and responses of Esther, her protagonist, in the novel. The prevailing ironic tone permeates both the novel and the reader's response. The author's embodiment of the senses forces the reader to adopt an empathetic attitude towards what goes on in the novel.

2. Budick (1987) conducted a study entitled *The Feminist Discourse of Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar*. This study argues that Sylvia Plath not only perceives the world as competing male and female languages, but attempts to write in the feminine. It discusses how *The Bell Jar* might define, as a solution to sociological and psychological problems of women, a language and art to secure women against male domination.

3. **Bonds (1990)** conducted a study entitled *The Separative Self in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar*. This study views Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* as dramatizing the collusion between the notion of a separate self (autonomous subject) and the cultural forces that have oppressed women. The pervasive imagery of dismemberment conveys the alienation and self-alienation leading to Esther Greenwood's breakdown and suicide attempt; the recovery which Plath constructs for her heroine merely reenacts the dismemberment obsessively imaged in the first half of the novel. This "recovery" defines the rationality of the self and leaves Esther to define herself unwittingly and unwillingly in relation to culturally- ingrained stereotypes of women. Literary critics have brought to the novel the same – about- the- self- assumptions which inform Plath's book. Thus, they have failed to recognize what the novel has to teach about the destructive effects -at least for women- of our cultural commitment to that model.

4. **Kuo (1996)** conducted a study entitled *Trauma and Paternal Loss in Sylvia Plath's Poetry*. The study mainly explored her relationship with her father and how her father's death has influenced her in the development of her character. The study showed that her father's death affected her deeply and created an absence that she felt for the rest of her life. Sylvia knew quite well that her husband was the double of her lost father. Her divorce from Ted Hughes triggered the memory of being abandoned, and the old and new pain overwhelmed her. Sylvia Plath's life represents the experience of an individual traumatized by her past and lives the repetition of her own trauma as it shapes her life. The poems are the traces of Sylvia's scars, old and new alike, crying out of pain and wound. In living, she is wounded to death. The intolerable trauma of paternal loss which Sylvia Plath has never worked through during her life leads her to

find the replacement for her loss, which is her husband. When Ted Hughes ultimately disappoints and denounces her, death seems to be the only option for her.

5. **Runco (1998)** conducted a study entitled *Suicide and Creativity: The Case of Sylvia Plath*. This study explores the idea that although much can be learned by viewing Sylvia Plath's poetry as an expression of her thinking, additional insights are afforded by reversing the typical direction of effect and by viewing Plath's situation, and in particular her writing which is the outcome of her depression. Consistent with this interpretation is Plath's huge investment in writing. This may have contributed to the sensitivity that predisposed her to stress and depression. This perspective is tied to the existing creativity literature and interwoven and contrasted with existing descriptions of Plath's work and tragic death.

6. **Khalifeh (1999)** conducted a study entitled *A "Normal" Split Personality: A Feminist Study of Sylvia Plath*. This study showed that the speaking subject in Sylvia Plath's works is a contradictory, divided, split subject. She is given different dialogic choices which express different ideologies and attitudes, be they conscious or unconscious. Among the mixture of these voices, the speaking "I" is given a revolutionary voice, called here the 'other', which enables her to stress her feminine identity.

7. **Kimura (2001)** conducted a study entitled *Sylvia Plath's Mourning and Creativity*. This study concentrated on the connection between mourning and creativity in Sylvia Plath's work. Through creative activity, one can restore lost internal and external objects and lost happiness. This study argues that Plath's work is an example of

Melanie Klein's idea that artists' creative products represent the process of mourning. For Plath, art -- in her case, writing -- was a compensation for loss, especially the loss of her father. She seems to have continued writing as an exercise in mourning and reparation intended to regain not only her lost father but also her inner peace which was lost when her father died. Through her writing, Plath attempted to enrich her ego with the father-object.

8. **Wijanarka (2006)** conducted a study entitled *The Aspects of Modernism in Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus'*. The study discussed the aspects of modernism in the intrinsic elements of Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus". Apart from the fact that this poem is biographically related to the author, this study observes how the spirit of modernism is expressed in "Lady Lazarus". The results show that there are five points related to the intrinsic elements revealing the spirit of modernism in the poem. These points are related to rhyme, diction, metaphor, theme, and moral teaching.

9. **Sharif (2006)** conducted a study entitled *Ambivalence: The Divided Self in Sylvia Plath's Poetry*. The study discussed ambivalence, mixed good and bad feelings about particular entity, individual or circumstance, became a ruling passion in Sylvia Plath's life. These states of ambivalence and breakdown are closely dealt with in her poems. Confessional poets usually reveal their own personal experiences without straining excruciating sentiment. Sylvia Plath, one of the 1960s most influential confessional poets used the same resentment and anguish that developed from her personal grief as the subject of many of her poems. Plath is well-known among the celebrities for her ambivalence: schizophrenic, schizoid and paranoid. As an obsessive-compulsive neurotic, ambivalence dominated both her works as well as her life. This

ambivalent personality of Plath made her and her works obscure and bizarre to the readers. Many of her poems bear the evidence of narcissism, self-hatred, deep attachment and simultaneously deep hatred towards her dear and near ones. This study is an endeavor to interpret this complex ambivalent personality of Plath in light of her poems, her journals and her letters where she clearly confesses all her neurotic obsessed activities directly, honestly and sincerely without any hesitation.

**10. Ghasemi (2007)** conducted a study entitled *Reflections of Self and Other in Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" Imagery*. This study aims to discuss how Plath's poetry reflects many aspects of her personality. Sylvia Plath's recurrent employment of the images of "mirror," "moon," and "candles" indicates the connotative significance which she invests in the imagery and symbolism concerned with self-reflection. Essentially, Plath's use of reflective objects and images exhibits her persona's search for self-recognition. While experiencing a conflict between rejection and acceptance of "self" and "other's" definition of identity and autonomous perception, the woman artist endeavours to achieve self-engendering by refuting the objectified identity imposed on her by the male-dominated culture. This study concentrates on Plath's use of reflective images which imply her process of arriving at a liberative and realistic definition of the female self.

**11. Maple (2009)** conducted a study entitled *The Intersection of Feminism and Disability Theory in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar*. The study discussed one effect of the increasing interest in disability as an identity category over the past few decades. Although Sylvia Plath's 1963 novel *The Bell Jar* is not typically read from the perspective of disability theory, Esther's identity is shaped not just by her experiences



as a woman, but as a disabled woman. For this reason, Esther's experiences cannot be fully explained by either feminism or disability theory independently; some combination of the two is needed. While scholars have long advocated the lens of feminism in reading *The Bell Jar*, the implications of disability theory for the novel have not been explored.

**12. Sharma (2009)** conducted a study entitled "*Terrible Fish in Sylvia Plath's mirrors: Perception and Relevance of Mirror Imagery*". The study discussed the distinguished features of "the Mirror" and how Sylvia showed her vision through its characters. It showed the mirror imagery thus signifies the consciousness of woman speaker who verbalizes the creative process of woman artist when she initiates into the inner world in search of her true self. Also, the female protagonist in Plath's "Mirror" identifies herself with the inanimate mirror, which faithfully reflects whatever comes within the line of its vision. She has got no identity of her own except those assigned to her by her male counterpart such as wife, mother, daughter and living doll to cater for the needs of her master who is "Lord of mirror." Freedman points out that this mirror is a symbol of female "passivity" and "subjugation" and that "figure gazing at and reflected in the mirror is neither the child nor the man the woman-as-mirror habitually reflects, but a woman." She feels that in this patriarchal world she is a powerless and passive creature who is expected to have everlasting beauty and youth.

### **Distinguishing Features of the Study in comparison with the Previous Studies**

After reading and examining previous studies related to the subject of this study, the researcher found that the most important characteristics which distinguish this study from the other previous studies can be stated as follows:

- Some of the previous studies such as Wijanarka's- *The Aspects of Modernism in Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus'* (2006) and Ghasemi's- *Reflections of Self and Other in Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" Imagery* (2007) concentrated on analyzing aspects of modernism in the intrinsic elements of Sylvia Plath's poetry they discussed how Plath's poetry shows the inner dynamism through the analysis of poems. All these aims were discussed in different poems of the current study such as: "Lady Lazarus" and "mirror".

## Chapter Two

### Sylvia Plath's Life and Works

#### 2-1 Overview

Sylvia Plath is one of the most prominent and recognized leading figures in twentieth-century American literature and culture. In her lifetime she published only one collection of poems *The Colossus* and one novel *The Bell Jar*. After her death, another magnificent collection of poems titled *Ariel* that included her edgy and most creative poems as well her *Letters Home* and *Journals* which have established her literary position as one of the age's most important and influential writers. Thus, her writings received the attention of literary critics and scholars who discussed and analyzed them from different perspectives and offered new valuable and interesting interpretations. Indeed, she became a favorable subject for literary studies.

In this chapter, I intended to shed light on Sylvia Plath's life and her nurturing and how all of this accumulated and affected her psychological formation of personality and character. I'll provide some psychoanalysis of the events of her life that contributed to the formulation of her perspectives and ideas articulated explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, I propose to show feminism tendencies and perspectives in Sylvia's writings.

#### 2-2 Family Background:

Sylvia Plath is the daughter of Otto Plath and Aurelia Schober. Both parents originate from German roots. Both parents played a significant role in shaping and developing Sylvia's skill of writing and her determinant character. Regarding the father,

Otto Plath, as Wagner-Martin (2008) points out, he immigrated to New York City from Germany in his early adolescence. He learned the English Language and excelled at it speaking a clear American accent by joining English classes during his primary education. Also, Otto Plath spoke German, French, and Polish. Offered a scholarship by the Lutheran Ministry, he moved to Wisconsin where he majored in classical languages. This scholarship was stopped when he decided to be a minister and all support of any kind was withheld.

Otto Plath, a determined determinant and smart individual, started teaching at Boston University, where he taught German. Then, he won a fellowship to study MS and ScD from Harvard. Otto was attracted to Aurelia who was a smart and avid reader with a tenacious mind.

He independently pursued advanced studies in languages, biology, and zoology. Eventually, he received a doctorate from Harvard in 1928 for a research on the life cycle of the bumblebee (O'Reilly, 2010).

Wagner-Martin (2008) notes that Aurelia was a child of German family and that her primary language was German. Other resources state that Sylvia's parents were Austrian (O'Reilly, 2010). However, she studied English and was an accomplished teacher of English and German at secondary level. She was a selective reader, and her mind is filled with literary masterpieces by Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Bronte, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, etc. After a year and half of courtship, she was married to Otto Plath at the age of twenty-two. Aurelia was a good assistant to her husband and offered him a great help on his doctoral dissertation which was published 1934. Both of them composed a long chapter on "Insect Societies".

When Sylvia was eight and Warren was five, Otto, who had been ailing for some time, developed gangrene in one foot after minor trauma and was found to have late stage untreated diabetes mellitus. It transpired that he had neglected his condition because of a conviction that it was cancer. The leg was amputated, but three weeks later, while he was still in hospital, he suffered a pulmonary embolism and died. The circumstances of his illness and death are strongly suggestive of depression, though neither he nor his wife had any recorded psychiatric history (Cooper, 2003). In fact, the death of Sylvia's father, which was later represented in most of her literary works, was the first wound and shock in her life.

