

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

N° : .....



DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

**Autobiographical Reflections and Images of  
Death in Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* Poems**

**Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Master's Degree**

**By: Mohamed Lamine MANSOUR / Zineb RAMLI**

**Academic Year: 2016/2017**

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**Academic Year: 2016 /2017**



## **Declaration**

We hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely the product of our personal investigation and that due reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary to the works of others researchers.

Mr. Mohamed Lamine MANSOUR

Miss. Zineb RAMLI

**Signature**

**Signature**

## **Acknowledgements**

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said,

**"He who does not thank people, does not thank Allah"** (Ahmad, Tirmidhi).

The completion of this dissertation could not have been possible without the guidance, assistance and enthusiastic supervision of Mrs. Nassima AMIROUCHE. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to her for her patience, confidence, and her faith in our abilities.

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Our thanks and appreciation are to teachers and members of the Department of English at University of Mohamed Boudiaf - M'sila.

## **Dedication**

To the soul of “DADDY”, Mohamed Cherif.

Mohamed Lamine

To my late father, Whom I always hoped would witness this day, my dear mother, brothers Yazid, Mahieddine, Abdelghani and my sister Lakhder Hamina Imen without them I would not have succeeded in reaching where I’m now.

Zineb

## Abstract

The major aim of this study is to reveal the autobiographical reflections and images of death in Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* poems. The purpose of this research is to verify the hypothesis that the theme of death in Plath's *Ariel* can be read from different ways. Owing to the fact that her poems were purely confessional, her biography reflected purposefully in her writing. Thus, in order to conduct this study, we intend to employ the Death Drive theory which was introduced by Sigmund Freud. This thesis consists of two chapters: the first chapter presents a theoretical background of the writer and the genre she belongs to. On other hand, Plath's life plays a pivotal role in shaping her poetry. The events she went through were illustrated in her poems and eventually made her commit suicide at an early age. The second chapter deals with the "death instinct" that was portrayed within *Ariel* poems and the various interpretations of this theme relying on the poet's life and mainly her psychological issues. The use of the death drive theory will allow us to analyse Plath's poems form a psychological perspective.

**Key Words:** Sylvia Plath, Confessional Poetry, the Death-Drive, Death, *Ariel*.

## ملخص

إنَّ ما نرْمي إليه في هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن صورة الموت في قصائد "أريال" لـ"سيلفيا بلاث"، حيث اشتغلنا على فرضية من خلالها استطعنا الغور في ماهية الموت وإمكانية تعدد قراءاته ، وبما أن قصائدها ضمن شعر الاعتراف فليس غريبا أن تكون انعكاسا طبيعيا لسيرتها الذاتية ومواقفها الشخصية، وقد لجأنا في ذلك إلى الاستعانة بالنظرية الفرويدية في دافعية الموت. أما بحثنا فقسمناه قسمين؛ يعرض الأول ترجمة لحياة الشاعرة والنوع الشعري الذي تنتمي إليه، حيث أدت حياتها دورا محوريا في كتاباتها، فالأحداث التي عبّرت عنها جعلتها في آخر المطاف تنتحر واقعيًا وهي في ريعان شبابها. وأما الثاني فيتناول فكرة "غريزة الموت" وتجلياتها في قصائد "أريال"، حيث اعتمدنا في تفسيرها على المشاكل النفسية التي تعرضت لها الشاعرة في حياتها، لذلك فدافعية الموت فتحت لنا المجال في القدرة على تحليل قصائد بلاث من وجهة نفسية.

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** سيلفيا بلاث، شعر الاعتراف، دافعية الموت، الموت، أريال.

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# Introduction

### Introduction

Sylvia Plath is a name that has a loud literary echo nowadays in everywhere. The topics she discussed are to some extent a reason for her fame and glamour. Despite the fact that she had written few poems before her death in an early age, she acquired a good literary status, inspiring dozens of biographies and critical studies.

The rise of Plath to this position has been rapid in the aftermath of her death. She is one of the confessional poets and is considered as one of the most important and influential poets of the twentieth modern literature.

In her lifetime, Plath published only one collection of poems *The Colossus* and one novel *The Bell Jar*. She also wrote several stories and sketches, including her *Letters Home* and *Journals* whereas the *Ariel* poems were published few years after her death. Her works run lines parallel with her life in itself, the ups and downs, daily inner battles and triumphs. Her poems' themes range from herself, her thoughts, feelings, and experiences, to victimization, patriarchy, nature, the body, motherhood, and death. The latter theme was recurrent whether during her own life or through her writings.

In literature, death is pictured in diverse ways; as a symbol, plot device or a theme. It came to be a recurrent theme in Sylvia Plath's poetry due to the sudden death of her father. His death left the daughter with powerful feelings of defeat, resentment, grief and remorse. The absence of the father had negatively influenced her emotional life. Plath's poetry depicts her life and represents her own self, leaving a body of brilliant works led some critics to describe her as the poetess of death, for death appears as prevalent theme in most of her poems. When reading her poems collection "*Ariel*", one can sense a persistent desire of death; it is due to many psychological, personal and social factors. Thus, this study aims at casting light on the images of death in "*Ariel*" poems on the one hand and identifying the biographical reflections of the author in those poems on the other.

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Plath's unfortunate suicide in 1963, shocked the literary world, thus her confessional writings became primary platform from which to dissect her life's details including death as prevalent theme firstly because her literary life reached a tragic end through committing suicide then the factors that paved the way for her to write poetry in particular amongst those factors the death of her father. Linda Wagner-Martin (1999) has written a book entitled "*Sylvia Plath a Literary Life*", in which she sheds light on Sylvia's works and reveals much about Sylvia from her childhood and the death of her father and its influence on the poet's psychology to her tragic suicide. Aileen.M.Aird's book (1973) "*Sylvia Plath : Her Life and Work*" discusses a set of the collection's poems such as "*Lady Lazarus*" , "*Ariel*" and "*Daddy*" and reveals the death wish and suicidal tendency of the poet and how it was obvious in her writings. Mark A.Runco (1998) conducted a study entitled "*Suicide and creativity: The case of Sylvia Plath*", in which he explains from psychoanalytic perspectives how Plath's creativity is the outcome of her stress and depression. Jennifer Yaros (2008) conducted a research entitled "*Sylvia Plath: Poetry of Suicide*" and claims that the details of Plath's personal life and the feelings are depicted in her poems. Another study "*A Note on Plath's Ariel*" by Samantha Miller, in which she tackled Plath's thoughts and attitudes towards death. Robert Philips (1972), is a critic who gave Sylvia Plath and her works much attention, in his volume "*The Dark Tunnel: A Reading of Sylvia Plath*". He analysed many of Plath's poems such as "*Daddy*" and "*Lady Lazarus*" providing the literary audience a clear and deep analysis of her works. Furthermore, psychological and psychoanalytic studies of Sylvia Plath's poetry were conducted, "*Psychological Study of Sylvia Plath*" by Poonam B.Valerain in which he explains the interrelationship between Plath's psychology and her literary works and how the details of her personal life explained the subject matter of her poems. Moreover, Shereen H. Hamdan (2010) demonstrated a study entitled "*Sylvia Plath's Literary Works: A Psychological View*", where her study aims at analysing the psychological aspects of Sylvia Plath and how they influenced her literary production. Also

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showing her relationship with her father, husband and mother though from a feminist and psychological point of view. As well as, a study conducted by Safiya Mohammed Al-Shamiri which is entitled “*From Confession to Death: A Study in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton*”, Al-Shamiri’s study explored the theme of death in Plath’s and Sexton’s poetry. It showed the affinities between the both poets in terms of confession in writing and interest in death. She treated the theme of death in their poetry relying on Freud’s idea and thoughts about death in mind.

This research aims to shed light on Plath's *Ariel* Poems, raising many questions about the writer, her experiences and relations with others. As she is considered as one of the confessional poets, there are some elements that are autobiographically based in those poems in particular, as well as her psychological attitudes throughout all her life. In poems such as *Ariel*, *Lady Lazarus*, *Daddy*, *I am Vertical*, *Edge*, *Death & Co.*, *Elm* and *A Birthday Present* reveal much about her as a creative writer and also reveal death in various ways, ultimately her death just few months after the genesis of *Ariel* was written. This study, therefore, focuses on death and its representation in Plath’s late poems. It also aims at showing the relationship between death and life, rebirth through death, and death as an inevitable evilness towards destruction.

