



## ARTÍCULOS

UTOPIA Y PRAXIS LATINOAMERICANA. AÑO: 25, n° EXTRA 1, 2020, pp. 450-461  
REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE FILOSOFÍA Y TEORÍA SOCIAL  
CESA-FCES-UNIVERSIDAD DEL ZULIA. MARACAIBO-VENEZUELA.  
ISSN 1316-5216 / ISSN-e: 2477-9555

### The Pessimistic Images in Sylvia Plath's Selected Poems

*Las imágenes pesimistas en los poemas seleccionados de Sylvia Plath*

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Este trabajo está depositado en Zenodo:  
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3784886>

#### ABSTRACT

Sylvia Plath is generally distinguished as a confessional poet, since her literary writings represent an actual dramatization of her own experiences with her family members. She skillfully embodies her personal tragedy as basis for symbolic poetic imagination, promoting her own life into poetic language.

**Keywords:** Images, pessimistic, poems, Sylvia Plath.

#### RESUMEN

Sylvia Plath generalmente se distingue como poeta confesional, ya que sus escritos literarios representan una dramatización real de sus propias experiencias con los miembros de su familia. Ella hábilmente encarna su tragedia personal como base para la imaginación poética simbólica, promoviendo su propia vida en lenguaje poético.

**Palabras clave:** Imágenes, pesimismo, poemas, Sylvia Plath

Recibido: 15-02-2020 • Aceptado: 28-04-2020



## SELECTED POEMS OF SYLVIA PLATH

The poems that are collected in *Ariel*, the last of Plath's volume of poetry, were all written in the last year or so of her life, between 1962 and 1963. They present a critical tone that accommodate her miserable life, suggesting that they have an intensity and energy which suggest she had really broken into a part of her sources of feeling that required the most urgent release.<sup>1</sup> In this period, being abandoned by her husband who left her alone with two children in freezing months, she lost her patience and tolerance.

The poems in *Ariel* continue to express the painful mood that was previously depicted in her first volume, *The Colossus*. Themes of alienation, despair, and annihilation as well as images that prevail the bleakness of her mentality, and the futility of man's existence were clearly reflected in her later poetry. These images are directly aroused from the outer world like nature, or from domestic associations, to reveal her relationship to her family members. In *Ariel*, the poetic imagery incorporates a natural and intimate identification between a certain image and the theme she expresses or the psychological state she reaches. The poems in *Ariel* "gain their curves of energy from a dazzling display of metaphor and symbol which swing in and out of the lines, creating poetry not of statement but of image."<sup>2</sup>

Actually, "The Moon and the Yew Tree" continues to explore the nature imagery, with a notable identification that has been aroused between the elements of nature and Plath's own mental state. "Tulips," also, incorporates images that reflect the sense of her surrender, subjection and lack of responsibility. "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy," explore her ability to widen her own tragedy by fusing it with global and historical figures of torturers and tortured as it is further projected in the images of German concentration camps. It also reflects her inventive attitude through relating herself and her own family members to those figures. It is noticeable that these images extend to her later poetry in her epic poem "Daddy,"<sup>3</sup> as she states: "...they pulled me together out of the sack, / And they stuck me together with glue." (ll. 62-36)

The images in *Ariel* acquire a direct relevance to the poet's experience, reflecting more strongly her emotional state. For instance, in "Lady Lazarus," Plath identifies herself with the image of the Phoenix; hence, she is "a red-hair demon" that will resurrect from the ashes, after her death, to avenge herself from her torturers. In "Ariel," the title poem, the persona of the poem, the horse she rode, as well as the nature of her poetry are strongly linked to make a physical and mythical unity.<sup>4</sup> Describing the rush movement towards self-destruction and death, she says "How one we grow, / Pivot of heels and knees." (ll. 5-6)

Nevertheless, every incident, scene, and situation acquire a symbolic dimension until she replaces her ideas into a series of images, which are not important as pictures of the external world but as meaningful symbols that reflect the poet's gloomy and dissatisfied mentality.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, a handful of recurring images or frequent associations of different kinds of images depict related meanings until they begin to construct a personal mythology, and all images are stated to reflect one single mind. For instance, in "The Moon and the Yew Tree," the images combine to reflect the poet's mindscape: "This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary/ The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue." (ll.1-2).

Thus, in addition to its unity with the early volume, *Ariel* acquires a notable atmosphere of creating a complete landscape of one particular mind. Repeatedly, if a single image is traced through certain poems in the volume, the interconnected ideas become visible. Tracing the moon, for instance, reveals the same constellation of meanings that are associated with the same ideas of sterility and despair that dominate her early volume, *The Colossus*.