Both Aurelia and Otto had two children: Sylvia and her brother Warren. Both children grew in a family environment that promoted and stressed reading books. The children's grandparents, with whom Sylvia spent extended periods of time, also developed the habits of reading about Sylvia. At an early stage of childhood, Aurelia and her parents enriched the words of the children by reading famous interesting stories, limericks, poems and fantasies.

Aurelia had to work hard to ensure good living for her family especially after Otto's death. She had a teaching position at university level in Wellesley. Although she was not well-paid, she believed it was a good means to secure her family. The children experienced an unstable life, for they moved from one school to another when their mother changed her work places.

## 2-3 Sylvia Plath's Biography and the Tragic End of her Life

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1932, being the first child of Otto Plath and his second wife, Aurelia Schober Plath. Otto Plath was forty-seven at the time of his daughter's birth, twenty-one years older than his wife, and a dominant patriarchal presence in the household.

From both parents, Plath seems to have inherited her strong idealism and drive toward self-improvement, and perhaps also an immigrant's sense of the precariousness of worldly success, a sense of its having to be continually renewed and bolstered. As mentioned above, the absence of her father after the surgery, when Sylvia was eight and Warren was five, was a turning-point in the family life. It was deeply engraved in Sylvia's inner self and generated contradictory feelings toward her father which would appear in her poetry later. One side of her poetry blames her father for his carelessness about his health condition and the other demonstrates anger for she thinks he has abandoned her and the family. After the death of Otto Plath, the family moved inland from Winthrop to Wellesley, Massachusetts because of Aurelia's new work. At an early stage, Sylvia Plath showed a brilliant academic career, aspiring with immense discipline and hard work to become the ideal all-round student. In fact, she subordinated her pains to writing.

Plath took an early interest in creative writing and began to publish poetry and short fiction in various magazines, including *Seventeen* and *the Christian Science Monitor*. A precocious and highly-motivated student, Plath attended Smith College on a scholarship beginning in 1950. There she continued to win academic distinctions and was selected in 1953 to serve as a student editor for *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York City (Narbeshuber, 2004).

Apparently, she enjoyed an active social life, which some psychoanalysts considered to be a compensatory action for the pains and fears she tried to keep hidden.

However, Sylvia's editorial experience seemed to be an unpleasant one, and she did not like it. According to O'Reilly (2010), "In June 1953, at the end of her second year at Smith, Plath embarked on a guest editorship for *Mademoiselle* in New York City, together with nineteen other young high achievers from colleges all over the country". She later satirized this period in her strongly autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. Her descriptions of the overwhelming summer heat of the city, the exhausting routine of hard work and socializing, and the competitive cattiness of the young women with whom she was thrown, show that Plath did not enjoy her stint on *Mademoiselle* as much as she felt she ought to have, but was left drained by the experience. On returning home to Wellesley, she was dismayed to discover that she had not been accepted for Frank O'Connor's summer writing class at Harvard. At loose ends in Wellesley, suffering badly from insomnia, and panicking at her inability to impose a disciplined routine on herself, Plath began to slip into depression (O'Reilly, 2010).

Consequently, the mother called the family doctor who prescribed sleeping pills and referred her to a psychiatrist, who recommended electroconvulsive therapy after a brief consultation. The Electric Convulsive Therapy was a horrible and terrific experience in her early life, which constitutes the torment patients experience in *The Bell Jar*.

An event worth mentioning is Sylvia's first suicidal attempt. On 24 August 1953, she hid herself in the family basement and took a massive overdose of sleeping pills. Having vomited up a large quantity of the pills, she lay undiscovered in a comatose state

for two days, while the police searched the surrounding area for her. She was eventually discovered and brought to the psychiatric wing of Massachusetts General Hospital. Her physical health was recovered, but the severity of her mental condition became clear, and she was transferred to McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts. She remained at McLean (whose other illustrious literary patients had included Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton) until February 1954, when she was judged fit to return to Smith. The Freudian analysis she underwent as part of her treatment at McLean had a profound influence on her writing. Plath's artistic debt to her analysis, and the rather programmatic narrative version of the traumatic events of her life with which it seemed to furnish her, remain controversial aspects of her biography (O'Reilly, 2010). In fact, this experience changed the nature of the relationship with her mother whom she blamed for exposing her to the terrific ECT experience. Further, this experience was the beginning of the inner collapse state of mind. She needed someone to help her correct her concepts and understanding of psychological inner state and concepts. This occurred later in 1958, while living in Boston with her husband, Ted Hughes. Plath voluntarily reentered analysis with her McLean psychiatrist, Dr. Ruth Beuscher, and further refined her own interpretation of the Freudian "family romance".

Success has not always been coupled with happiness in Sylvia's life. Vanspanckeren explained that the success of the only novel written by Sylvia *The Bell Jar* (1963) aggravated unresolved psychological problems evoked in her highly-readable novel. Some of these problems were personal, while others arose from her sense of repressive attitudes toward women in the 1950s. Among these were the beliefs—shared by many women themselves—that women should not show anger or ambitiously pursue a career, and instead find fulfillment attending to their husbands and



children. Professionally successful women like Plath felt that they lived a contradiction. In her only novel, it is noticed that "the struggle to shape her mature life becomes the plot of Esther Greenwood's narrative in *The Bell Jar*, a novel filled with the woman protagonist's fears of never finding a suitable career, a worthy husband, or her own mental health" (Wagner-Martin, 2010,p.9).

O'Reilly (2010) stated that in 1962 Plath and Hughes separated acrimoniously after Plath's discovery that Hughes had begun an affair with Assia Wevill, wife of the young Canadian poet David Wevill.

Sylvia was alone with her children in Devon. However, she entered the most productive phase of her creative life. For example, between September and December of 1962, she produced as many as forty lyric poems of immense power, often writing two in a day. As previously suggested, she subordinated the pain and depression to writing.

In December, Plath seemed to be tired of her enforced isolation in Devon, but exultant at her creative breakthrough, so she moved back to London with her children, where she continued writing poems, but with less ferocity than the initial outburst of the autumn. She was probably working on a second novel, which dealt with the subject of her marriage. The shocking news of Sylvia's ending her life occurred in the morning of 11 February 1963; Sylvia Plath committed suicide in London. Vanspanckeren (2002) described this traumatic event that occurred "during a winter of extreme cold" both the weather and cold inner self" p. 3, Isolated and desperate, Plath worked against the clock to produce a series of stunning poems before she committed suicide by gassing herself in her kitchen" (Vanspanckeren, 2002, 164). Before she gassed herself, she said farewell

to her children, prepared for breakfast them, and closed windows firmly, so that she had no hope of being rescued. Apparently, she lived the utmost despair and frustration in her life so that she was determined to face death.

Vanspanckeren (2002) claims that Sylvia's poems were collected two years after her death in *Ariel* whose introduction was written by Lowell who noted her poetry's rapid development from the time she first attended his poetry classes in 1958 (Vanspanckeren, 2002). For example, In "The Applicant" (1966), Plath exposes the emptiness of the current role of wife (who is reduced to an inanimate "it"), which reflects the underestimation of women's lives and the criticism of women who just talk and talk:

*A living doll, everywhere you look.*

*It can sew, it can cook.*

*It can talk, talk, talk.*

## **2-4 Literary Works:**

Sylvia Plath has written many works in prose and verse since her early childhood. As mentioned above, she was raised in a family that encouraged reading which was the best way to gain the parents' love. Remarkably, she wrote short stories at school. "Heat", one of three early-written stories by Sylvia, was written when she was 16. In this story, protagonists are women, and the atmosphere reflects boredom, depression, and the lack of promise to their lives. In "The Attic View", for instance, the protagonist is a nameless woman whose presence is as unnoticed as her death (Wagner-Martin, 2010, 8).

Sylvia's prose works are similar to those written in verse in that they are both worked by intense self-consciousness, accusatory despair, disquieting expressions of futility and frustration. Plath is often considered to be a confessional poet, though her deeply personal lamentations often achieve universality through mythic allusion and archetypal symbolism. Viewed as being a cathartic response to her divided personae as an artist, mother, and wife, Plath's vivid and often shocking verse reveals the psychological torment associated with the feelings of alienation, inadequacy, and abandonment.

Her semi-autobiographic novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) and highly charged verse in *The Colossus* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965) have won widespread critical appreciation and continue to attract scholarly analysis. "*The Collected Poems*", a collection of her poems published posthumously in (1981) was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1982. It is worth mentioning that *The Bell Jar* was published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas (O'Reilly, 2010).

Generally speaking, Plath has an immense influence on American literature as a self-possessed visionary of her art. The *Ariel* poems were collected and published after Sylvia's death by her husband. The volume included poems written for the most part in the last five months of her life. The study evoked many questions about her life, the effect of family on children development, and future attitudes and behavior. Further, she set an example of a rebellious and intelligent female in a male society. She was not satisfied with the idea of being marginalized; she didn't surrender the same way other women did.

Sylvia Plath focuses in her poems on the Psychiatric Perspective. This perspective focuses on the writer's mind, the creative process, psychological types, principles present within works of literature, and the effects of literature upon its readers. Psychoanalysis relies on the works of two psychoanalysts: Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Substantially, the core of psychoanalysis depends on the analysis of Freud's levels of awareness: the unconscious, conscious, and moral judgment. The other method of psychoanalysis application focuses on studying the human stages according to Lacan, the following are the stages and examples from "Daddy" poem:

a- Imaginary stage: includes child's incomplete sense of self but without need or lack of fulfillment.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
 In the picture I have of you,  
 A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
 But no less a devil for that, no not  
 Any less the black man who

b- Symbolic stage: includes child's entrance into symbols, language, cultural norms and power.

And a head in the freakish Atlantic  
 Where it pours bean green over blue  
 In the waters off the beautiful Nauset.  
 I used to pray to recover you.  
 Ach, du.

c- Real stage: includes an unattainable stage representing all that a person is not and does not have.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time---  
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,  
Ghastly statue with one gray toe  
Big as a Frisco seal

In Freud's work, sublimation is a process in which the libido is channeled into apparently non-sexual activities such as artistic creation and intellectual work. Sublimation thus functions as a socially acceptable escape valve for excess sexual energy which would otherwise have to be discharged in socially unacceptable forms (perverse behavior) or in neurotic symptoms. The logical conclusion of such a view is that complete sublimation would mean the end of all perversion and all neurosis. However, many points remain unclear in Freud's account of sublimation. While Lacan takes up the concept of sublimation in his seminar of 1959-60, he follows Freud in emphasizing the fact that the element of social recognition is central to the concept, only insofar as the drives are diverted towards this dimension of shared social values that they can be said to be sublimated. This dimension of shared social values which allows Lacan to tie in the concept of sublimation with his discussion of ethics (Nobus, 2000).

It is this dimension of shared social values which allows Lacan to tie in the concept of sublimation with his discussion of ethics. However, Lacan's account of sublimation also differs from Freud's on a number of points:

1. Freud's account implies that perverse sexuality as a form of direct satisfaction of the drive is possible, and that sublimation is only necessary because this direct form is prohibited by society. Lacan however rejects the concept of a zero

degree of satisfaction (Zizek, 1991), arguing that perversion not simply a brute natural means of discharging the libido, but a highly structured relation to the drives which are already, in themselves, linguistic rather than biological forces.