From a newly reader of Plath’s poetry, one cannot comprehend her emotions and feelings that displayed within her poems lines unless digging deeper into her life. A life that is connected and reflected on her writings. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following main question:

- ❖ What are the autobiographical reflections of Plath’s own life and their relationship with images of death in her *Ariel*’s poems?

More than that, it will equally endeavour at responding to other sub-questions which are related to the topic of our study:

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- ❖ How are Sylvia Plath's melancholia and depression reflected in her poems?
- ❖ In what images is death revealed in *Ariel* due to her psychic disorders?
- ❖ Is death a sense of destruction or rebirth?

As stated earlier, the current study will focus on Sylvia Plath's poems in "*Ariel*" as a sample to analyse the images of death and uncover the biographical reflections of the author in the poems. The major objective of this study is to provide a detailed and comprehensive view of the psychological perspective of Plath's life and how it is reflected in her poems. The research hence will delve into Plath's committing suicide and death as recurrent theme in her major works.

This study will humbly provide students and all those who are concerned with American Literature with a clear understanding of the relationship between Plath's life and her confessions through her writings mainly poetry. It will also help to demonstrate clearly her psychological troubles and her view of life by means of death.

To present an analytical evaluation of Sylvia Plath's poems, the study will employ the Psycho-analytical Approach. Namely, it will attempt to delve into images of death and the reflection of the poet's own life in her writing and why death in particular. As a matter of fact, this approach relies on the works of Sigmund Freud and mainly his concept of the death drive. Through this concept, the study will provide an explanation for the analogies of Plath's life with her poems on one hand and death as the ontological force behind the origins of mind on the other. Although this theory was criticised by the vast majority of contemporary psychoanalysts like Antonio Virsida, Robert R. Holt, Henri Ellenberger, and Allan Compton, it resembles the representation of death in Plath's poems in terms instincts toward destruction and aggression. Moreover, this Freudian theory provides and explains the dualistic view of life/Eros and death/Thanatos as Freud introduced it in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

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This study is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is entitled “*Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death*”, in this chapter, we intend to cast light on Sylvia Plath’s life whose events and stages played an important role in shaping the poet’s literary works as well as the psychological trauma that developed due to different causes and hence committing suicide in an early age.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, *Loss, Despair, Life, and Death*, deals with Sylvia Plath the child and her parents’ Germanic background. When she was a child, Plath witnessed the loss of her father. Even though such incident turned her life into despair and depression, her creative mind arises her being a poet, who wrote magnificent poems, from her childhood to her death. Plath was an excellent poet. Writing was another life for her in which she tried to recover through confessing her feelings into words. She went through a jumbled relationship with her husband, substantially her tragic death few months later. Therefore, Plath’s life is an important element to start with this research.

The second section of this chapter is entitled *a Confessional Tone*. It introduces the genre namely the confessional poetry, and it digs into its main leaders as well as its characteristics. Moreover, in order to show the confessions that appeared in Plath’s poems, this section deals also with Plath’s belonging this genre as a one of the most leading poets. As well as this section states Plath’s confessions which are represented as feelings of rage, anger, and despair. Sylvia Plath Her confessions and autobiographical writings emerged from her melancholic life and her inner struggles. Thus, there is a deep connection of her confessional tone that was used in her poetry and the different episodes of her life.

The second chapter of this study, which is entitled *The Death Instinct in Ariel poems*, opens the analytical part of our thesis. It aims at analysing the representation of death as an ever-existing reality in Plath’s poetry. It is divided into three sections. The first one, which is entitled *The Freudian Death Drive*, deals with Freud’s theory of the death drive since Plath’s

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poetry, “*Ariel*” in particular, provides an excellent ground for this theory in terms of life and death instincts and exemplifies the combination between seeking the pleasure through her writing’s creative value and the suppression of the unpleasant which is represented in her attraction to death. So in order to delve into the images of death within her poems and to help the reader to understand the sublimation and transformation of her overactive impulse towards death which is something unpleasant into pleasure, we intend to devote this section to talk about the death drive theory as an original and significant concept developed by Freud.

The second section, *Death as a Source of Human Evilness*, investigates the death of Plath’s father which was a recurrent theme in her poetry, self-destruction of the poet through her suicide’s attempts and her impulse toward death, and finally the holocaustic images as a reflection of her Jewish belonging from one hand and her being a victim by losing her “Nazi” father from the other. The third section of this chapter is entitled *Dichotomy between death and life* and shows how death is represented in Plath’s poetry as a symbol of life from one hand, and life as a symbol of death from another.

Chapter One:  
**Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from  
Confession to Death**

The first chapter of this research is entitled *Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death*, it deals with the poet's life as an autobiographical reflection on her poetry since Plath herself used a confessional tone to show her feelings and emotions through writing. It was essential to elucidate Plath's poems mainly the death theme relying on her biographical aspects. Although this chapter provides a theoretical background, it enhances our understanding of the reflections and the confessions of the writer as well as it paves the way for us to apply the appropriate approach. Furthermore, the first chapter helps to narrow the scope of our analytical material in chapter two.

### **1. Loss, Despair, Life, and Death**

#### **1.1 Social background**

Sylvia Plath is the daughter of highly educated parents. Otto Plath and Aurelia Schober whose origins are German, had a great impact in shaping their daughter's skills of writing and developing her potential to be one of the most remarkable poets in the American Literature.

Her father, Otto Plath, emigrates from Germany to the United States in his adolescent age, where he starts his elementary classes. He has a beneficial skill to acquire subsequent languages. Hence, in addition to his mother tongue, German, he speaks English, French and Polish, as well as teaches German at university. Otto moves to Wisconsin, where his grandparents live. He has an opportunity to attend college by getting a scholarship from the Lutheran ministry where he majored classical languages (Wagner-Martin 03). According to O'Reilly, his scholarship comes to an end by the time he converted to Darwinism. Although he was drummed out from the Lutheran family, Otto Plath independently pursues advanced studies of various fields such as languages, biology, zoology and entomology, eventually he gets a doctorate in Harvard for his research about the life cycle of the bumblebee in 1928. By this time, he started teaching Aurelia Schober at the University of Boston (355).

## Chapter One: Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death

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In her other book, “*Sylvia Plath: A Biography*”, Wagner-Martin states that Sylvia Plath’s mother, Aurelia Schober, whose parents were Austrian immigrants, lived easier than Otto because of love and ambition offered by her parents. She learned German when she was in elementary school and she worked in a public library and then as a typist and secretary while studying in college. Subsequently, she studied Middle-High German at Boston University, then taught German and English at Brookline High School meanwhile continuing her M.A. degree (20,21).

As it was aforementioned, Otto was Aurelia’s teacher for Middle High German. He was attracted to her because she had a tenacious and persistent mind as well as she was an avid and a highly selective reader whose world was filled with literary works of great writers such as Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Brontes, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Galsworthy, Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James etc. She married Otto after a year and half of courtship because of his early marriage (Wagner-Martin 03). Otto’s previous marriage was pointed out as comments that were made by Aurelia in Sylvia Plath’s *Letters Home* which were edited and published in 1976, “Otto had first to seek a divorce from his previous wife, Lydia, from whom he had separated some thirteen years earlier” (Gill 02).

Otto’s divorce with Lydia paved the way to his second marriage with his student who was twenty-one years older than her, as Butscher states, “She was twenty-one years younger than Otto. In fact, Aurelia’s future husband was only four years younger than her own father” (7). Early in 1932, Otto Plath and Aurelia Schober were married and settled in the Jamaica Plain area so he could be near to the university where he taught.

By the autumn of the same year, they gave birth to their first child, Sylvia, who was an attractive and bright child. Despite the fact that Otto did not want a child, he was delighted with her and changed his mind and loved her so much when he saw her. Nevertheless, he called for a son in the few coming years. By two and a half years, Warren Josef Plath was born who

## Chapter One: Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death

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brought a huge wound in Sylvia's childhood after she was the only child for her elderly father (8). This painful experience left her deeply wounded as she noted it in her sublime memoir "*Ocean 1212-W*" few months before her death where she showed her anger and rage at his invasion of her territory: "A baby! I hated babies. I who for two and half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth, babies!" (268,269). The latter lines refer to the early intention of parents towards Sylvia that was shifted to her brother after his birth, such experience left the child felt unwanted and neglected from the family.