It was written in 1962, at the suggestion of Plath's husband, when they were brooding over the image of the moon through the branches of a yew tree in the neighboring churchyard.<sup>6</sup> It shows her continuous interest in nature imagery and her permanent feeling of the cruelty of the natural elements, presented in the image of the moon, approximating it to her mind. Outer bleakness of the moon reflects the solitariness of her own mind and the gloomy thoughts that brought her grief.<sup>7</sup>

From the beginning of the poem, the poet identifies the setting of the poem with her own mentality, pointing out that the darkness of the night is as bleak as her own mind. She says

The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,  
White as knuckle and terribly upset.  
It drags the sea after it like a dark crime; it is quiet  
With the O-gape of complete despair. I live here.  
(ll. 9-11)

These lines recall the image of the moon in the early poetry, emphasizing the unity of her poetry, presenting an antagonistic relationship between the moon and the sea. By describing the moon as "a dark crime" that drags the sea after it, she emphasizes the dominance of the moon over the sea, which continuously represents her freedom, as presented in her early poems like "Full Fathom Five" and "Moonrise."

Hence, the poem emphasizes that the persona feels that this environment is her only home and she reaches a depression from which she can get no progression: "I simply cannot see where to get to." (l.7) With this growing despair, she can see no way, she is confused by the bleakness of the moon, hence, of her own mind. Even the image of the church, which is supposed to provide her with the security that religion provides is accompanied by the image of the graveyard, which serves only to intensify the idea of death in her mind. She says "Fumy, spirituous mists inhabit this place / Separated from my house by a row of headstones." (ll. 5-6) Yet, this growing despair and the indulgence in the idea of death become tenuous by the image of the bells in the church, emphasizing the idea that after death a kind of resurrection and rebirth is possible. Moreover, the image of the "bells" serves to prove Plath's ability to interweave the concrete images with those of nature.

Twice on Sunday, the bells startle the sky  
Eight great tongues affirming the Resurrection.  
At the end, they soberly bong out their names.  
(ll. 12-14)

The idea of resurrection and rebirth is closely attached to death in this volume; and it becomes clearer in later poems like "Lady Lazarus." In this respect, another aspect that proves Plath's ability to link her early poetry with the later one is presented in this poem. She relates the image of the moon to the image of her mother with all the aspects and connotations of hatred and dominance she bears to her. In the previous volume, Plath also related the moon to her mother in the mythological image of "Lucina," the moon goddess, in the "Moonrise." Whereas "The Moon and the Yew Tree," Plath directly refers that the moon is as her mother: "The moon is my mother." (l. 17) Being exhausted by the matriarch attitude of her mother, Plath openly declares that

...She is not sweet like Mary  
Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls  
How I would like to believe in tenderness.  
(ll. 17-19)

This description of her mother's dress as blue, with the colors' indications of darkness and gloominess, reaffirms her feelings of intolerable struggle that she has faced with her mother. The significance of the color blue as the color black, reflecting negative associations that she presented at the beginning of the poem when she describes the color of the moon and, hence, of her own mind.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, this poem asserts that there is a definite person in Plath's mind, who, like the moon represents a kind of unbearable dominance over her identity. The images of the night animals, "bats" and "owls" that fly from the blue dress of her mother confirm the blackness of her life attached with her mother.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the flying of those birds pave the way for the images of movement that is going to prevail the

last poems of *Ariel*, suggesting her rush movement, which is represented in her final decision of death just as they foreshadow her tragic end, culminating in actual suicide and death. Furthermore, the image of the "bat," in particular, will be further developed in her poem "Daddy," when the "bat" image will be translated into the legend of a "vampire." In "Daddy," she attaches this image with her father and her husband, whom she regards as her immediate torturers, accusing them of sucking her blood by their betrayal. Nevertheless, these striking images prove Plath's development and inventiveness in poetic imagery as well as they confirm the depth of her psychological state.<sup>10</sup>

In the final stanza of the poem, the poet once again uses the adjectives, "bald" and "wild," with their negative connotations, describing her own mother, the same adjectives she has used in her early poetry to describe the bald muses who are the inhabitants of her world in "The Disquieting Muses." This also proves Plath's ability to unify her poetry. At the end, she moves the poem back to the first description of her mind and thoughts: "And the message of the yew tree is blackness-blackness and silence." (l.28) Hence, she emphasizes that the thoughts, which are grown in her mind, are as black as the branches of the yew tree. Emphasizing the passive color of the moon as it is not originally white, the moon is described as black and dishonest since its color is borrowed from the sun. So, it cannot illuminate its surroundings, thus, everything looks black.<sup>11</sup> Bennett Lavers in her article "The World As Icon," asserts that

... white is also an absence of color, and is indeed the symbol of death in some civilizations. This, coupled with the other attributes of death, makes the moon the perfect symbol for it: it shines in the night, its light is borrowed, its shape regular, well-defined and self-contained, and its bald light turns everything into stone and death.<sup>12</sup>

This unbearable struggle and inner torment is also revealed in another poem entitled "Tulips," which was written in March 1961. Based on a personal experience, the poem projects the poet's reaction to the image of the tulips, brightly colored spring flowers, which she received as a gift at hospital.<sup>13</sup>

Plath's inner struggle has been presented in the contradictory images, of the red tulips and the prevailing whiteness of the hospital: "The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here. / Look how white everything." (ll. 1-2) This contrast unifies the poem with Plath's early poetry, especially in "Moonrise." In both poems the red color represents life, vitality and social commitment, whereas the white represents purity, death and peace that the poet yearns for.