2. Whereas Freud believed that complete sublimation might be possible for some particularly defined or cultured people, Lacan argues that 'complete sublimation is not possible for the individuals'.
3. In Freud's account, sublimation involves the redirection of the drive to a different (non sexual) object. In Lacan's account, however, what changes is not the object but its position in the structure of fantasy. In other words, sublimation does not involve directing the drive to a different object, but rather changing the nature of the object to which the drive was already directed, a change of object in itself, something which made possible because the drive is 'already deeply marked by the articulation of signifier'. The sublime quality of an object is thus not due to any intrinsic property of the object itself, but simply an effect of the object's position in the symbolic structure of fantasy. To be more specific, sublimation objects in the position of the THING. The Lacanian formula for sublimation is re-locates thus that 'it raises an object...to the dignity of the Thing' (Lacan, 1992).
4. While Lacan follows Freud in linking sublimation with creative and ART, he complicates this by also linking it with the DEATH DRIVE. Several reasons can be adduced to explain this. Firstly, the concept of the death drive is itself seen as a product of Freud's own sublimation. Secondly, the death drive is not only a 'destruction drive', but also 'a will to create from zero'. Thirdly, the sublime object, through being elevated to the dignity of the Thing, exerts a power of fascination which leads ultimately to death and destruction (Lacan, 1992).

Freud's psychoanalysis is of great interest because it relates personality and psychological interpretation to life events and social context and background in an attempt to explain psychological issues and human behavior. Thus, "psychoanalysis became immensely influential within and outside academia, shaping not only psychology and the other mental health professions but also art, literature, law, politics, education, anthropology, and myriad other fields" (Bornstein, 2005: p.324).

Lacan's "return to Freud" emphasizes a renewed attention to the original texts of Freud and a radical critique of Ego psychology and Melanie Klein and Object relations theory. Lacan thought that Freud's ideas of "slips of the tongue," jokes, and the interpretation of dreams all emphasized the agency of language in subjective constitution. In "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud," he argues that "the unconscious is structured like a language." The unconscious is not a primitive or archetypal part of the mind separate from the conscious, linguistic ego, he explained, but rather a formation as complex and structurally-sophisticated as consciousness itself. One consequence of the unconscious being structured like a language is that the self is denied any point of reference to which to be "restored" following trauma or a crisis of identity (Evans, 1996).

This is reflected in Plath's personal experiences since her early childhood when her father died complicated her inner distress. Also, the absence of her mother for long times when she moved to find a new job and the unstable life she experienced, deprived Sylvia from having an adult or mature guiding through her life and psychological development. All those experiences left a negative effect on her. Further, the neglect of community of women's rights and the inequality of opportunities for male and female grew in her irritated self. Exposed to betrayal by her beloved husband intensified her

psychological disorders. Further, the experience of ECT intensified her inner problems and increased her inner torture. In one of her poems, she compared the metal electric pot on head during ECT to the holocaust. Even the symbolism in her poems and other works reflected her psychological unstable personality. Many of these symbols permeated her dreams. According to Freud (1931), the source of dream-contents materials originates from three main sources, among them " that it has at its disposal the earliest impressions of our childhood, and brings to light details from this period of life, which, again, seem trivial to us, and which in waking life were believed to have been long since forgotten" (Freud. 1931, p. 51).

According to Freud psychoanalysis, the Electra complex interpreted her longing to her father. This led to repetition of the images of the dad and father figure in most of her works. A representative example of Electra Complex in Sylvia's works is, "Daddy" which was written in 1962, in which there is an angry tirade against the father who has deserted her, a Freudian drama of repetition-compulsion in which the speaker resurrects her vampiric father only to kill him again in a contradictory attempt to efface the original source of her psychological pain. O'Reilly (2010) claims that in Plath's poetry and prose, Otto Plath was to become a potent symbol of absence, signifying the impossibility of lasting love, of God, or of any real meaning in life. The death of her father was a shock from which Plath never properly recovered.

In fact, her relation and feelings toward her father are contradictory. They varied between love and yearning and sadness for his absence. At other times, Sylvia showed anger and blame for his death which he brought to himself by refusing visiting doctors that complicated his illness.



Her problem developed after the betrayal of her husband. In fact, Sylvia suffered from depression. In fact she was a manic-depression (Hargrove, 1994). Diagnosis of Sylvia's state according to "Dr Slater's appraisal was based on a binary model of affective illness, in which the terms endogenous and reactive—or alternatively psychotic and neurotic—were used to denote two contrasting syndromes: one consists in recurrent severe disorders of mood (depressive and/or manic), apparently spontaneous in onset, the depressive phase being accompanied by psychomotor retardation, feelings of guilt and unworthiness, early-morning waking and somatic changes; another is intermittent depression mingled with anxiety, triggered by adverse life events, marked by irritability and self-concern rather than guilt and by subjective complaints rather than objective bodily disorder" (Cooper, 2003, p. 64). This psychological diagnosis of Sylvia's state revealed that she suffered from stress and contradictory feelings which brought her both discomfort and anxiety and made her upset most of the time. In my opinion, Sylvia state became worse due to her having no close friends to console her advise her on how to face her problems. This psychological and emotional isolation was felt in many of her poems as will be shown in the following pages.

Psychoanalytic criticism adopts the methods of "reading" employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express secret unconscious desires and anxieties. Earlier approaches to psychoanalytic criticism argued that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. However, it is now more common for psychoanalytic criticism to focus on the motivations and conflicts that determine the predicaments of characters within a work of literature.

Freud (1931) in "On Dreams" explained that the dream-thoughts which are not clothed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts, but are on the contrary

represented symbolically by means of similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech.

Lacan argues that the Symbolic order structures the visual field of the Imaginary, which means that it involves a linguistic dimension. If the signifier is the foundation of the Symbolic, the signified and signification are part of the Imaginary order. Language has Symbolic and Imaginary connotations—in its Imaginary aspect, language is the "wall of language" that inverts and distorts the discourse of the other. On the other hand, the Imaginary is rooted in the subject's relationship with his or her own body (the image of the body). Insofar as identification with the analyst is the objective of analysis, Lacan accused major psychoanalytic schools of reducing the practice of psychoanalysis to the Imaginary order. Instead, Lacan proposes the use of the Symbolic to dislodge the disabling fixations of the Imaginary—the analyst transforms the images into words (Homer, 2005).

In Sylvia Plath's case, her dreams often composed the symbols used in her works, especially if we recall that Sylvia suffered from unhappy dreams and nightmares in the year preceding her suicide. She suffered from insomnia when she wrote her late works of "*collection of poems*" including the *Ariel* too. Analyzing her personality, the researcher finds it apt to start with her relationship to her father and mother. As aforementioned, the first deeply affecting self injury was the loss of the Otto Plath, the father. Her father was her motivating person toward creativity and represented the model for the loving and caring father. His death when she was eight years exposed Sylvia to unexpected horrors of the other world. No one explained the sudden death of the father to her, neither the doctor nor the mother, Aurelia. So, the ambiguity of the loss of the protecting figure in her life, and the distinguished scientist and thinker complicated the consequences of the event. Further, she could not forget that the mother

did not take Sylvia and Warren to the funeral, and in less than two months the mother moved to another place, as if she tried to cut all ties of the past.

Like psychoanalysis itself, this critical endeavor seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, ambivalences, and so forth within what may well be disunities literary work. In psychoanalysis, the earlier approach to psychoanalytic criticism attempted to reveal how the author's own childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations, traceable and detectable by chasing and analyzing the behavior of the characters in the literary work. The more contemporary approach would focus more on how the characters' childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations, etc. shape their behavior with the literary work. In either case, psychological material will be expressed indirectly, disguised, or encoded (as in dreams) through principles such as "symbolism" (the repressed object represented in disguise), "condensation" (several thoughts or persons represented in a single image), and "displacement" (anxiety located onto another image by means of association).

Psychoanalytic criticism is similar to New Criticism in not concerning itself with what the author or character intended. Instead, it is mainly concerned with what the author or character never intended, that is, the repressed is sought. The unconscious material has been distorted by the censoring conscious mind

Waves of depression in her life occurred at different stages. At 20, she felt depressed because of overload hard work and failure to obtain a fellowship to Harvard. The result was that her mother where her mother sent her to psychiatrist and she was exposed to ECT which terrified her and made her believe she was fated to become insane. Another aspect of her personality disorder is her morbid personality which referred to the condition of a patient's personality prior to the definitive onset of a

disorder such as schizophrenia. In fact, she had a dissonance between the bright, buoyant, high-achievement persona whose ideals of success, social status and domesticity are conveyed in the letters to her mother, and the dark sense of isolation and inner emptiness that finds expression in her journals and poems, the follows are an example form "*The Mirror*"

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

This case-history corresponds to the traditional stereotype neither 'endogenous' nor of 'reactive' depression, but presents a mix of clinical features associated with both syndromes—the agitation, weight loss, insomnia with early waking and suicidal ideation, combined with the final deeply-intractable mood change, are typical of an illness of the first type; whereas the obvious provoking cause, the early mood shifts, through anger, anxiety and hopefulness, the demonstrative behavior and blaming of others (Cooper, 2003).

In sum, the appropriate case-formulation would appear to be: recurrent depressive disorder, severe; or alternatively, major depressive disorder, recurrent, in the setting of a borderline personality disorder.

## **2-5 Conflicts with Masculine Figures in Her life**

For lack of any overt or clear statement of resentment by Plath regarding whether she saw herself oppressed by patriarchal law or not, feminist readings of her works have often struggled to accuse patriarchy of what Curtis calls her “sense of entrapment (Deshmane, 2009, p 145), and have chosen to extend the scope of Plath’s problem to encompass all women, most of whom do not feel entrapped in their practical life. A critic, paradoxically using ‘barely legal’ as a username, has tried to legalize Plath’s problem by comparing her with patients of anorexia, who attempt to gain control over some law or established code of conduct, and points out that 90% of the anorexia patients are women. However, this critic does not talk about the remaining 10%, and conveniently makes it a specifically feminine and thus a social problem" (Deshmane, 2009, pp. 145-146).

So, comparing Sylvia Plath with Virginia Woolf or Anne Sexton or other creative female writers will support the feminist claims of male use and oppression women were exposed to in male- dominated societies. I think that writers look for all that supports their hypotheses and claims and provide single evidence enhancing and proving their claims. In life, things can be interpreted differently. In the case of Sylvia Plath, many psychoanalysts and critics introduce different perspectives and everyone seeks evidence supporting his/ her claims, and readers at the end will judge and take what is most persuasive for them.

She has a contradictory relation with males represented by both father and husband. She needed the love and protection of the father, but hated her husband's utilitarian treatment of her in satisfying his desires and benefiting from her skills and intelligence.

In Deshmane's perspective "Law functions as the corroborative principle of desire. It is true that males are the creators of the law, yet there is no death of males suffering from the same law: witness lovers committing suicide on finding the law of class or caste ridden societies unbearable. I wish to emphasize that fundamentally it is a question of individual desire which, if repressed, revolts--to the extent of driving the subject of Law to become inhuman or a self-willed victim of its own desire (Deshmane, 148-149).