When Sylvia became four years old, her father's health began to decline. Initially, his illness was thought to be cancer but later the diagnosis revealed that he had an advanced diabetes and eventually died in 1940 (Bassnett 06). His death was a turning point either for his wife who found herself obliged to work to maintain a living for her family or the children, and Sylvia in particular, which was represented clearly in her later literary works and was reflected on either her writing style or the psychological aspects of her life. As she confesses in her only novel, *the Bell Jar*, "I thought how strange it had never occurred to me before that I was purely happy until I was nine years old" (75).

### 1.2 A Melancholic Child

Sylvia Plath was born at the Robinson Memorial Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 27, 1932. She was the first child of Otto Plath and his second wife, Aurelia Schober Plath. Her name has different derivations, as Bustscher presupposes:

the child's name was derived from the herb "salvia" and the adjective "sylvan", which would have suited Otto's classical education and scientific training. Sylvia herself might have preferred a reference to Shakespeare's "Silvia" in the *Tempest*. Whatever its derivation, the name seemed fitting.(8)

By the time of her birth, the Plaths were living in Jamaica Plains. When Sylvia was four, they moved to Winthrop, the eastern part of Massachusetts, in order to be near to sea and to the

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Schobers, Sylvia's grandparents, where Sylvia spent extended periods of time with them, especially before Warren was born. She was sent to her grandparents to prepare for the new baby's birth (Bloom 11). Although she was attached to her grandparents and fascinated by the sea and the landscape in Winthrop, she was deeply wounded that her being the centre of attention was replaced by Warren. This painful experience was the first step towards depression and melancholy in such early age, as well as it led to isolation and loneliness.

After the death of Otto Plath, Aurelia's parents moved to the Plaths' home. Since the children were still young and sad of the loss of their father, they needed additional support. Shortly After the family moved inland from the edge of the ocean to a small home in Wellesley, west of Boston, where Aurelia was offered a job to teach at university. Despite the poorly paid income, Aurelia was eager to provide more stability and security to her family, especially after Otto's funeral costs and the financial issue the family faced, As Sylvia claims in her *Letters Home*: "her father did not have a pension – a source of deep bitterness to her mother – and the costs of his illness and funeral had exhausted any spare savings" (29). Although Wellesley provided good schools and lower taxes which maintained an opportunity for Sylvia to attend school, get scholarship, and achieve her academic career, the loss of her father and Winthrop affected her entire childhood badly as she recalled in her memoir "*Ocean 1212-W*" in a highly nostalgic description: "And this how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle – beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white, flying myth" (272).

In addition to her loss, Sylvia did not accept the fact that she moved from Winthrop. According to Wagner-Martin (1987), Sylvia hated to leave her friends David and Ruth Freeman whose friendship lasted five years, as well as she had to repeat the fifth grade because she was younger than students in the sixth grade, she was also frightened by her mother's serious illness (36, 37). All these childhood's painful events did not stop Sylvia to get A's grades in school

and build her creative mind. Moreover, Wellesley was a station towards her creativity and brilliant academic career in which she transferred her pain and despair into writing and poetry.

### 1.3 Plath's Studious Bent and Creative Mind

During her lifetime, she loved words and the way they are arranged. According to Wagner-Martin (2003), "She (Sylvia) had always read, it seemed. She could not remember a time when she was not reading, or someone – her mother, both her grandparents – was not reading to her" (6). She limited her reading skills although she was a book addict, as she stated in her *Journals* "I can never read all the books I want" which means she wanted to read all the books but it is impossible to have all the books read, she trained all her life for her art but she could not be skilled in all arts "I can never train myself in all the skills I want" and finishes her saying by human being's limitation "I am horribly limited". "She learned early that writing was as important as reading" Reading" (6). In other words, the process of writing runs in parallel with reading as Stephen King argues: "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot". At the age of eight, Sylvia had her first poem published in the *Boston Sunday Herald*. She was talented as a child and her writing process determined her skills and showed her trend to develop and express her feelings into poems and diaries. She wrote a lot during her years in high school and was praised by her teachers especially her English teacher, Wilbury Crocket, who encouraged and helped her. Moreover, she was taught at Bradford High school which offered good teachers (7). She became more introverted in her adolescence and most of her writings were diary poems, between the ages of nine and seventeen. Most of her poems were published in the so called magazine, *The Phillipian*, from 1944 to 1947 during her years in The Phillips school. Although they were considered as her initial attempts into writing poetry, they well-structured in form following dimensions of highly creative mind, where she tried to put images of nature in poems such as "*The Spring Parade*", "*March*", and "*Rain*". Her poetry techniques changed and freed from structural ties that more previously

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appeared in her early poems, and started to focus more on narrative line (Butscher 24). By her sixteen, she wrote three short stories of fiction “*Heat*”, “*The Brink*”, and “*The Attic View*”. Each story had a woman protagonist and focused on how these women dealt emotionlessly towards their lives, as loneliness and depression were major themes in these stories. Later in 1949, she wrote other stories such as “*The Dark River*” and “*East Wind*”, the latter represented Miss Minton, a repeated character in her award winning story, “*Sunday at the Minton*” later in 1952 (9).

The year of 1950 brought a remarkable gift for Sylvia; as she won a scholarship to study at Smith college. Such fortunate opportunity maintained her high grades, gave her a chance to enjoy an active social life, served her a position as one of the editors of *Smith Review*, and more than that, she published several stories in *Seventeen*, *the Christian Science Monitor*, and *Mademoiselle*. In 1953, by the end of her second year at Smith, Plath knew that she was not selected to attend Frank O’Connor’s summer writing course at Harvard, so she slipped into a deep depression and suffered badly from insomnia which led her to take overdosed sleeping pills as an attempt of suicide. After this traumatic event, Sylvia returned to Smith in the spring of 1954 and graduated a year after. Hence, she won a Fulbright scholarship to Newnham College in Cambridge, England (O’Reilly 356). She graduated from Cambridge and obtained a master’s degree a year after her marriage with the English poet Ted Hughes in 1956. Shortly after, the couple went back to the United States, where she took up a teaching position at Smith. Due to the fact that she was not into teaching and got exhausted, her husband and she focused more on writing. They moved to Boston in 1958, where they met different writers such as Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich. She spent plenty of time traveling with her husband. Subsequently, they stayed at Yaddo, where she had a suitable atmosphere as she was pregnant with her first child. This stability allowed her to write and produce great deal of poems including “*Poem of a Birthday*”, “*Mushrooms*”, and “*The*

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*Colossus*". The latter was a title for her first collection. "*The Colossus*" was published in London in 1960 shortly after they left to England, and two years later in New York by Knopf, as Bloom asserts the "*The Colossus*" value to be published in the United States which brought attention to Plath's writings, "Plath quickly received favourable attention and a sizable writing grant from an American foundation". Hence, as he adds, "She began working intently on *The Bell Jar*, a novel that contains much autobiographical detail about her near-suicide at age of twenty" which was published in January 1963 under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, she wrote many essays, book reviews, and a radio play entitled *Three Women* (12,13).

The late months of 1962, were considered as the most productive period of her writing life. She wrote poems that were posthumously published under the name of *Ariel*. According to O'Reilly "she produced as many as forty lyric poems of immense power, often writing two in a day. For a writer as self-conscious and painstaking as Plath had been, it was a true watershed" (357). In a revival voice where she predicted her future fame and mythical status through her late poems including "*Lady Lazarus*", "*Ariel*", and "*Daddy*", she wrote addressing her mother and critics "I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name".

In the aftermath of her death, Plath's success and greatest fame grew rapidly especially after the publication of *Collected Poems* in 1981 by her husband which awarded the Pulitzer Prize, as well as the edition of *The Journal of Sylvia Plath* in 1982. More than that, he previously published a collection of short stories, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, in 1977 and two volume of poetry *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* in 1971. In addition to Hughes publications, Aurelia Schober Plath's also published a children's book entitled *The Bed Book* and *Letters Home* in 1975 (O'Reilly 357). According to Bassnett "she (Plath) had acquired an almost mythical status, inspiring dozens of biographies, critical studies, memoirs, performances and even, by 2003, a Hollywood film about her life" (1). She adds that it is due to the quality of Plath's poetry and its relationship with the almost autobiographical aspects and reflections

of her life, her works had a sudden increase in the amount of books, articles, and critiques. Even if early responses towards her poetry were superficially treated and criticised for its darkness and bloody images, later critics, particularly feminists, focused more on her powerful language and the outraged expressions that manifest women's struggling and pain.