"Tulips," in general, depicts themes of passivity, nothingness, despair, loneliness and more prominently a welcomed sense of irresponsibility, feelings that the patient enjoys in his presence in the hospital. Eileen M. Aird remarks that the world of the hospital ward is a welcome one of snowy whiteness, relax and silence. One has removed beyond normal activity to become a body with no personal identity.<sup>14</sup>

As a patient, Plath reflects a notable satisfaction with her sick state because nothing is required of her. She expresses the desire for peace of non-existence by regarding illness as a means to achieve freedom from any human claim. It liberates her from all feelings, responsibilities and reciprocal relationships, thus, she is utterly free

I have nothing to do with explosions.  
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses.  
And my history to an anesthetist, and my body to surgeons.  
(ll. 5-7)

The prevailing whiteness, the "quiet" and "snowed in" atmosphere of the hospital reflect a sense of passivity and relief. She refuses health because it brings her back to her painful life and social responsibilities. This echoes the same sense of passivity and nothingness that is presented in the image of the white leaves in the "Moonrise" from the previous volume, when Plath identifies herself with those leaves, saying: "I'll go out and sit in white like they do, / Doing nothing." (ll. 2-3) In both poems, she welcomes her state of being passive and irresponsible.

Moreover, the hospital environment with its nurses and doctors extend the poem back to Plath's early volume, especially to its last poem, "The Stones," in which she presents the striking images of the surgical instruments. Yet, in "The Stones," the poet rejects these instruments and the electrical way of treatment, which the doctors use to re-establish her disintegrated personality, because they bring her back to life. Whereas in "Tulips," she willingly accepts the "bright needles" of the nurses because, by such anesthetic tools, they send her, though temporarily, beyond all the "loving associations" and family commitments to a world in which she would not be obliged to respond or care.

In "The Stones," the nurses are insincere and "bald", while in "Tulips"  
The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble.  
They pass the way gulls pass in land in their white caps,  
They bring me numbness in their bight needles, they bring me sleep.  
(ll. 11-12 and ll.17)

However, Plath, in both poems, "Tulips" and "The Stones," accepts to be treated as a concrete inanimate object, which reflects a sense of depersonalization and passivity. In both poems she appears as a "pebble" that is worked upon.

Thus, she prefers to be anaesthetized and kept sleep. She welcomes her gradual loss of conscience, enjoying a sense of living in death, when her possessions "Sink out of sight and the water went over my head." (l. 40) This image of water reaffirms Plath's desperate desire for committing suicide in the sea. It also states the idea that the sea is a symbol of her freedom. This freedom is "the immediate metaphor of the hospital and the ultimate metamorphosis of death."<sup>17</sup> This state of peacefulness is also mentioned at the end, where the sea is warm and tasty because it provides her with "peacefulness," freedom and security. All these features allude to death.

Turning to the central image in the poem, the tulips, that the persona in the poem reluctantly rejects, it is obvious that it reflects Plath's refusal of life, health and intimate relationships. In the peaceful and restful atmosphere of the hospital, the tulips are the last things that she needs; "I didn't want any flower." (l. 37) The white atmosphere of the hospital enables her to enjoy the sense of forgetfulness, but the tulips' red color reminds her of her wounds, her suffering and torment. "Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds." (l.39) Hence, the image of the tulips imposes upon her a sense of reality that hurts her. She feels that the flowers have eyes which watch her and increase her sense of her own reality.<sup>18</sup>

She enjoys the sense of being unwatched. But, the tulips are personified and, she imagines them, as having "tongues" and "eyes" that watch her while she was free. Before a while, in her anesthetic case, she was without identity a sense that she greatly needs: "Nobody watched me before, now I am watched". (l. 43)

Through these associated images, Plath reveals gradually her sense of hatred towards those tulips, which figuratively stand as emblems of life and social commitments. She is exhausted by their sharp redness that reminds her of her responsibilities. They remind her of her past life, a sense that prevailed the poems of her early volume, *The Colossus*. She associates the image of the tulips with a "sunken rust-red engine." This old and consumed engine, as the adjective "rust" indicates, reflects her past time that continuously pressed and suffocated her, depriving her from enjoying the present.