## **2-6 Plath's Creativity, Psychopathy and Feminist Perspectives:**

Since ancient times people have linked creativity with madness or mental disorder. According to one source, Plato asserts that creativity is a "divine madness...a gift from the gods", and Seneca records Aristotle's saying, "No great genius was without a mixture of insanity".

Bipolar disorder, creativity-madness, is a distinguishing feature of creative literary characters. If creativity of an individual is always judged in a context, then it will help to understand how the context interacts with how people are judged (Harrison, 2010).

Creative artists have been the subject of a wide range of psychiatric diagnosis, including depression, schizophrenia, alcoholism and drug dependency. Excess risk they may have for such conditions seems at least as likely to be due to psychosocial as well as to genetic factors. So characterized have been the lives of poets, novelists, composers and graphic artists historically by ill-health, loneliness, poverty, insecurity and lack of the normal social ties provided by a communal working environment. The wonder must

be that many more have not become mentally deranged or committed suicide. Sylvia Plath's case is similar to others like Coleridge, Poe, Joyce, Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and Anne Sexton.

Sylvia Plath's experiences reflected her own points of view regarding the position and function of women in their societies. In her most ambitious poems she tackles the problem of female selfhood. What is it? Within a world where women are contained by rigid scripts and relegated to silence, how can they revolt? On the one hand, she gives us poems like "The Applicant" and "The Munich Mannequins," where women, reduced to nothing more than commodities, appear robbed of their humanity. On the other hand, in poems such as "Lady Lazarus," she presents selves in revolt, resisting assimilation to patriarchal ideals. In both cases, Plath's poetry reacts against the absence of women in public space, and women's lacking a language for debate; she is against the current state of affairs. She is asking that women who have been denied equality be equal to men.

## Chapter Three

### Understanding Sylvia Plath

#### 3-1 Overview

In this chapter I argue that Plath deliberately blurs the borders between the public and the private in two of the most celebrated and controversial poems: "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus." Transforming the conventional female body of the 1950s into a kind of transgressive dialect, Plath makes her personae speak in and to a public realm dominated by male desires. Moreover, I will present the main works of Sylvia Plath, *The Colossus*, *The Ariel*, *The "Mirror"* and *The Bell Jar*. Different perspectives and reflections are presented from a psychoanalytic point of view. In fact, the artistic characteristics of the literary work are not the core interest here.

The previous chapter introduced biographical information necessary for understanding how the poetry and prose of Sylvia Plath came to be written; this information also facilitates figuring out and analyzing her literary works.

Sylvia Plath received wide admiration and praise for her technical and literary accomplishment, thorough and insightful analysis of her psychological breakdown and existential anxiety. However, in spite of her premature death, critics continue to admire her rapid artistic development during the short period of her life. The contents of *The Colossus* and *Ariel*, in addition to other works such as *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees*, represent Plath's principal body and structure of work from which her literary reputation as a poetess and writer was established. After her death, the successive appearance of her works renewed the continued interest in her literary production. After



the posthumous publication of *The Collected Poems*, Sylvia Plath won renewed critical approval and gained an even larger attention and praise.

After reading Sylvia Plath's poetry, I notice that her poetry exhibits an appealing irony, wit, and consistency in its recurring leitmotifs and colloquial symbols, namely bees, infants, wombs, flowers, mirrors, corpses, the moon, and the sea. I also notice the reflection of the personal life events in her prose and poetry. For instance, *The Bell Jar* is very similar to Sylvia's own experience in the hospital and the ECT treatment she has received.

Plath's poetry is typically criticized for its display of emotion, excessive self-absorption, inaccessible personal allusions, and nihilistic obsession with death. In addition, some critics object to references to the Holocaust in her later poetry, which, in the context of Plath's private anguish, are viewed as gratuitous and inappropriate. The researcher holds her life events to be source of her creativity and inspiration especially that Sylvia Plath, the smart and genius child, if we consider Howard Gardner's theory of "Multiple Intelligences", is a good example of individuals enjoying *Lingual Intelligence*. Therefore, in her best poetry, she skillfully converts personal experiences and ordinary affairs into the mythopoetic. Again, *The Bell Jar* which is regarded to be a classic of modern American literature, is to be compared with other narrative masterpieces in Twentieth century such as J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Furthermore, the interest which the feminist movement demonstrated in Sylvia Plath contributed to her popularity and fame among women writers. Plath herself is considered to be an iconic symbol of the creative writer and poet and victim of male and patriarchal societies. Sylvia Plath struggled throughout all her life to occupy the position appropriate to her, rejecting all

discouraging voices inviting her to be like other women who only mother their husbands and children, and not run after their ambitions and dreams competing with the male counterparts. Thus, Sylvia Plath is considered to be an influential and important American poetess of the twentieth century.

### **3-2 Introduction to "The Colossus", "Ariel", "Mirror" and "The Bell Jar"**

Plath's poetry and fiction are well-known for their intensity and full incorporation of personal detail. *The Bell Jar*, Plath's only novel is perhaps the most explicitly autobiographical, as it recounts events surrounding Plath's internship with *Mademoiselle* and subsequent nervous breakdown. The protagonist is Esther Greenwood, a nineteen-year-old college student whose intellectual talents and professional ambitions are frustrated by disillusionment and mental collapse following a summer in New York City as an intern for a woman's magazine. While in Manhattan, Esther quickly becomes dissatisfied with her superficial work as a fashion writer, and struggles to develop her self-identity in opposition to conventional female roles. After unhappy encounters with several men, including one who physically abuses her, she throws her clothes into the street from the top of her apartment building and returns home, where she falls into a deep depression and eventually attempts suicide. While hospitalized, Esther is subjected to traumatic electroshock therapy, though, in the care of a benevolent female doctor. Later, she recovers returns to school under the ominous threat of another, more severe, breakdown. As in much of her poetry, Plath evinces a morbid fascination with death and a strong aversion to the prospect of a stifling domestic existence as a subservient housewife and mother. Esther's disappointing social

and sexual experiences also reveal the frustration and humiliation endured by women whose intelligence and abilities are disregarded in both the office and home.

*The Mirror* is an emblem of the objective in Sylvia Plath's poem. It is silver to the extent of perfect reflection. Therefore it is exact and precise in its projection of image. It has no preconceptions pertaining to emotion and memory or logic. In other words, it is the best critic. For even the best critic is biased to a certain extent. Whatever it sees is swallowed by it into its frame. As it swallows images to project, it does not tell how many will 'digest' this 'swallowing' of images. Plath's first volume of poetry, *The Colossus*, similarly displays an overriding preoccupation with estrangement, motherhood, and fragmentation in contemporary society. More formal than her later work, the poems of *The Colossus* reveal Plath's mastery of conventional forms, though they bear distinct influence of her association with confessional poets like Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton. Much of Plath's rage is directed against her father, whom she invokes as both a Muse and target of scorn.

While in the title poem Plath refers to him as an "oracle" and "mouthpiece of the dead," in "Electra on Azalea Path," she rails against his premature death and her own lost innocence.

My father died, and when he died  
He willed his books and shell away.  
The books burned up, sea took the shell,  
But I, I keep the voices he  
Set in my ear, and in my eye  
The sight of those blue, unseen waves

For which the ghost of Bocklin grieves.

The peasants feast and multiply.

Likewise, "The Beekeeper's Daughter," one of many so-called "Bee" poems, alludes to her father and his expertise on the subject of bumblebees. Plath's concern with childbirth is evident in "Metaphors," a vivid description of gestation introduced as "a riddle in nine syllables," and in "Poem for a Birthday," a series of five separate poems that explore the relationship between artistic creation and the maternal condition. The imagery of fetuses, pregnancy, and creation appear in much of Plath's poetry, especially as a foil for the opposite extreme of the life cycle—death, particularly the looming prospect of self-annihilation. Five months before her suicide, Plath composed the bulk of the poems in *Ariel*, her most famous volume of poetry, which contains "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy," her best known and most anthologized poems. More so than in *The Colossus*, the poems of *Ariel* render isolation and insecurity as menacing threats with gruesome consequences. Through a synthesis of brutal self-revelation and macabre associations, including casual references to Nazis and the Holocaust, Plath conjures historical and mythic allusions to give depth and immediacy to her psychic distress.

Plath also uses color symbolism and archetypal imagery to juxtapose opposing aspects of nature and existence, as in "Tulips" and the title poem, "Ariel," where red and white alternately represent blood, life, death, and rebirth

### **Tulips**

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted

To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.

How free it is, you have no idea how free -

The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,

And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.  
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them  
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.

**Ariel**

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else  
Hauls me through air -  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

Other poems, such as "Cut" and "Fever 103°," describe physical afflictions with a combination of clinical objectivity and surrealism that evokes a sense of disorientation and violent self-abnegation. On the theme of marriage and domesticity, "The Applicant" reveals the objectification of women as obedient wives whose value is determined by their household utility. As in much of her poetry, the appearance of wild spontaneity and free association contradicts the subtlety of internal metaphors, lyrical rhythms, and tonal complexity.

In the following discussion, I argue that Plath deliberately blurs the borders between the public and the private in two of the most celebrated, controversial, and critiqued of her poems: "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus."

**Daddy**

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time--

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

**Lady Lazarus**

I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it-----

A sort of walking miracle, my skin

Bright as a Nazi lampshade,

My right foot

Transforming the conventional female body of the 1950s into a kind of transgressive dialect, Plath makes her personae speak in and to a public realm dominated by male desires. Giving the female construct voice, so to speak, Plath prefigures recent trends in feminist criticism that read the female body. (Narbeshuber, 2004, p. 144)

**- Ariel:**

Sylvia Plath's poetic voice matured immeasurably from the time of her first creative work *Ariel*, a poem published in the Boston Sunday Herald when she was eight:

*Hear the crickets chirping*

*In the dewy grass.*

*Bright little fireflies*

*Twinkle as they pass.* (qtd. in Mitchell, 1989. P.119)

Through her early and dedicated efforts at imitating such idolized poets as Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and W.B. Yeats, Plath developed a fine sense of poetic technique and an understanding of the inner workings--structural as well as thematic--of a poem. However, in *Ariel*, Plath at last went beyond the techniques and skills learned from these writers to attain a new form of identity and self-confidence. Robert Lowell explains how this transformation altered Plath's way of writing:

In these poems written in the last months of her life, and often rushed out at the rate of two or three a day, Sylvia Plath becomes herself, becomes something imaginary, newly, wildly and subtly created. . . . (qtd. in Mitchell, 1989. P.119)

A major part of her new voice involves an interest in victims, that are at the center of her *Ariel* poems. She not only uses victims as subject matter, but also frequently creates new victims out of the readers of her poetry. For example: Plath presents Ted Hughes as a victim of circumstance, criticized for his molestation of Plath's original work.