However, her highly individualistic style of writing made her a difficult poet for critics whose studies and works were sought to reveal the connections between her poetry and the stages of her life including her depression, the loss of her father, and eventually the betrayal of her husband that reflected her poetry's thematic patterns.

### 1.4 Herr God, Herr Lucifer

The death of Otto Plath, Sylvia's father, was considered as a shock from which she never recovered and followed her until her own death. Thus, during the past two decades she lived with guilt and anger, she did not accept the death of her father and tried to get rid of him through writing in a way to bring rest and peace to her life, especially he left her between two stools, either to accept the reality of his death hence carrying her life without him or to bring him back to life which is entirely impossible and psychologically is going to affect her life and replace her love to him by feelings of hatred. Amongst her *Ariel* poems, "Daddy" is one of her most well-known poems, it is a magnificent poem about daughter's relationship with father. Robert Philips says "It is a terrible poem, full of blackness, and one of the most nakedly confessional poems ever written" (1973), where Plath presents her deepest thoughts and strong emotions related to her short and cut off relationship with her father and the traumatic effect of his death. Critics have viewed "Daddy" as a response to Plath's complex relation with her parent. O'Reilly claims that in Plath's poetry, Otto Plath was to become a potent symbol of absence. Her feelings towards her father varied, in fact, they are contradictory, a combination of love, yearning and sorrow for his absence, she blames him for his death and the disorder in her life.

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Plath's father was emotionally detached from her, in addition, to his dominance over his daughter and his wife. After his death, she continuously felt suppressed by him and extremely angry at the fact he was not present in her life, and she could not work her feelings with him. Her hatred for him is expressed frankly in the line, "Daddy I have to kill you; you died before I had time" as if she wished at times that he was dead. She also describes the lack of connection between them and her inability to talk to him in both life and death. Plath revealed all the feelings she had towards her father, about his death and his treatment. Nevertheless, she felt guilty about her hatred to her father, she waited to meet him again and get back to him and to correct that mistakes.

Moreover, getting rid of daddy symbolized also her relationship with her husband, as Wagner-Martin puts "coping with the man in her household who has ruined her idyl – whether the man be her father or her husband" (128). Her life with Ted Hughes has changed dramatically after his betrayal, which caused her depression and melancholy. Her marriage to the English poet had been at first a euphoric experience but gradually life became much harder, Hughes suppressed her the same way her father did, she could not express herself the way she wanted and he did not allow her to make things in her own manner. In "*Daddy*", in addition to complex relationship with Otto Plath and the traumatic effect of his death, the poem additionally reveals that Plath tried to replace the father by the husband.

### 1.5 The Tragic End of her Life

As it was stated before, Plath was married to the English poet, Ted Hughes, in London whom she described him as "the only man in the world who is my match." During their marriage time, they moved back from England to the United States, then they returned to settle down in England a couple of years later. She gave birth to two children, Freida Rebeca who was born in the United States meanwhile Nicholas in England in January 1962. The turning point was in May that year, when their friends, David and Assia Wevill, visited them. In fact, Plath knew

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about her husband's affair with Wevill what made her in a great tension and anger whereon she was unable to cope with it, thus both planned to divorce in August. Aurelia Plath confirms that tension when she visited her daughter in the summer of 1962. Shortly after, Hughes moved out then Plath stayed alone with children in Devon (Bloom 12, 13).

In December 1962, she rented an apartment in London with her two children. According to Wagner-Martin (2003), she often wrote letters to her college classmate Marcia Brown, Marty, about her way of life, her problems with her husband, and her health decrease. In January 1963, she wrote a letter to Marty revealing her health situation that she lost twenty pounds and "almost died of the flu this summer." A month later, less than a week before her suicide, her letter to Marty expresses the effects of trauma and the physical conditions she goes through, "Everything has blown and bubbled and warped and split." As if she were introducing her near committing suicide and that her life has come to an end, more than that, she adds "I am in limbo between the old world and the very uncertain and rather grim new." In addition to those letters, her autobiographical poem, "*Lady Lazarus*", revealed much about her suicide and death:

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else.  
I do it exceptionally well. (7)

If anyone read these lines and related them to her life, he would say that Plath favoured death and considered it as an art, an art in which she sought for her revival after death far of all the negative aspects of her melancholic life. As well as, her revealed intentions for her third suicide attempt that was confessed in the following lines:

I am only thirty.  
And like the cat I have nine times to die.  
  
This is Number Three.  
What a trash  
To annihilate each decade. (6)

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Bassnett discussed Plath's death from another point of view that "*she was playing a game with death, gambling with her own life as the stake but assuming that she would, of course, survive*" and she asserts that she did not intend to kill herself but that decision was taken to keep her out of her current trauma. Nevertheless, she killed herself by her own hands on a cold morning on 11 February, 1963 by gassing herself (19)

Gilbert argues that "the cause of Plath's death was not widely communicated at the time. American friends presumed that she died of pneumonia or flu" Until 1971, when Alvarez, who was an editor of the *Observer* and who was considered as a supporter and friend for Plath, reveals the real causes of her death in his memoir, *The Savage God*, in which Ted Hughes explains later in his *Letters of Ted Hughes* reasons behind covering the truth of the tragic death of his wife that it was due to the family benefit and in order to maintain a protection for the children and to encourage Plath's literary works to flourish and reach their ultimate credibility (Gill12).

## 2. The Confessional Tone

### 2.1 Confessional as a Genre

The confessional poetry is a branch of modern poetry. It is the poetry of self-revelation and the personal. It emerged in the mid twentieth century in the United States.

The term has first used in 1959 by M. L Rosenthal after Robert Lowell's "*Life Studies*" was published. Rosenthal (1985) explains this concept in his review on Lowell's "Life Studies": "Lowell's work is considered to be a personal one, which dealt with his own experiences, mental illness, and his family issues, thus it broke with the traditional genre of poetry (p. 64). Irving Howe, who defines the confessional poetry argues that: "a confessional poem would seem to be one in which the writer speaks to be the reader, telling him, without mediating presence of imagined event or persona, something about his life". In this sense, the main aim

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of this genre is saying all what the poet feels, he reveals what his heart holds and doesn't create any kind of borders between him and his audience.

This genre of poetry is usually associated with the American poets Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath. Their works are intensely personal and highly subjective. The new confessional poets discuss cutting edge topics such mental illness, anguish, despair, and feelings about death, loss, and depression. David Perkins claims that: "confession indicates a poetry, in which the expression is personal, and reveals experience or emotions that are more or less shocking, hatred of one's parents, children, spouse, or self, lust, voyeurism, suicidal fantasies, madness, horror, and fascination with death" (410). Expressing deep emotions and personal issues became the subject matter of this new trend. Previously, such topics had not been dealt with. Poets write these confessional poems to bare their souls to get a psychic relief.

The strong presence of the "I" is what distinguishes the genre, which means all the confessional poems are written from a first person point of view. Thus, the "I" is, ultimately the starting point for all the important elements that lead to the confessional mode. The confessional poetry is also characterized by homogeneous practices, that is, they all employed similar strategies, style, diction, and they all wrote autobiographical poetry (Rosenthal, p. 120). Confessional poetry symbolizes to the meaning and consequences of the poet's personal emotions, thoughts, and experiences. In his *"In Memoriam and the Rhetoric of Confession"*, David Shaw lists the characteristic features of confessional writing (80). One is the personal, which is the intimate nature of confessional writing; another is its "polemical nature"; the confessor, Shaw adds: "often the advocate in disguise" (83). Ted Hughes, in an interview for the Paris Review (Art of Poetry), discusses confessional poetry:

why do human beings need to confess? Maybe if you do not have that secret confession, you do not have a poem, do not have even a story, do not have a writer. If most poetry does not seem to be in any sense confessional, it is

because the strategy of concealment, of obliquity, can be so compulsive that it is almost entirely successful. The smuggling analogy is loaded with interesting cargo that seems to be therefore its own sake, subject matter of general interest. The novelty of some of Robert Lowell's most affecting pieces in *Life Studies*, some of Anne Sexton's poems, and some of Sylvia's was the way they tried to throw off that luggage, the deliberate way they stripped off the veiling analogies. Sylvia went furthest in the sense that her secret was most dangerous to her. She desperately needed to reveal it.

Hughes sees that confession represents something to be told and revealed. Confessing comes directly out of the heart, this confessional poetry became so estimable.

The confessionalists of the previous century pioneered a type of writing that changed the landscape of American poetry forever. This genre had a great influence on generations of writers and continues to this day.