According to Mitchell (1989), Sylvia Plath's readers are victimized on a temporary basis when thwarted from performing such essential reading tasks as predicting meaning accurately and when made to identify with antagonistic or distasteful characters in a poem. Readers are also victimized on a long-term basis, that is, for a longer duration than that required to read and understand a poem. The dedicated

reader of *Ariel* is thus made Plath's victim even after having put the volume down and emerged from the world of the poem. Plath accomplishes this feat by emphasizing the darker and more primitive side of human nature. Readers are like all humans who succumb occasionally to the overt desires of a primitive Id. Nevertheless, many humans try to ignore, escape, or deny the existence of their own Id. Readers may wish to believe that it is only Plath's characters such as Elm who are "inhabited by a cry" , yet at some point (the reading of *Ariel* is one of those points) adults should confront and deal with their own internal malignity. It is one thing to acknowledge one's own primitive nature and quite another to realize that all humans are similar in this regard. Plath's poems charge the reader with poetic evidence to support the assertion that all humans have a darker side. For example, in "Tulips" the speaker does not tell the well-wisher that she hates the tulips, but the reader is conveniently allowed to see clearly into the speaker's negative thoughts. Plath continues to show the reader that the polished exterior words and actions of fellow humans probably mask the cruder interior feelings and desires. All humans are "inhabited by a cry," but not all humans let their inner owl fly around as obviously as Plath's persona in "Elm" seems to. A Long-term exposure to the *Ariel* poems enables readers to understand the potential of hypocrisy and to begin suspecting people's motives and sincerity. Now, when in real life the patient in the hospital reaches for the flowers extended as a gesture of sympathy and says "Oh, how beautiful!" Plath's readers are prompted to wonder whether he or she actually thinks "What a waste of money!" or "I'd rather have something else."

Plath's poetry merely reinforces and confirms what was already suspected. For those innocent who have hitherto succeeded in denying or ignoring the dark side of humans, Plath is not to be commended for granting them a degree of sophistication in



their outlook. Those who trust blindly and completely in idolized heroic figures may be devastated by that individual's inevitable crash. Plath warns the reader of the possibility and even the likelihood that this event will happen (Mitchell, 1989, p.122).

Regardless of the nature of this responsibility that readers and authors share together, Plath's poetry is not always easy for readers to understand, respond to, and accept. While some readers may put down the volume in frustration, Plath remained more interested in those who found permanent value in her poetry:

*I am not worried that poems reach relatively few people. As it is, they go surprisingly far—among strangers, around the world, even.*

*Farther than the words of a class room teacher or the prescriptions of a doctor; if they are very lucky, farther than a lifetime. (See Mitchell, 1989. p.123)*

In *Ariel* is the same name of one of Plath's most highly regarded, most often criticised, and most complicated poems. The ambiguities in the poem begin with its title, which has a three- fold meaning. As Harrison notices "The Ariel collection consists almost entirely of dramatic monologues, poems in which a known "I" addresses a silently listening "You." Richard Matovich's concordance to The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath reveals that Plath used the pronoun "I" 988 times, making it the seventh most frequent word used in her poetry, and she used the pronoun "you" 393 times, making it the fifteenth most frequent word (595). Plath's emphasis on this stylistic framework may be traced as far back as her Smith College years when Plath the poet and person had sought to define herself in terms of an Other" (Mitchell, 1989, pps. 94-95).

Actually, as Harrison explains, Plath attempts, through a particular rhetorical device, to prompt the reader to identify with a character and his or her experiences expressed in the poem. The device Plath employs to encourage the process of identification is her studied use of personal pronouns. To actually identify with a character and experience the poem personally, the reader must be able to assume either the "I" or "You" pronoun found in the *Ariel* poems. Because the pronoun "I" is customarily taken to represent the writer's persona, the reader generally accepts the "You" pronoun of the addressee.

In the *Daddy* (1962) poem, Sylvia shows an angry tirade against the father who has deserted her, a Freudian drama of repetition-compulsion in which the speaker resurrects her vampiric father only to kill him again in a contradictory attempt to efface the original source of her psychological pain. In Plath's poetry and prose, Otto Plath was to become a potent symbol of absence, signifying the impossibility of lasting love, of God, or of any real meaning in life. The death of her father was a shock from which Plath never properly recovered (O'Reilly, 2010).

According to Mitchell (1989), Sylvia Plath works to convince her readers that she herself is the ultimate victim. Not content to create purely fictional characters to populate those poems that reveal her victimized status, Plath turned to the people actually surrounding her friends, family, and colleagues-for source material. This practice is not unique to Plath as many writers resort to discussing the influences on their lives. Plath, however, is peculiar in her method of distorting, exaggerating, and rewriting her own reality and that of her acquaintances so that they are presented as

oppressors and victimizers. For example, in "Daddy," Plath implies that her father was as oppressive as a Nazi and that she was as victimized as a Jew.

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

In the same poem, she suggests that her husband Ted Hughes enjoyed torturing her as much as her late father did.

A careful chronological reading of the poems indicates that Plath's themes are in fact remarkably consistent. While the *Ariel* poems may seem to represent a self that has emerged from the inimical reality in which it has been forced to exist, Plath's best poems illustrate, conversely, a troubling philosophical acquiescence to such realities.

Thus, in an early poem such as "The Thin People," Plath establishes the vampire metaphor she would later use to a greater dramatic effect in "Daddy." The "thin people" of the poem are never named, although it is clear that she is thinking of the starved inmates of the Nazi concentration camps as they appeared in 1940s newsreels during the speaker's childhood. Although she argues that the passage of time should logically make them disappear, they seem paradoxically to grow in power by virtue of their tenacity in memory. Obviously they return from the scene of their repression in "the contracted country of the head" and begin to drain reality of its richness, as if in revenge:

They persist in the sunlit room: the wallpaper  
 Frieze of cabbage-roses and cornflowers pales  
 Under their thinlipped smiles,  
 Their withering kingship.

Similarly, in the 1957 poems “All the Dead Dears” and “The Disquieting Muses,” Plath introduces the theme of maternal blame she would later modify in “Medusa.” Although Plath’s early lyrics are rather selfconscious, demonstrating how heavily, at first, she relied on the formal poetic resources of rhyme and meter, her development as a poet was rapid. By the time of her return to England in 1959, following the decisive breakthrough of “Poem for a Birthday,” she was writing lyrics full of disturbingly powerful and suggestive imagery.

In “Crossing the Water,” for example, she imagines herself and her husband as “two black, cut-paper people” whose fragile identities are threatened by the immensity of the ocean. Such themes—the terrible insecurity of the self, the reality of indifference and lovelessness, and the inevitability of death and loss—preoccupied Plath from the beginning of her writing life to the end. It is in the poems of *Ariel* that they are most powerfully reiterated, however. Apart from the controversial poems such as “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus,” in which Plath inflates her personal trauma to rival that of the Jewish victims of the Nazis, it is in other, better poems that the poignancy of her tragic vision comes through most clearly.

Plath’s most beautiful poems present images of absolute self-loss. One of these, “The Night Dances,” describes, according to Ted Hughes, “a revolving dance which her baby son performed at night in his crib.” The smile that falls surrealistically into the grass at the beginning of this poem is “irretrievable,” and the speaker compares this to

her baby's dancing gestures, which seem so significant to her that she finds it hard to believe that they are merely fleeting:

Surely they travel

The world forever, I shall not entirely

Sit emptied of beauties, the gift

Of your small breath, the drenched grass

Smell of your sleeps, lilies, lilies.

The image of the lilies is then considered in its uniqueness—it is as if Plath were deconstructing the poem as she writes it:

their flesh bears no relation.

Cold folds of the ego, the calla,

And the tiger, embellishing itself-

Spots, and a spread of hot petals.

This is the alienation of extreme self-involvement: a lily is not just a lily but it's classified according to species; the calla lily (from the Greek kallos) is wrapped up in its own cold beauty (There is a submerged pun here on “callous”) while the tiger lily embellishes itself alone.

This introduces the theme of indifference, or, as this poem expresses it, amnesia:

The comets

Have such a space to cross,

Such coldness, forgetfulness.

She considers the movement of the comets to be a more appropriate metaphor for her son's gestures:

So your gestures flake off—  
 Warm and human, then their pink light  
 Bleeding and peeling  
 Through the black amnesias of heaven.

By this time the speaker seems to have given up her belief that the self and its gestures can retain their identity, and the image is a disturbing one, a vision of dismemberment. In “The Night Dances” the self is a disintegrating structure, whose gestures are inevitably swallowed up in inhospitable and unconscious space. The fatalistic tone of the poem is reflected in Plath’s avoidance of the question mark, a technique she uses here twice: “And how will your night dances lose themselves.” And again at the end, when she compares her son’s dances to falling snow:

Why am I given  
 these lamps, these planets  
 Falling like blessings, like flakes  
 Six-sided, white  
 On my eyes, my lips, my hair  
 Touching and melting.

The speaker of “The Night Dances” entertains no hope of an answer to her questions. This poem provides an image of self not as emergent but as fragmented, dissipated, and obsolescent.

The consciousness of *Ariel* has many different masks and positions; part of the excitement of the volume comes from the restless dynamism of a voice that repeatedly insists on escaping from deadening enclosures. Such a movement always entails loss, however; the speaker of *Ariel* imagines sloughing off “dead hands, dead stringencies”;

the ascending consciousness of “Fever 103” experiences orgiastic self-loss, “my selves dissolving, old whore petticoats”; and the symbolically liberated queen bee of “Stings” is horribly injured, a metonymic “red scar” already murdered by the “wax house” that has engulfed her. In other remarkable poems such as “Totem,” Plath restates her disabused and fatalistic recognition that:

There is no terminus, only suitcases  
 Out of which the same self unfolds like a suit  
 Bald and shiny, with pockets of wishes,  
 Notions and tickets, short circuits and folding mirrors.

“Words,” written the week before her death, posits an absolute division between the autonomy of “words dry and riderless” and the “fixed stars” that “govern a life.”

At its most extreme, this critical approach has tended to view Plath’s entire work as an extended suicide note, or (in Hughes’s analysis) as the “by-products” of her quest for self-realization. But the connections between a writer’s life and her work are numerous, indirect, and mysterious. Plath’s poems stand as a poignant testament to the tragic loss of a remarkable talent, but they are also undeniably powerful and achieved works of art in their own right (O’Reilly, 2010, pps.360-361).

### - **The *Bell Jar*:**

Plath began writing *The Bell Jar* about a “college girl suicide.” Drawing on Plath’s own summer internship and subsequent suicide attempt in 1953, *The Bell Jar* tells the story of Esther Greenwood, a college student who serves as a guest editor at a New York women’s magazine and returns to her home in the Boston suburbs depressed. The novel follows Esther through her treatment at a mental hospital after her suicide

attempt and is told from the perspective of an older Esther who has since become a mother and “all right again.”

Plath’s own life complicates our understanding of *The Bell Jar*’s reception, given that the novel was published in England under a pseudonym in January 1963 and did not appear in America under Plath’s own name until 1971, long after she committed suicide. Plath’s death in February 1963, at age thirty, occurred just weeks after the British publication of the novel. Though Plath biographies are full of references to her struggle with depression, "scholars have only recently started to write about how Plath herself participated in a larger cultural conversation about medicine and mental health" (Moraski, 2009, p.8).

Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* in the spring of 1961 in a friend’s study near 3 Chalcot Square, London. She was herself now a mother to one- year-old Frieda Rebecca and was also recuperating from a recent miscarriage and appendectomy. Hughes watched their daughter in the morning to allow Plath to do some writing of her own. She did not tell many people that she was writing a book, though she wrote to her college friend Ann Davidow that she was working on a novel about a college co-ed overcoming a nervous breakdown. After Plath learned that she had won a two thousand-dollar Eugene F. Saxton Fellowship, she wrote to her mother that she already “finished a batch of stuff this last year, tied it up in 4 parcels, & have it ready to report on bit by bit as required.” This was *The Bell Jar*, completed in advance of the grant’s deadlines. “I don't believe in getting money for something you haven’t done yet, it’s too nerve-wracking,” she explained in a letter written to her mother (Moraski, 2009, p.93).



Moraski (2009) believes that *The Bell Jar* is a fascinating novel because it is unfinished: Plath planned to write another novel in which her protagonist could better explain what it was to be “all right again.” For Plath, being well came from being loved. Unlike the author of the *Cosmopolitan* article that served as an initial inspiration, Plath was unable to discover what it was to be well on one’s own, without a partner. We know this because she burned her sequel to *The Bell Jar* once she discovered Hughes’ infidelity. Blake became the hero in her own story in *Cosmopolitan*. For Esther—and for Plath, too—the hero was supposed to be the husband (Moraski, 2009. P.97).

But *The Bell Jar* is more than a novel of the 1950s. Its depictions of electroshock treatment, public and private psychiatric practice, and the relationship between patient and therapist came right as a new movement—antipsychiatry—developed in the early 1960s among some psychiatrists and cultural critics.

"The sickness rolled through me in great waves. After each wave it would fade away and leave me limp as a wet leaf and shivering all over and then I would feel it rising up in me again, and the glittering white torture chamber tiles under my feet and over my head and all four sides closed in and squeezed me to pieces, p 4" *The Bell Jar*

Though Plath was always grateful to her therapist and remained close to her throughout her life, she was also deeply scarred by the incompetent administration of electroshock given to her by the first psychiatrists she saw.

Plath believed that medicine could help her manage her moods, but she was also aware that the mental health establishment could become a terror in its own right when administered by men like Dr. Gordon. *The Bell Jar*, therefore, ended up providing social commentary even as Plath aimed it for popular success. Her criticism of men like Dr. Gordon as well as her approving characterization of Dr. Nolan, the therapist who helps

Esther recover, set the stage for two novels—Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Joanne Greenberg’s *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*—that would more thoroughly investigate the relationship between patient and practitioner within the mental health establishment (Moraski, 2009, p.98).

O’ Reilly confirms that *The Bell Jar* deals with the theme of isolation and unhappiness in greater detail. The book is really a superb account detailing the traumatic summer of Plath’s breakdown in 1953, and contains thinly disguised portraits of her family and friends. It is generally supposed that Plath published the novel under an assumed name and discouraged her mother from reading it because of the acidity with which some of these portraits are drawn. Mrs. Greenwood, the mother of the book’s protagonist, comes off particularly badly. In another recasting of her versatile Freudian-inflected myth of self, Plath makes clear that it is her heroine’s enforced proximity to her well-meaning but hopelessly naive mother that leads to suicidal depression. During one climactic scene an insomniac and desperate Esther Greenwood fantasizes about killing her sleeping mother:

“my mother turned from a foggy log into a slumbering, middle-aged woman, her mouth slightly open and a snore raveling from her throat. The piggish noise irritated me, and for a while it seemed to me that the only way to stop it would be to take the column of skin and sinew from which it rose and twist it to silence between my hands.”p.32

The extreme detachment of this description borders on the pathological, and is symptomatic of Esther’s feeling of general disconnectedness from reality. This is the

“*Bell Jar*” state that Plath describes being trapped in, as though a glass wall were separating her from her life (O’Reilly, 2010, p. 358).

Its similarity to the sealed-off ship-in-a-bottle quality of her childhood described above serves to underline the profound continuity of imagery throughout Plath’s work. A version of *The Bell Jar* would return in her late poem “Medusa,” a counterpart to “Daddy” in which the speaker violently rejects her smothering, controlling mother, whom she also envisages as an airless receptacle:

“Bottle in which I live, / Ghastly Vatican.”

O’Reilly (2010) states that *The Bell Jar* is written with considerable energy, and displays Plath’s gifts for humor, forceful imagery, and skillful inflection of voice, characteristics that she later raised to a great level in the poems of *Ariel*. However, the novel is less convincing as a bildungsroman or psychological self-portrait. The critic Stan Smith has written of Plath’s “irony of artifice,” suggesting that Plath uses her heroine’s paranoia to “penetrate the bland benevolent surfaces of other people’s motives to discover their inner and unconscious significance, p7” The growth in self-knowledge and insight one expects from a novel of crisis has failed to materialize, but this aesthetic weakness is perhaps indicative of another, more disturbing meaning. In *The Bell Jar*, “cure” is viewed not as a form of internal healing, but instead as a test one must pass in order to rejoin the competitive society beyond the asylum walls.

O’Reilly (2010, pp. 358-359) holds that the novel depicts an encompassing dystopia to which there seems no viable alternative, and at its core is a nihilism that is avoided only by denial, a willed redirection of the gaze. Esther’s suicide can in fact be seen as a last-ditch attempt of the will to avoid coming face-to-face with this more

profound, unspoken reality, not an outcome of having already confronted it. *The Bell Jar*, despite its slangy narrative style, is a work that studiously avoids admitting its own deepest implications

- **“Mirror”**

Here is the full poem of **“Mirror”**.

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike

I am not cruel, only truthful –

The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long

I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.

Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me.

Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

In Sylvia Plath poem's "Mirror", Plath regards life from the perspective of the mirror on the wall, personified in the use of first person pronoun "I" but only reflecting a view which is full of objectivity and indifference.

Wood (1992, p71) maintains as the mirror appears to be a lake, the woman who regards her own vision in it sees her own drowning in it as a young girl and her own rising from it as an old woman. Thus, the reflection with its multiple guises carries within it the themes of death and rebirth. David John Wood in his study of the "birth" imagery in Plath's poetry, points to the uncanny connection between birth and writing. His research analyzes the nature of the relationship between maternal experience during childbirth, miscarriage and Plath's quest for fulfillment, pointing to her poem "Face Lift". He underlines the fact that motherhood comes to be associated with the desire for birth of a new poetic voice and identity (Wood, 1992). However, David Holbrook (1988) states that to give birth is to die, in other words, one is making a new life which causes another life to die. In her poem "Morning Song" even Plath's image of her own self as a mother figure is blurred and effaced slowly from its shadowy vision in the mirror which reflects her various guises.

Holbrook, in his psychoanalytical study entitled *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and Existence*, also points to the ambiguity in Plath's mind between death and birth. He draws attention to Plath's identification with Mother Earth, who is the metaphor of the female and fertility the same time she is the devourer of everything as a result of its being devoted to a love of Death. Holbrook mentions this powerful ambiguity in Sylvia Plath's poem, "Death & Co.," and states that there is a mixture of necrophilia and necrophobia in the poem (Holbrook, 1988, p127). In other words, Sylvia Plath reflects both fear of death and sexual attraction towards death as if she were in love with it. In

Plath's vision, we see a powerful tendency that evaluates sex as eating and annihilation. In this context, as mentioned in her *Journals*, Sylvia Plath's biting Ted's cheek during their first encounter at a party at Cambridge becomes quite meaningful because the act reflects both her sexual attraction towards Ted Hughes and her subconscious desire to devour him like Mother Earth. The significance of an alter-ego figure in Sylvia Plath's late poems increases just as the desperate search for her own identity becomes hopeless.

Sylvia Plath's fascination with mirror imagery started quite early and consciously as a way of recognizing her sense of psychic division. Her father's early death, of course, was one of the main reasons behind that sense of the schizoid self which most psychoanalysts have observed in her poetic art. Her troublesome relation with her mother and her difficulty in identification with her and the search for the feminine part of her soul were, of course, other reasons.

Another reason was her interest in the literary figure of "the double" which constituted her senior honors thesis at Smith College in 1954-1955, entitled "The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoevsky's Novels" (Axelrod, 2007). In her literary analysis of the figure of the Double, Sylvia Plath wrote:

The appearance of the Double is an aspect of man's eternal desire to solve the enigma of his own identity. By seeking to read the riddle of his soul in its myriad manifestations, man is brought face to face with his own mysterious mirror image, an image which he confronts with mingled curiosity and fear. This simultaneous attraction and repulsion arises from the inherently ambivalent nature of the Double which may embody not only good, creative characteristics, but also evil, destructive ones ... The confrontation of the Double in these

instances usually results in a duel which ends in insanity or death (Plath, 1981, p. 161).

In Sylvia Plath's poetry such themes as creativity versus inertia and also fertility versus sterility appear to be recurrent. Within her own psyche, there could be seen the conflict between the sensual and the abstract, the transcendent and the rational. Sylvia Plath, tries to reconcile the dark forces of her own psyche with the brilliant creative forces of her intellect. Thus, her poetry expresses the various reflections of that conflict of the self as well as the enigmatic world within the self. As Pamela J. Annas describes in her study of Sylvia Plath's poetry in *A Disturbance of Mirrors*, the fragmentation of the self in Plath's work is most obvious:

To see yourself trapped between sets of mutually exclusive alternatives

Neither of which fits, is to live in a circus hall of mirrors, where the self is distorted, disguised or shattered into slivers of reflection (Annas, 1988, p, 211).

In her paper at the International Psycho-Analytical Congress in Paris, in 1973, Shelley Orgel analyzes the life of Plath in parallel with her poetry from the perspective of her term "fusion with the victim". In other words, a regressive stage of identification with the aggressor (Orgel, 1973). Orgel first turns back to Plath's childhood. As Sylvia and her brother grew up in the seashore town of Winthrop, Massachusetts, her childhood was filled with sea memories – gathering of seashells, making toys from objects picked up on the beach, collecting starfish in jars and watching them grow back lost arms, dreaming of Spain on the other coast of the Atlantic, believing in mermaids, observing the ferocity of a hurricane and the violence of the sea (Orgel, 1973, p. 93).

Orgel states that Plath seems to have identified the sea as a reflecting surface with the image of the father. In her subconscious, the sea is associated with a sadistic oedipal father. Her longing for her father appears in certain images in her poetry and *The Bell Jar* as figures who wish to drown themselves. In her poem "Suicide Off Egg Rock" the man is about to drown himself and in *The Bell Jar*, Esther imagines drowning herself in the bath which is a sign of her desire to be united with the absent father. Orgel states that Plath, in order to thwart the longed-for union in the ocean with the father as primal parent, as well as the oedipal consummation with the later father, turned in her poetry to the preoedipal mother for aid in repressing these instinctual longings. But her mother, whom Plath reproaches for her negligence of her father, becomes a symbol of whiteness, coldness and petrification like the gaze of Medusa and the light of the Moon.

In any case, you are always there ,

Tremulous breath at the end of my line ,

Curve of water upleaping

To my water rod, dazzling and grateful ,

Touching and sucking .

I didn't call you .

I didn't call you at all .

Nevertheless, nevertheless

You steamed to me over the sea ,

Fat and red, a placenta



Sylvia in her idealizing of the father figure, in college, was writing her first poetic drafts using her father's red leathered thesaurus. At this time her identification with her idealized father was in conflict with her feminine sexual feelings. Later in her life, the women she selected as idealized surrogates for mother had the desired attributes or the intellectual capacity of males. Even her choice of the Double in her thesis suggests further elaborations of her conflict between dual identities – poet and female, aggressor and victim and of her differentiation between self and object, ego and superego. In her poem, "Daddy" there exists the desire to bring the father temporarily back to life, not as the man of the sea, but as the primal aggressor who can be hated like the Nazis, as the devil who can be warded off and killed permanently for the sake of her own survival.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two---

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know.

Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through

In order to resist the longing for fusion with the dead father she needs to find a way to turn her aggressive wishes outward. One way is by imaginatively creating a

“hating” sadomasochistic relationship with the father and with her husband, who is also portrayed as an identical Fascist brute in “Daddy”. Many of her poems seem to be like a journey to the borders of death which is always there both as a threat and as an attraction.

In her last poems, the struggle against the forces of death weakens. In her poem, “The Colossus” she attempts to glue herself together, to create poetry out of her fragmented self and the multiple voices in her head, to reconstruct a poetic voice from the fragments of ruins so that they will return life through her art and to be reborn as having found her true self. The suicidal act simultaneously kills the aggressive self whose energies are directed against the bodily self and due to Plath’s sensitivity and vulnerability in early childhood, Plath appears to be an example of such a creative artist in whom the aggressive energies could be supplied either to the energy for creative activity or to the energy for self-destruction. The creation of a poem for Plath represents in a displaced form the killing of a hated part of the self in a partially externalized representation. The act of suicide appears to be in opposition to the act of writing poetry.

When the poems failed to allow a relatively constant investment of narcissistic libido, or aggression, their loss appeared like a series of deaths. The purpose of her creative impulse was to rescue her self, and to be re-breathing her own breath. Orgel concludes her analysis by stating that the poems may be regarded as attempts to create transitional objects evoking the illusion of unity of the self with such representatives of the absent mother figure and the lost father figure (Orgel, 1973, P 71). With the

destruction of the creativity process in writing poetry, the rage returns to the self, threatening to make their creator their victim.

## **- Looking at Poetry:**

### **3-6-1 "*Daddy*"**

**Here is the full poem of "*Daddy*":**

You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white,  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time ----  
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,  
Ghastly statue with one gray toe  
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic  
Where it pours bean green over blue  
In the waters off the beautiful Nauset.  
I used to pray to recover you.  
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town  
Scraped flat by the roller  
Of wars, wars, wars.  
But the name of the town is common.  
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.  
So I never could tell where you  
Put your foot, your root,  
I never could talk to you.  
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.  
Ich, ich, ich, ich,  
I could hardly speak.  
I thought every German was you.  
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine,  
Chuffing me off like a Jew.  
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.  
I began to talk like a Jew.  
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna  
Are not very pure or true.

With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck  
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack  
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of you,  
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.  
And your neat mustache  
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.  
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You ----

Not God but a swastika  
So black no sky could squeak through.  
Every woman adores a Fascist,  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
In the picture I have of you,  
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
But no less a devil for that, no not

Any less the black man who  
Bit my pretty red heart in two.

I was ten when they buried you.

At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue.

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Mein kampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

So daddy, I'm finally through.

The black telephone's off at the root,

The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two ----

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know.

Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

"**Daddy**" is a poem written on October 12, 1962, shortly before her death, and published posthumously in *Ariel* in 1965. The poem's implications and thematic concerns have been discussed academically with differing conclusions. I think, the popularity of "Daddy" can be attributed to Plath's vivid use of imagery and controversial use of the Holocaust as a metaphor. Critics have also viewed "Daddy" as a response to Plath's complex relationship with her father, Otto Plath, who died shortly after her eighth birthday as a result of undiagnosed diabetes.

The poem repeats in 5-line stanzas with meter and rhyme scheme resembling the style and structure of a nursery-rhyme:

You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Sylvia Plath, introducing the poem for a BBC radio reading shortly before her suicide, famously described the poem as being about "a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God." (Tobin, 1988). Coupled with morbid imagery, the narrator's childlike intonation evokes a keen state of unease in the reader throughout the poem, climaxing in the final lines "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through".

"Daddy" deals with a girl's deep attachment to the memory of her father and the unhappiness it caused in her life. It can also be seen as an outlet for Plath to deal with her father's death or her husband's betrayal. She does this through reinventing the relationship as one between a Nazi and a Jew, creating an "oppressor-oppressed" relationship.

The poem "Daddy" can be interpreted along with other poems by Plath as semi-autobiographical regarding her own relationship with her father or her husband, Ted Hughes. Plath's poems "Full Fathom Five" and "The Colossus" also explore the relationship between a girl and a dominant father figure.

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one grey toe

[...]

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

In these lines, her father is portrayed differently. In "Full Fathom Five", he is portrayed as the sea god; surfacing only on occasion. He is portrayed as ancient, ethereal, mysterious, and powerful. Quite differently, in "The Colossus", he is portrayed as a massive fallen statue, whom Plath has spent her life trying to reassemble, and in so doing. In "Daddy", Plath continues in the same vein as "The Colossus", portraying her father in the same manner. However, "Daddy" differs from others in that it shows an attempt to change the situation. Plath states: "Daddy, I have had to kill you." By this, she of course means her unhealthy relationship with the memory of her father. The extent to which her father's memory affected her is obvious especially from the twelfth stanza on. She states:



At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do.

Here Plath refers to an attempted suicide by overdose of sleeping pills, stating that it was an attempt to get back to her father, to be with him in death. She continues by stating that:

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue.

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

The 'man in black with a Meinkampf look' is a reference to her husband, Ted Hughes (who dressed head to toe in black), from whom she had recently separated. She portrays their relationship as a manifestation of her Electra complex, that she was attracted to Hughes because he reminded her of her father. In the next stanza, Plath describes the outcome of this relationship.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two-

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

The two men she refers to are her father and Hughes, where "killed" here means that she has moved on and forgotten about them. From the portrayal of both of them as vampires, it is obvious that this was not done easily and that Plath endured seven years

of marriage to this 'vampire'. In stating this she means that she has overcome the memory of her father, and has moved on. This could also mean that Plath is through with dealing with these painful memories and living with these thoughts going through her mind since she committed suicide only five months after writing this poem.

Uroff states that "Daddy" is an even more complicated treatment of the same process. The poem opens with the daughter's assertion that "You do not do, you do not do." We find this speaker in the characteristic Plath trap, forcing herself to deal with a situation she finds unacceptable. "Daddy" is not so much an account of a true-life situation as a demonstration of the mind confronting its own suffering and trying to control. The simplistic, insistent rhythm is one form of control, the obsessive rhyming and repeated short phrases are others means by which she attempts to charm and hold off the evil spirits. The images themselves are important for what they tell us of her sense of being victimized and victimizer but more significant than the actual image is the swift ease with which she can turn it to various uses. For example, she starts out imagining herself as a prisoner living like a foot in the black shoe of her father. Then she casts her father in her own role and he becomes "one grey toe / Big as a Frisco seal" and then quickly she is looks for his foot, his root. Next he reverts to his original boot identity, and she is the one with "The boot in the face." And immediately he returns with "A cleft in your chin instead of your foot." At the end, she sees the villagers stamping on him.

Thus she moves from booted to booter as her father reverses the direction. The mind that works in this way is neither logical nor psychologically penetrating; it is simply extremely skillful at juggling images. In fact, the speaker is caught in her own

strategies. She can control her terrors by forcing them into images, but she seems to have no understanding of the confusion her wild image-making betrays. When she identifies herself as a foot, she suggests that she is trapped, but when she calls her father a foot the associations break down. In the same way, when she caricatures her father as a Fascist and herself as a Jew, she develops associations of torture which are not exactly reversed when she reverses the identification and calls herself the killer of her vampire-father. The speaker here can categorize and manipulate her feelings in name-calling, in rituals, in images, but these are only techniques, and her frenzied use of them suggests that they are methods she employs in the absence of any other. When she says, "Daddy, I have had to kill you," she seems to realize the necessity of the exorcism and to understand the ritual she performs, but the frantic pitch of the language and the swift switches of images do not confirm any self-understanding. "The pace of the poem reveals its speaker as one driven by a hysterical need for complete control, a need that stems from the fear that without such control she will be destroyed. Her simple, incantatory monologue is the perfect vehicle of expression for the orderly disordered mind" (Uroff, 1977).

Plath called these poems "light verse." "Daddy" does not seem to fall easily into that category despite its nonsense rhymes and rhythms, its quickly flicking images. Given its subject, neither is it ponderous or solemn. Above all, it offers no insight into the speaker, no justification. Plath's classification is clear perhaps only if we consider her speaker a parodic version of the poet. The speaker manipulates her terror in singsong language and thus delivers herself in "light verse" that employs its craft in holding off its subject. For all the frankness of this poem, the name-calling and blaming, the dark feeling that pervades it is undefined, held back rather than revealed by the

technique. The poet who has created this speaker knows the speaker's strategies because they are a perverted version of her own, and that is the distinction between the speaker's "light verse" and the poet's serious poem (Uroff, 1977).

From her earliest madwomen and hysterical virgins to the late suicides and father-killers, Plath portrays characters whose stagey performances are subversions of the creative act. Absorbed in their rituals, they confess nothing. They are not anxious to make a breakthrough back into life. In fact, their energies are engaged in erecting a barricade against self-revelation. Plath's fascination with this parodic image of the creative artist stems from a deep knowledge of the machinations of the mind. If she reveals herself in these poems, she does so in the grotesque mirror of parody. If these poems come out of her own emotional experiences, as she said they did, they are not uninformed cries from the heart.

- "*The Colossus*":

Here is the full poem of "The Colossus"

I shall never get you put together entirely,

Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles

Proceed from your great lips.

It's worse than a barnyard.

Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,

Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.

Thirty years now I have labored

To dredge the silt from your throat.

I am none the wiser.

Scaling little ladders with glue pots and pails of Lysol

I crawl like an ant in mourning

Over the weedy acres of your brow

To mend the immense skull-plates and clear

The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.

A blue sky out of the Oresteia

Arches above us. O father, all by yourself

You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum.

I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress.

Your fluted bones and acanthine hair are littered

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.

It would take more than a lightning-stroke

To create such a ruin.

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia

Of your left ear, out of the wind,

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.

The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.

My hours are married to shadow.

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel

On the blank stones of the landing

"The Colossus" represents a turning point in her poems about the father, about the gods in her mythology, and about what she spoke of as her "death," the failed suicide attempt of 1953. After "The Colossus," those themes are developed presentatively, with minimal description.

Dikie (1979) states that "The Colossus" is Plath's admission of defeat and analysis of her own impotence. . . . Plath transfers elements from the myths and rituals of the dying god to the colossus figure and elaborates them with references to Greek tragedy to make her poem a complicated, often enigmatic, study of her own failure. . . ." (p. 154).

In fact, Plath selects the ancient role of the female who mourns the dying god, or the heroine who tends the idol, and brings it into her poem as felt experience. The colossus is a statue, a father, a mythical being; he is a ruined idol, "pithy and historical as the Roman Forum," and at the same time a figure whose great lips utter "Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles," an echo of Hughes's language.

The persona in the poem crawls over him, squats in his ear, eats her lunch there - intimate activities that hardly seem the rites of a priestess. The colossus himself is both a stone idol with "immense skull-plates" and "fluted bones and acanthine hair," and at the same time a natural wilderness covered with "weedy acres" and "A hill of black cypress." Much remains beneath the surface in this poem, and much on the surface appears confusing.