### 2.2 Sylvia Plath's belonging

Sylvia Plath is one of the noted figures of the confessional poetry, and one of the most prominent leading writers in the twentieth century American literature. In her lifetime she published one collection of poems under the title of "*Colossus*" and her semi-autobiographical novel, "*the Bell Jar*". Plath's experiences, anguish, depression and pain were expressed frankly in her poems. The most intimate events of her life were a part of her creation, in particular poems that were written shortly before her death. Therefore, she received the attention of many scholars who dealt and analysed her poetry from different approaches.

She is well-known for her belonging to "Confessionalism", in which the poets divulged extremely intimate subjects. Sylvia Plath was traumatized in her life. First of all, it was the loss of her father, followed by her failure in attending writing class at Harvard and the collapse of her marriage. Plath used her pain to compose powerful poems and everlasting legacy that impressed the literary world.

In an interview on BBC with Peter Orr, Plath talked about her works saying:

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I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experience I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these cries from the heart that informed by nothing expect a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind.

The poet explains how she employed her own experiences in her poetry, claiming that the person cannot have better than his own life to write about, thus, the subjects which were considered taboo took shape in her poems.

Plath expresses her inner raging world with mystifying clarity and boldness. Gray Lane, in his book *“Sylvia Plath, New Views on Poetry”* mentioned that: “Her (Plath’s) words became axes, honed and deadly, and a major voice cut itself into the echoing wood for our poetry” (Lane 135).

“Plath’s great achievement was her ability to transform the experience into art without losing its nightmarish immediacy” (Critical Survey on Poetry). Her style of writing was based on the use of autobiographical experience and the reflection of her life in order to create art.

Sylvia Plath, as a young writer, was stimulated by such writers as Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickenson, Feodor Dostoevsky, D H Lawrence and later by Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell. She had a strong relation with the latter two poets, for they were all members of the so-called confessional school of poetry. Robert Lowell was the one who influenced Plath the most, after reading his *“Life Studies”* she was amazed by the themes, therefore, she was motivated to write in similar style. In the same interview with Peter Orr, she says:

I have been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came with Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*, this intense breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience which I feel has been partly a taboo. Robert Lowell’s poems about his experience in a mental hospital, for example, interested me very much. These peculiar, private and taboo subjects I feel have been explored in recent American poetry.

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Robert Lowell was an inspiration for Plath; his major work led Sylvia Plath to show her bold side and discuss openly what she always desired. She cited that his work had a profound impact on the poetry she was writing during the last phase of her career.

### 2.3 Plath's Confessions

In the words of Karl Malkoff, Sylvia made “an intense breakthrough into very serious, very emotional experience”. A close observation of Plath’s poems gives readers a clear clue that the element of fear appears in one of her early poems “*Juvenilia*”. This element of fear spreads to “*Colossus*” and it is followed later by adding other elements like dread and anger to other volumes: “*Crossing the Water*”, “*Ariel*” and “*Wintering*”. (128). The poems are marked by a sense of doom and holocaust elements as if the world around Sylvia were falling apart and were full of terror and horror. As Plath notes on Johnny Panic and the Bible Dreams:

The only thing to love is fear itself  
Love of fear is beginning of wisdom  
The only thing to love is fear itself  
May fear and fear and fear be everywhere. (33)

The lines above were written by the poet in an early age. Fear is supposed to be repelled in the normal course but Plath here is speaking of fear that has to be loved as the only thing that should be loved. Critics claim that this feeling of fear is the fear of death which grows with Plath over years.

Another incident that proves her fear can be seen in “*Letters Home*”. Her first written poem represents those images of undertones and fears, the fear of losing everything. Plath says:

I thought that I could not be hurt  
I thought that I must surely be  
Impervious to suffering  
Immune to mental pain or agony (33)

## Chapter One: Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death

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Plath's disappointments and unhappiness escalated with the death of her father when she was only eight. Thus, she started to see her life in a different way, she felt pain, dread, and anger. Those feelings increased making her producing more powerful poems and having negative attitude toward life.

Fear, dread and anger were recurring and dominant themes in Plath's poetry. They filled in "*Crossing the Water*", says Plath:

Black lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people.  
Where do the black trees go to drink here? (14)

These lines show that Plath sees that the world is full of dread, darkness and horror and these feelings tend to appear in many poems. Most of her poems are the reflection of her inside, deep emotions and personal thoughts. She wrote forty poems of rage, despair, pain and fear shortly before her death. These included heart-breaking poems such as "*Daddy*", "*Ariel*", "*Lady Lazarus*", "*Nick and the Candlestick*" which were published after her death, in a collection entitled "*Ariel*", and it is remembered for its haunting subject matter.

In "*Ariel*", she expressed the way she felt concerning every crucial matter in her life. Everything in this collection represent Plath's self and personality. "*Morning Song*", the opening poem in the collection, Plath expressed her feeling after the birth of her first child. The poet, confesses that she could not become a mother merely by giving a birth, as if she has been in a state of denial.

Sylvia Plath makes bold and assertive revelations about her fears, wishes, conflicts and worries. She wrote out of deep personal anxiety and experience making ever lasting legacy. She will be always remembered for her brutal honesty, emotionality and her autobiographical poetry.

## Chapter One: Sylvia Plath, the Poet, from Confession to Death

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This chapter contains the most crucial events and incidents that affected Plath's life and reflected on her literary works, mainly her poetry which is our focus in this study. Thus, in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the impact of those autobiographical reflections and the representation of death within her poems from different angles, it was necessary to shade light on her life's episodes and factors that contributed immensely in invoking the prevalent theme of death in her poetry. Plath's impulse towards death was the income of her struggles. Her attempts of committing suicide and the death of her father justify this impulse. As a confessional poet, she therefore used those own experienced events and her feelings in words. Thus, to dig deeper into those images of death, the first chapter focuses on Plath's life as autobiographical reflections in her poems.

Chapter Two:  
**The Death Instinct in *Ariel*  
Poems**

The second chapter of this study is entitled *The Death Instinct in Plath's Ariel*. In this chapter, we intend to use the death drive theory as a ground for analysing the collection of "*Ariel*" that were written during her pre-death stage. Death was presented in Plath's poems as an instinctual impulse by means of aggression and destruction, showing the evilness of humans and their instincts towards the bad. The images of death were represented in various ways in her poems.

### 1. The Freudian Death Drive

Death, unfathomable and inevitable, has always inspired and obsessed intellectuals and writers. Writers who suffer from mental illnesses or melancholia are usually repulsed to this universal theme, as they struggle with their psychological issues. Ginsberg states that "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" (37)

Since our study focuses on images of death as a complex theme in the poetry of Sylvia Plath. In accordance to her psyche as a tendency toward aggression and destruction through her multiple suicide attempts that eventually haunted her life, the concept of death drive resembles this tendency in terms of death and life instincts.

The Psychoanalytic Drive Theory developed throughout the last century since the existence of psychoanalysis in terms of continuity and thought diversity. This development based on Sigmund Freud's earliest writings. Freud originates the concept of death drive from Eros and Thanatos, Greek Gods for love and death in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud defined the death drive as an ambivalence in which Eros and Thanatos are traditionally connected. It is the drive or the instinct toward death, decay and annihilation. In other words, it "is the 'true result' and to that extent, the purpose of all life" (322). Freud saw that the human mind is composed of two oppositional forces, the death drive or Thanatos, those which lead the living to death, or the life drive/Eros, which attempt to eternally achieve a renewal of life. As Janet Malcolm points out:

## Chapter Two: The Death Instinct in *Ariel* Poems

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In some secret way, Thanatos nourishes Eros as well as opposes it. The two principles work in covert concert: though in most of us Eros dominates, in none of us is Thanatos completely subdued. However, and this is the paradox of suicide to take one's life is to behave in a more active, assertive, "erotic" way than to helplessly watch as one's life is taken away from one by inevitable morality. (58)

This association between life and death comes from biological impulse where violence existed naturally in the self as Freud argues:

This [the death drive] would serve as a biological justification for all the ugly and dangerous impulses against which we are struggling. It must be admitted that they stand nearer to Nature than does our resistance to them for which an explanation also needs to be found... there is no use in trying to get rid of men's aggressive inclinations. (211)