The fact that the statue is addressed at one point as "father" has caused most critics to link this poem with Plath's own father and her poetic treatment of him; but nothing in this poem demands that single interpretation. Perhaps the colossus is not the actual father but the creative father, a suggestion reinforced by the fact that the spirit of the Ouija board from which Plath and Hughes received hints of subjects for poems claimed that his family god, *Kolossus*, gave him most of his information. The colossus, then, may be Plath's private god of poetry, the muse which she would have to make masculine in order to worship and marry. The concentration of mouth imagery to describe the colossus also points to his identification as a speaker or poet. The persona has labored thirty years "To dredge the silt from your throat," although, she admits, "I am none the wiser." She suggests, "Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle, Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other." In the end, she says, "The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue." No messages came from the throat, the mouthpiece, the tongue of this figure; this god is silent, yet the speaker feels bound to serve him. The sense of servitude and of the impossible task of such service reflects the creative exhaustion Plath felt during this period. Her statement at the end that "My hours are married to shadow" may be an admission that she is married, in fact, to darkness and creative silence, rather than to the god of poetry who could fertilize her. Her fears also center on the catastrophe that produced the breaking of the idol: "It would take more than a lightning-stroke/ to create such a ruin." This admission, enigmatic if the statue is her father or a dying god, recalls Plath's early poetic concerns about creative paralysis and the sense of a collapsing order.

Furthermore, Philips (1972) thinks that "This hatred of men and the unhealthiness of her mental condition continue to ground the figures of "The Colossus."

The speaker's identity here hinges on a broken idol out of the stream of civilization, one whose "hours are married to shadow." No longer does she "listen for the scrape of a keel / on the blank stones of the landing." Man, personified by a ship, has no place in her scheme. The marriage to shadow is a marriage to the memory of the poet's father, and therefore to death itself. The pull toward that condition is the subject of "Lorelei" as well as the central symbol of "A Winter Ship." That she perceived the nature of her own psychic condition is clear not only in the identification with the broken idol of "The Colossus," but also with the broken vase of "The Stones." Plath makes a metaphor for her reverse misogyny in "The Bull of Bendylaw," where she transforms that traditionally feminine body, the sea (note the article, *la mere*), into a brute bull, a potent symbol for the active masculine principle. The bull, as in all Palaeo-oriental cultures, is a symbol of both destruction and power. Yet, as with many of Plath's symbols, there is a complexity beyond this "(Philips, 1972, p. 311).

Accordingly, the poems already mentioned concentrate on certain recurrent and central issues such as artistic creativity, morbid psychic life and above all the infatuation-hatred relation with both father and husband. Indeed these are the axes around which most of her poems revolve.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **4.1 Overview:**

In this chapter, the researcher attempts to answer the questions of the current study. In fact, conclusions are made after a thorough and detailed investigation of the literature reviewed for the purposes of this study.

However, conclusions are obtained depending on the resources of data that the researcher succeeded to obtain. Hopefully, conclusions will be in conformity with the whole study and logically derived.

The conclusions are to be presented in accordance with the questions of the study that appeared in chapter one.

#### **4.2 Conclusions:**

##### **4.2.1 What is the rationale behind choosing Sylvia Plath's recurrent topics and imagery, as well as her characteristic style?**

This question is discussed in detail in chapters two and three, where it is stressed that in Sylvia's literary works especially the poems, there are recurrent uses of certain symbols and metaphors. There are repeated recalls of the father figure. The "colossus" represented the absent father in Sylvia's life. "Mirror" reflected the inner self and the oppressed self in Sylvia. Other symbols repeatedly used represent death, winter, and the holocaust.

The selection of the symbols and metaphors in Sylvia Plath's literary works reflected her psychological state. Moreover, they serve as codes used to interpret the

feelings of Sylvia Plath, exactly as in dreams according to the Freudian interpretations, where dreams function as codes for reality and lived experiences.

#### **4.2.2 What are the conflicts of Sylvia Plath, which began in her relationship with her father and continued with her husband?**

Sylvia Plath who was attracted to her loving father later idealized the figure of the father in her literary works. She often expressed longing and yearning to the protector and teacher and guide to her in this world. The first psychological problems stem from the unexplained absence of her father. In fact, she could not tolerate his death, and even accused him of killing himself by refusing to be treated in the early stages of illness. Sylvia considered Ted to be the father surrogate in her life, but she clashed with him for being a dishonest lover and unfaithful husband. Also she internally considered him the expected opponent male figure who does make his best to hinder a female surpassing or getting rid of male dominance.

Moreover, being occupied to ensure her children enjoy a good life, the mother contributed to the accumulation of grief, ignorance and feelings of deprivation in Sylvia. Later, when the mother attempted to help her daughter regain health after the first suicidal attempt when she was at college, Sylvia suffered from the ECT therapy. It was a nightmare that haunted her memories; the family ties broke between the mother and the daughter. Consequently, isolation and inner self-estrangement radically developed and intensified. Hence, accumulation of frustrations, disappointments and increasing estrangement between her and the supposed beloved individuals in her life such as her mother and husband worsened her mental capacity and ability to cope and adapt when exposed to life crises as when she discovered her husband is one affair.

In fact, the desperate state in which Sylvia found herself complicated the depression and anxiety she suffered in the last months before she committed suicide. All these burdened her and weakened her self-defense and forced her to surrender and give up life, although she was to witness a new prosperous stage in her literary career with writing poems of *Ariel*. Ironically enough, these poems received great praise for they reflected the great development in Sylvia's writing and language skills. However, the inner and emotional crises that Sylvia suffered from were accompanied with the suppression and restraining of feelings as a reaction from Sylvia contributed to the development of a severe morbid state. All this affected Sylvia who used to think highly of herself and never admitted weakness in her personality and refused the fragility of women in a patriarchal society. Such characteristics including megalomania when Sylvia thought she was superior and exceptionally- gifted woman complicated her state. Thus, before deciding to commit suicide, she did not send signals to those surrounding her that her inner-self was being devastated and that she was collapsing. In short, Sylvia could not cope with her self-crises and frustrations accumulated during the few years she lived.

#### **4.2.3 Comment on Sylvia Plath's sense of oppression and her battle to come to grips with the issues of this power imbalance!**

Sylvia Plath, after her first suicidal attempt felt that her inner self balance was questionable. Therefore, a psychological therapy was conducted to help her regain her inner self-balance. Regardless of the effect of the ECT, Sylvia was conscious of the fact that she needs to free herself from guilt feeling, of being responsible for her father's death indirectly and other complications of her past.

Deeply Sylvia Plath felt that her father betrayed her and let her down by his early departure and absence from her life. Feeling she needed him beside her to instruct and guide her worsened things and complicated the effects of the emotional loss of father's love in her life as a child and girl. Her ideal model for her loving and intelligent father and the dominant figure that she saw in her early childhood remained in her memory. Even her husband, to whom she tended, to substitute and compensate for the loss of her father, ruined her life when they separated after Sylvia discovered his affair.

Furthermore, her relationship with her mother intensified and worsened and increased her feeling of being victimized after she sent Sylvia to a psychological therapist and staying in hospital while treated by methods of ECT. All this left a drastic effect on her feelings and mind.

All these experiences enhanced the feeling of being oppressed in Sylvia's ego and consequently increased her self-estrangement from the surrounding people. Further, in her last months she spent her time isolated and working on her *Ariel* collection of poems, which included the most popular and well-known poems. However, secluding herself writing poems did not prevent her from ending her life.

All her poems and her novel show these emotional and psychological states. They betray a terrible sense of loss, pain and inflated ego.

#### **4.2.4 What is the inner struggle of Sylvia Plath that many women face in male-dominated society?**

Sylvia Plath lived during the second feminism wave in the American society. When she pursued her college education she found out that was not easy, for society at that time cared more about education of the males than females. The females were

expected to occupy certain jobs teaching at schools, nursing and clerks and secretarial jobs, but they are not expected to occupy major jobs in higher education or leading positions.

Sylvia Plath suffered from both parts in the society, the male and the female. From the male side, she lived in a society dominated by males. Sylvia refused to be a traditional woman who does secondary jobs and has less influence on her society; she had conflicts with males who oppressed the smarter and more confident women. Conversely, Sylvia was not satisfied with women themselves who surrender to males' will, and accept to be only housewives looking after children and husbands and occupy their minds with trivial matters. In fact, Sylvia criticized her father for using her mother to type and document his dissertation and assist him with fulfilling it, but his acknowledgement and dedications went to the male. In fact, Sylvia was rebellious and resisted the utilization or marginalizing of women in society. Therefore, she considered men to be opponents and not as complementary to each other. She felt her existence and success were threatened by men. Even Ted Hughes was her competitor, although he encouraged her to write and used to advise her about her works. Her self-destruction resulted from the surrounding situations and factors.

Reading two poems by Sylvia Plath "The Colossus" and "Daddy", verses confirms the above mentioned conclusions. For example, regarding Sylvia Plath's feelings of despair and isolation and emptiness in her soul can be detected easily from "The Colossus"

My hours are married to shadow.

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel

On the blank stones of the landing.

This final image has considerable pathos and beauty and is imaginatively in unity with the growing despair of the earlier verses. It is also a statement of the submission of the restorer to the broken statue and her acceptance referred to the word 'married', that there can be no escape from this memory into a more vital relationship. In such a life everything must be shadowy, blank, lonely, but she accepts her isolation almost with fervor.

Dropping the past was at the center of Sylvia's attention. In fact, she tried to free herself from her love and obsession of father and that is what she did in the above-mentioned verses of the "*Colossus*". But the most stark announcement comes in "Daddy" when she outcried:

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

She is, however, at this point, turning from the stone wreckage of another being to the ruins of her own. The movement is vital, for it indicates her wish to leave death--her father's actual death and her own dramatized death--for new life.

Further, the symbolic use of shadow in "Daddy" and "the Colossus" represented the fears of being or living in the shadow of the empowered-by-society males, who are the father and the husband in Sylvia's case.

In addition, Sylvia admitted she could not heal the wounds in herself, which hinted at the deformed relationship with her father and males in general. Sylvia's helplessness to heal the wound marks her inability to cope with her inner conflicts which intensified her torture and pain and tragedy. In "The Colossus" she addressed her father as "the broken colossus":

I shall never get you put together entirely,  
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

A more radical turn in her relationship with her father and males in general, which reflects the extreme and utmost unstable emotional state of Sylvia Plath is when she wrote in "Daddy":

Daddy, I have had to kill you

In fact, she killed her father, the male dominance in her life and the desperate state. Out of the great pain and frustration, Sylvia Plath has managed to create artistic moments of beauty, grace and intensity.

### 4.3 Recommendations:

After analyzing the psychological dimensions in Sylvia's life that were reflected in her literary production, the researcher has addressed this issue by generally discussing the themes which appeared in four of Sylvia Plath's works: *The Bell Jar*, *The Ariel*, *The Mirror* and *The Colossus*.

However, this issue still needs further and more profound analysis. Therefore, the researcher can recommend the following:

1. To conduct a comparative study addressing psychological perspectives in Sylvia Plath compared with other women writers, such as her contemporary Anne Sexton and other writers who committed suicide.
2. To conduct a study about the effect of Sylvia Plath on contemporary English literature both in prose and poetry.
3. To further select and study other poems that have not received their due analysis.



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