Carel claims that: "Freud's formulation of the role and function of the death drive is problematic because he was grappling with several ideas, not all of which were compatible with one another". He adds that the death drive's role is to control the different psychic functions. This formulation provided a complex connection between life and death in which Carel considers it as a confusion in shaping Freud's theory. This confusion precisely criticised in the relationship between the life drive which is Eros and the death drive as Thanatos where both "mutually influence each other", life is a course towards death, in which death is an inevitable consequence of certain internal or external circumstances that happened in life. However, death and life "are at the same time separable" in terms of function. Life therefore is a process that comes to an end by the so-called death (03). Freud's drive theory based on the primacy of death drive from the life drive which he gives more emphasis to death drive:

For a long time, perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its

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original course of life and to make ever more complicated détours before reaching its aim of death. (46)

Though Freud's theory about the death drive that was originated from the concept of the pleasure principle, it referred also, to some extent, to behaviour as a repeated sequence in which there is no pleasure in dealing with an unpleasant event and getting it rid of our mind. Such sequence kept the mind going through it repeatedly. Thus Freud put another drive works side to side with the life drive which is the death drive. He adds: "These circuitous paths to death, faithfully kept to by its conservative instincts, would thus present us to-day with the picture of the phenomena of life" (46). In other words, life is the delay of death where the death drive regarded as means of "neuronal quantity". It minimizes the flow in quantity which leads to zero flow (Van Der Merwe 123). Aggression, as defined by later psychoanalysts, plays an important role as a phenomenon that affects the psyche and resides in. As Laplanche and Pontalis put in their book of *"Language of Psychoanalysis"*:

...Indeed there is no kind of behaviour that may not have an aggressive function... Psychoanalysis had gradually come to give great importance to aggressiveness, showing it to be at work in the early stage of the subject's development and bringing out the complicated ebb and flow of its fusion with and diffusion from, sexuality. The culmination of this increasing stress on aggressiveness is the attempt to find a single and basic instinctual underpinning for it in the idea of the death instinct. (17)

Although the death drive is a keenly contested and is considered as a significant concept in psychoanalysis, majority of contemporary psychoanalysts rejected it. Their claim was related to the flaws in Freud's clinical application as well as his hypotheses about the death drive were criticised as speculative and incredible. Ernest Jones confirms this rejection in his biography of Freud: "The book [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*] is further noteworthy in being the only one of Freud's which has received little acceptance on the part of his followers" (287). In addition to Jones, Friedman noted that: "the same situation exists today; there is no support for Freud's

notion of the death instinct” (189). He also adds that this widespread rejection namely comes from Antonio Virsida, Robert R. Holt, Henri Ellenberger, and Allan Compton and others (189).

Although most of psychoanalysts opposed the death drive theory, still some who supported it including Melanie Klein and her followers. Unlike others, they embraced Freud’s notion and praised his clinical application as a credible and useful one (Gillespie 185). Whereas some others refused only the term, so instead “the death drive” they put “aggression”.

Jacques Lacan’s reading of Freud’s concept is notably an essential add to psychoanalysis. His description of the death drive, unlike Freud’s, relies on aggression not a biological force (Boothby 342). Lacan’s states three major tenets that death drive relies on, which are aggression, desire, and castration. Aggression is mainly the defect in Freud’s description. Whereas, desire as Ragland explains that its relation to the death drive is alienated (86). He adds that: “one begins to see how desire is hooked to the death drive” (106). Boothby adds: “it is with respect to alienation that the nature of the death drive in Lacan must be determined” (344). Moreover, castration is another link in defining Freud’s death drive. Lacan explains the term of castration in his *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire* as: “castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the law of desire” (827).

In our study we intent to employ Freud’s death drive concept in terms of duality of life and death as well as the Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of Freud and his explanation of aggression as a self-destruction and destruction of the other.

## **2. Death as a Source of Human Evilness**

### **2.1 The Death of the Father**

Sylvia Plath’s first encounter with death came with the death of her father, Otto Plath. She blamed him for that and considered his death as an act of betrayal. She has been always obsessed with death as manifested in her life and poetry.

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Critics have discussed Plath's collection "*Ariel*" as death-driven volume, they M.L. Rosenthal notes, "under the other motifs (in *Ariel*), however, is the confusion of terror at death with fascination by it" (61).

"*Daddy*" one of the most famous poems in "*Ariel*" presents Plath's complicated attitude towards her father's memory. In a reading for the B.B.C programme the poet gave the following impression with regard to "*Daddy*":

This poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra Complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it.

Plath's confusion between her memories and her fantasies produced the creative inspiration that spawned of her writing. The losses she suffered had the same heavy effect, thus, it made her spin words in her poetry. "*Daddy*, in this poem Plath delves into several significant topics including death, she says:

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. (51)

The above lines show the poet's persistent desire for death, Plath shows some reasons behind her death wish. She thought that death could be the only solution to be reunited with her father, or it could be a source of comfort and relief.

Plath felt unsecure since an early age and the unexpected loss of her father contributed in shaping Sylvia's disturbed self. In "*Daddy*" Plath considered her suffering equivalent with the ache and pain of the Jews who suffered from the torture of the Nazi. This association between her pain and the images of holocaust aims at the heavy torture and the extent of

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suffering she experienced through her life, therefore, death was the only alternative she had. (Rosenblatt 1979).

Plath tried to get over her father's loss by looking for someone who can possess his features. She married Ted Hughes, she thought marriage would make her happy again and she would find a surrogate father. Marriage seemed to be a refuge at the beginning but later on it became a vital reason behind her desire for death:

The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know. (51)

Through this stanza, Plath described her marriage as a frustrating experience which made her life worst. Her married life was disappointed one Sylvia could not achieve the happiness she sought, she had married a "vampire" as she claims who offered her seven years of unhappy life. Her husband betrayal was extremely strong shock, thus, she lost faith in all men and she started thinking of salvation. (Phillips 1972).

Sylvia Plath, in "*Daddy*", was drawn into death due to personal and domestic reasons. Her failure to accept her father's loss and the collapse of her marriage pushed her to think of death as a solution to her sufferings.

Plath felt betrayed twice in her life, once when Otto Plath died and the other when Ted Hughes had an affair with another woman. Thus, she thought that by death she can put an end to the chain of failures.

### 2.2 Death as a Form of Self-Destruction

Sylvia Plath is a modernist poetess who was obsessed with the concept of death. She suffered from melancholia and depression due her father's death and other disappointed events in her life. Vinita Singh Chawdhry claims that "The melancholia it bred got condensed to the extent

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that she began to show signs of obsession with death, probably the only alternative left with her”.

Commenting on their obsession with death, Sylvia Plath’s friend Anne Sexton describes Plath and herself as “death mongers”. In her article “Anne Sexton “The Barfly Ought to Sing” says “We talked death with burned up intensity, both of us drawn to it like moths to an electric light bulb, sucking on it” (Newman 174).

Death is represented in various ways in Sylvia Plath’s poems, she engages the readers either in personal or in impersonal way to view death as a liberating force or troubling depressing experience. Sylvia Plath had another perspective towards death, she sees it as a form of destroying that is death may be chosen by the individual himself as means of self-destruction, rather than acting as a horrible exterminating force.

Self-destruction is reflected clearly in her poem “*Edge*”, this is Plath’s last poem written mere days before she committed suicide, according to Seamon Heaney, the poem is a suicide note that is entirely personal. The poetess talks about a woman who is about to kill herself or already is dead, in the opening lines the woman is perfected and had accomplished what she wanted, suggesting that her suicide was a mark of bravery (Marrone 188).

The woman is perfected.  
Her dead  
Body wears the smile of accomplishment,  
The illusion of Greek necessity  
Flows in the scrolls of her toga,  
Her bare  
Feet seem to be saying:  
We have come so far, it is over.  
Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,  
One at each little  
Pitcher of milk, now empty.  
She has folded

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Them back into her body as petals  
Of a rose close when the garden  
Stiffens and odors bleed. (84)

Through “*Edge*” Sylvia Plath seems that she glorifies death, and the woman suggests that she has been longing to die for a long time. From this poem the reader can depict that the narrator has planned for her suicide, as she left each a child a “pitcher of milk”, Plath did the same thing to her children before she killed herself. The narrator in “*Edge*” thinks that her suicide is the best choice for her and people around her. She also considered her suicide as something good and not a sin “She wears a toga” the white colour that represents purity, therefore emphasizing the idea that her suicide was not a sin. In this poem Sylvia Plath represented the concept of self-destructiveness, she gives the readers clues about her strong determined wish for death, Plath sees that killing herself is an achievement that she finally fulfilled.

“*Birthday Present*” written in September of 1962, hauntingly recorded in her own voice on audio in October of the same year. The poems she wrote shortly before her suicide are the result of her definite decision to take her life. Hayman argues that: “With her perfectionism and her ruthless zeal to excel in every activity, Sylvia had always put herself under the greatest possible pressure. When she was lashing herself forward, the idea of suicide could work as an extra goad (132).”

“*Birthday Present*” is another monologue in which death is predominate theme, Sylvia Plath by writing this poem she knew that death is the best thing to do for herself because she could no more cope with her life, she wanted to discover what lies behind that veil. The narrator was eager to know what was the present offered by her friend, she imagines the gift may be “bones”, “a pearl button”, or “an ivory tusk”.

What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?  
It is shimmering, has it breasts, has it edges?

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I am sure it is unique, I am sure it is what I want.  
But it shimmers, it does not stop, and I think it wants me.  
I would not mind if were bones, or a pearl button.  
I do not want much of present, anyway, this year  
After all I am alive only by accident.  
I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way.  
Now there are these veils, shimmering like curtains,  
The diaphanous stains of a January window  
White as babies' bedding and glittering with dead breath. O ivory!  
Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.  
If it were death  
I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes. (42-44)

Notably that this poem is not about a birthday present in any ordinary sense, through the poem it becomes clear that the gift is death itself or something that brings the protagonist to death. She sees death has been there all along just waiting for her to make the decision and she assures that underground is the suitable place for her, Plath tried to do what was expected from any woman (being a house wife and a mother) but she could not be able to achieve such life which led her to seriously thinking of taking her life (Abid 737). Thus, her birthday becomes her death day, and death becomes her birthday present which is in a form of new beginning.

Sylvia Plath's poems are full of numerous descriptions of her instinctive drive towards death. Her emotional struggles as reflected in her poetry reveal the kind of conflicts which Freud described as the conflict between life and death instincts. (Potamites 625). Plath has put it all in her poetry, she divulged to the public about her inner emotions about everything including her death wish. She showed her struggle between life and death instincts.

Sylvia Plath tried to kill herself once in every decade, she repeatedly expressed her preoccupation with the idea of death as a means to escape. This persistent wish for death is clearly shown in the opening lines of "*Lady Lazarus*":

I have done it again.  
Once year in every ten  
I manage it. (6)

Through the poem Sylvia Plath takes a connection between her own suffering and the experience of tortured Jews. The poem is about attempting suicide, it speaks of close calls with death at the age of ten, twenty and thirty. In “*Lady Lazarus*” Sylvia Plath refers to death as a form of art that she masters very well, she says:

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else.  
I do it exceptionally well.  
  
I do it so it feels like hell  
I do it so it feels real.  
I guess you could say I’ve a call.  
  
It’s easy enough to do it in a cell.  
It’s easy enough to do it and stay put.  
It’s the theatrical  
  
Comeback in broad day  
To the same place, the same face, the same brute. (7,8)

### 2.3 Holocaustic Images

Sylvia Plath’s late poems, published in her final collection “*Ariel*”, are remembered for their haunting subject matter, poems such as “*Daddy*” and “*Lady Lazarus*” are almost preoccupied with the past. In interview with Peter Orr, Sylvia Plath remarked:

I am not a historian, but I find myself being more and more fascinated by history and now I find myself reading more and more about history. I am very interested in Napoleon, at the present I’m very interested in battles, In wars, in Gallipoli, the First World War and so on, and I think that as I age I am becoming more and more historical.

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Plath confessed her fascination with history, thus, “*Daddy*” and “*Lady Lazarus*” contain much of historical aspects, using holocaust as a metaphor to compare her anguish to the agony of the Jew people who were abused by the German regime.

In “*Daddy*”, Plath interprets her feelings of victimization from her father’s premature death through the use of Nazi Germany and Holocaustic images, in this poem she associates herself with the Jew suffering under the Nazi regime as a victim of Holocaust. She makes her pain equivalent to the victims’ torture of Holocaust, Sylvia feels that there is a connection between the holocaust victims and her for they similarly have not taken the decision of death, neither she nor they have chosen to die.

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. (50)

Death is a refuge an escape from life’s oppression, for Sylvia Plath it was an escape from the trials of motherhood, womanhood and wifehood, whereas it was a removal from persecution for holocaust victims.

“*Lady Lazarus*” is another poem in which Holocaustic images are recurrent, Plath again compares herself to the Jewish victims of Holocaust, Eillen M. Aird indicates that, in “*Lady Lazarus*”, the poet again equates her suffering with the experiences of the tortured Jews, she becomes, as a result of the suicide she inflicts on herself, a Jew.

A sort of walking miracle, my skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My bright foot  
  
A paperweight,  
My face a featureless, fine  
Jew linen. (6)

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Plath used dark imagery, disturbing diction with reference to horrible historical events to create a unique and morbid tone that reflects the necessity of death and life. Subsequently, Plath includes other holocaust elements such as the German “Herr Doktor” and “Herr Enemy”, she addresses men in her life, both her late father and her husband as if she blames them attempting to free herself from the immobilizing authority. (Kroll 118).

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy. (8)

### 3. Dichotomy between Life and Death

On a creative and personal level, Sylvia Plath seems to have been fascinated by the relationship between life and death, she is seen as a woman struggling with both Thanatos and Eros. She suffered of depression since her early life, Plath went through several haunting incidents thus she has been in a conflict between carrying with life or responding to her death instincts to give up on life and put an end to it.

In “*Ariel*”, Plath often focuses on subjects of death, suicide, incest, resentment and melancholia. Sylvia Plath’s “*Elm*”, is a poem which reveals the poetess conflict, Philip Potamites notes that: “Poem like “*Elm*” speak to the ambivalence that must have constantly haunted her, while reinforcing imagery of primordial peace and transference between internal and external relations.”

I know the bottom, she says, I know it with my great tap root:

It is what you fear.

I do not fear it, I have been there.

It is the sea you hear in me,

Its dissatisfactions?

Or the voice of nothing, that was your madness?

I am inhabited by a cry.

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Nightly it flaps out  
Looking, with its hooks, for something to love.  
  
I am terrified by this dark thing  
That sleeps in me;  
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity. (15,16)

On “Elm” Potamites explains his point of view with regard to Freud’s death drive theory, he notes that: “The roots and sea evokes the prime source of life. The cry, the sea and the dark thing all seem to be the external objects that have been internalized, and yet they may be considered the externalized symbols of her own dark, frustrated; confused desires. If her drive is both the root and the dark thing, then one voice claims no suicide.”

Sylvia Plath was scared because the death drive was so strong in her, but long ago Freud argued that this instinct is there in all of us, constantly tempting both comforting and dangerous.

Sylvia Plath’s poetry is a reflection of her own inner conflicts, she is considered a mentally disturbed woman, unstoppably driven towards death. Her poem “*Tulips*” is another representation of the struggle between Sylvia’s Thanatos and Eros, she uses a personal experience as a setting to express the complexities. Ted Hughes, her husband, says that Plath wrote “*Tulips*” after being hospitalized for an appendectomy in March 1961.

The Tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.  
Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in.  
Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage.  
I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat  
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. (10,11)

Sylvia Plath describes the quietness and the sense of calm emptiness she felt during her stay in a hospital, but flowers, presumably brought to her as a gift interrupt her peace and relief and drive her to the realities of life. Barbara Hardy made a review on “*Tulips*”, she notes: “In

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“*Tulips*” there is a slow, reluctant acceptance of the tulips, which means a slow reluctant acceptance of a return to life.” Relying on Freud’s instincts theory Sylvia Plath had a strong desire to die, her Thanatos got over her Eros. In “*Tulips*” the poetess sought serenity in death but the tulips came to interrupt her journey with it.

Sylvia Plath had tackled the theme of death in various manners, it is nowhere more present, powerful in her last poems in “*Ariel*”. The imagery of death is explicit and intense it leaves a haunting impression. Death is represented in contradicting manner, it is represented as renewal, transcending and as the more traditional, ominous and melancholic end.

“*Death & Co*”, is one of the greatest examples of the element of duality a form common to many of the subjects in Plath’s poetry. In the poem the two polarities of death are united in the image of the dual nature of death, “*Death & Co*”, is a poem about death and life its title refers to a corporation, it is both ironic and mocking. The ambivalence towards death is that although it represents a portentous state it also represents a figure of comfort for the suffering who believe in life after death, Plath described “*Death & Co*” a poem as: “. . . about the double or schizophrenic nature of death the marmoreal coldness of Blake’s death mask, say, hand in glove with the fearful softness of worms, water and the other katabolists” and that she views “these two aspects of death as two men, two business friends, who have come to call” (Kroll 142,143).

Two, of course there are two.

It seems perfectly natural now. (28)

Plath opens the poems with these lines, talking about the duality in this case, the poetess, becomes aware that death is not singular but it has two faces, it is a realization that does not surprise her but at the same time terrifies her. In “*Death & Co*” Sylvia Plath represents her contradictory views of death, she shows her attractiveness and her fear of it, the poem is an

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illustration of two contradictory forces, her fear of death and her fascination with it (Melander97).

Sylvia Plath, a poetess, who talked about both the allure and anger, the glamour and shame, dying and living over and over again, her poetic is an expression of her unfulfilled desires and obsessive fears. Her instinctive towards death is clearly described, Freud considered the death drive as a significant instinct, and in Plath's confessions she is a one with the drive.

According to Kroll, "The image of death in Plath's late poetry usually encodes a deeper, hidden wish for rebirth, the birth of true self" (129). Death as means of rebirth is represented in Plath's "*I am Vertical*", as most of Plath's poems this one is revolved around death. The poem describes Plath's desire for an acceptance that she hopes to find through death (Marysseal 3). The poetess describes the idea of death as a means of rebirth and regeneration. The title suggests that Plath was dissatisfied with her life, being a vertical tree does not satisfy her; therefore, she wishes to be horizontal one by cutting her:

I am vertical  
But I would rather be horizontal  
I am not a tree with root in the soil  
Sucking up the minerals and motherly love  
So that each March I may gleam into leaf,  
Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed. (143)

D.F. McKay notes that: "*Ariel*" can be read as "a poem about the experience of horseback riding at dawn", the title refers to the spiritual figure in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* "*Ariel* would probably most immediately call the "airy spirit" who in Shakespeare's "*The Tempest*" (V.Davis 1972), and to a horse that Sylvia rode weekly. Rosenblatt suggests that "*Ariel* is Plath's finest single construction because of the precision and depth of its images", in its account of the ritual journey toward the centre of life and death, Sylvia perfects her method of leaping from image to image.

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Stasis in darkness.  
Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.  
  
God's lioness,  
How one we grow,  
Pivot of heels and knees! The furrow  
  
Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,  
  
Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks  
  
Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows,  
Something else  
  
Hauls me through air  
Tighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.  
  
White  
Godiva, I unpeel  
Dead hands, dead stringencies. (26)

So much of the material is dark and suicidal, but some sort of transcendence always accompanies physical death. Plath presents death as inevitable; it is as strangely pure force because it brings escape from conflict (Aird 72).

Mckay notes that "*Ariel*", from a psychological perspective, "expresses a conventional death wish, a desire for extinction". She rides into sunrise rather than a sunset which might be associated with death, this twist evokes Freud's ideas of restoration and the return to earlier beginnings.

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One of the reasons that death is portrayed so vividly by Sylvia Plath that she experienced suicide attempts during her life. Among the “death poems” Sylvia wrote, “*Lady Lazarus*” is the one that is considered highly confessional and a direct reference to her prior suicide attempts.

Phillips in “*The Dark Tunnel*” assert that “*Lady Lazarus*”, a much-quoted poem in which Plath compares herself to that biblical figure once resurrected by Christ because she has been “resurrected” from attempted suicide three times”. In “*Lady Lazarus*” Sylvia Plath makes use of the biblical story of “Lazarus”, who was resurrected from death by Jesus, she identifies herself with Lazarus; she was saved from death more than once. Sylvia Plath lives only by a miracle because she lost her energy to live, she had only that force which drives her towards death not towards life. Thus, she resembles Lazarus in the sense that she was brought back to life after repeated suicide attempts.

This chapter aimed at showing the death instinct in *Ariel* poems from different angles. The death of the father took the main concern of the poet in her writings. It was the real cause of all her psychological problems, hence her impulse toward self-destructiveness which was exemplified through her confessional tone in terms of suicide attempts several times. The death drive theory allowed to interpret the poems of *Ariel* in relation to the psyche and the human mind.

Conclusion

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This research's purpose was to cast light on the images of death and their representation in Plath's *Ariel* collection of poems that tackled the theme of death in various ways. Death was represented in Plath's poems as means of destruction and aggression. Her inner struggles and traumas were autobiographically reflected on her poems in form of fear, despair, and melancholy. This research aimed at revealing the theme of death and its images in Plath's *Ariel*. It started with the possibility of applying a psychoanalytical approach on her poetry, in which the combination between the writer's psychological issues and her life's events showed this interest. Therefore, in order to examine Plath's poems, we employed the Psychoanalytic Drive Theory namely the death drive, which was introduced by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalysis.

As a result, Plath's poetry share an immense representation of death drive a human evilness, throughout the stories tackled within the poems and her own personal experience. It is easy to say that the notion of death was discussed both in moment and retrospect which shows clearly the emotional and psychological state Plath went through, which eventually haunts her life. Her choices of poems and stories revealed the personal issues she was having due to the loss of her dear father, the traumatic experience shaped the body of her poetry which is considered nowadays as one of the most influential poets among young readers. The themes discussed in the poetry shed light on the traditional issued raised by Freud in studies of the human mind, which consisted of the mental illness, inability and insecurities of one self. Sylvia's confessional poetry was more as a mirror to her life complications and traumas, it gathered all the inner suffering within her to be put into words. This poetry was more as a refuge to escape the loneliness and darkness of her soul. However, the suicidal fantasies of Sylvia Plath were not only words on paper but a fate to sadly end the tragic, young life of a young writer. The death of Plath's father was very influential that it created a very close line between death

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and life according to her own understanding. All the suffering she was living with during her age and the several attempts of suicide were only a revelation of her will to escape from life to death as a disappointed chance to live or rebirth. Death was Plath's oblivion, where she gives all to reach the deepness of thoughts and maturity in her mind, lead her to think more than a human mind can bear. she wakened the beast within her to show the human evilness. Plath's loss adorned her poetry. It shared deep personal details that can be felt and lived by readers who went through same self-doubt and suffering. she was evil by willing to find rescue in death that she could not reach during her life. Her self-doubt eventually killed her and her creativity as she confessed in her journals: "The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt". Hence, the duality of Eros and Thanatos, or life and death was highly presented in Plath's poetry, mainly her volume entitled "*Ariel*", and life.

Plath's interpretation of death was more than death. She sought for another life differ to the one she lived. She sought for rebirth by death which she literally meant her art. Her sadness, madness, horror, and suicidal fantasies were all the burden the young writer was obliged to live with until she ultimately found her freedom by embracing death. She committed a suicide leaving behind heavy reference for those who read and still will read her poems. The fact that she chose her immortality and life in demise gave her more eternity after her death, she is nowadays, one of the most known American poets.

This research may extend vaster in the future. Therefore, we open the circle of research for more investigations of Sylvia Plath's Poetry. Thus, for further studies, we suggest to tackle images of death in all the works of the writer, including her only novel "*The Bell Jar*" for the richness of the autobiographical aspects in it. As well as, we propose to focus on comparative studies between Sylvia Plath's poetry and other poets mainly confessional poets. A comparative study with poets such Anne Sexton who shares similar affinities to Plath. Death is obviously a prevalent theme within confessional poets since most of them committed suicide and went

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through psychological issues and troubles. For higher studies, it is preferred to conduct studies comparing to poets who are not Americans. It would be more interesting studying comparative literature for the variety in culture and the style of writing. From another perspective, theoretically speaking, we suggest to include other reading of the death drive theory like Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek, and Mladen Dolar and others who tackled differently the death drive theory. Moreover, it is useful to combine multi theories that are related to death drive theory like existentialism and biographical criticism. Since our study emphasised on poetry rather than prose, we propose to take Sylvia Plath's poems by means of style, structure, and language whose poetry is highly written and full of imagery and figurative language. Thus, this variety in topics allow other researchers to apply other theories like formalism. Such researches would enhance literature to be developed despite difficulties we face during our journey, as Plath said: "Some things are hard to write about. After something happens to you, you go to write it down, and either you over dramatize it, or underplay it, exaggerate the wrong parts or ignore the important ones. At any rate, you never write it quite the way you want to."

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