The connotation of the image of the engine is overtly revealed in "Daddy," when she describes the same sense of suffocation in her life, caused by her own father, who is portrayed as "An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off." (ll. 31-32) With this highly image, Plath reveals her ability to command over different kinds of images that can help to reveal her great sense of pain and agony. Finally, her increasing sense of hatred towards those tulips makes her describes them "like dangerous animals; / They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat." (ll.58-59). This symbolic dimension of the tulips confirms her inner suffering of her life, since they stand as a reminder of her social and family responsibilities that she tries to escape from. Thus, she prefers to imprison those animals, i.e., those tulips in order to eliminate their strength to remain passively

white.<sup>19</sup> By using this image, she wants to get rid of her life since the tulips and the dangerous animals are symbols of her life and social commitments.

Significantly, "Lady Lazarus," "Daddy" and "Ariel" are poems which portray a persona who realizes her way very well. Through prominent images, Plath expresses her certain movement toward self-destruction and death. In those poems, death is accompanied with an apparent resolution and determination. It is regarded as an active agent which could both puts an end to her suffering and transmutes her, through resurrection and rebirth into a new personality.

"Lady Lazarus" was written in autumn of 1962, incorporating mainly a biblical image of Lady Lazarus, whom Christ raised from death. Hence, it directly reveals Plath's interest in the idea of death and rebirth.<sup>20</sup> The poem reflects a great amount of autobiographical information and the repeated attempts of suicide that Plath has actually had done in her life. She remarks her suicidal attempts which happened in her life. Plath examines the reaction of other people to her suicide, who were apparently indifference. This reaction intensifies the absence of attention to the causes of her struggles. The same idea is presented in the first volume, in "Aftermath," when she states the theme of people's indifference towards individuals' sufferings. However in "Aftermath," Plath's own character is hidden behind a mythological image, "Mother Medea," who stands as a symbol of a tortured person. While in "Lady Lazarus," she directly and freely talks about her suicidal attempts. Actually, her central obsession with the idea of suicide lies in her desire "to eliminate her old body and self (which is incapable of giving her a sense of significance) in the expectation of creating a new identity that will confer a meaning on her."<sup>21</sup>

The main development in Plath's poetic imagery is remarked in "Lady Lazarus." She devotes the universal image of the German concentration camps to portray her own suffering, identifying herself with the image of the tortured Jew.

my skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My right foot  
A paperweight,  
My face is featureless, fine  
Jew linen.  
(ll. 4-9)

The identification between Plath and the tortured Jew has an autobiographical dimension. Her father, Mr. Otto Plath is of German ancestors and since Plath feels that her father took a notable part in her tragedy out of his early death, the poem is "developed through the father-daughter, Nazi-Jew complexity,"<sup>22</sup> yet, the idea will be clearly stated in "Daddy." The poet uses a series of images attached to the tortured Jew that serves to reflect her own torment and life-long suffering. She sees herself as one of the materialistic objects like "a Nazi lampshade," a "paper weight" and a "Jew linen:" all are things "that are made from the remains of camps victims."<sup>23</sup> She portrays herself like insignificant objects, a matter that reflects her sense of insignificance. Then, in another set of images of separate organs that refer to the remnants of the tortured Jews, Plath points out her awareness of her disintegrated personality. She says

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?  
The sour breath  
will vanish in a day.  
(Ll.13-15)

These shattered parts of body are shown by the poet as remains of her shattered personality. She decides to get rid of this life, commits suicide, and punishes her body in the manner of recreating it.

I turn and burn.  
Do not you thing I underestimate your great concern.  
Ash, ash  
You poke and stir  
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there.  
(ll. 71-75)

In this respect, this use of instantly images as an embodiment of Plath's inner suffering is further illuminated in her epic poem "Daddy" which was written in October 1962. This poem repeats her complete subjection to her father's memory and his dominance over her identity. Plath uses odd images of a "black shoe" and "foot" which suggest her submissiveness, entrapment, misunderstanding and suffocation, because of the complete dominance of the father's image on her identity.

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.  
(ll.1-5)

This stanza also exposes Plath's use of the color black which indicates a gloomy and bleak mood that prevails her life as well as her poetry, reflecting a great sense of psychological conflicts. These images link the poem to Plath's early poetry especially to "Man in Black," as she portrays the man who stands against the harshness of the sea: "Black coat, black shoes and your / Black hair till there you stood." (ll.17-18) In both poems, the black man is Plath's own father, as she points out in "Daddy." She keeps attaching the image of the black man to her own father, increasing the sense of hatred towards the dominance of her father on her identity projecting a great sense of inner torture: "Any less the black man who / Bit my pretty red heart in two." (ll.56-57).

Actually, her father played a notable part in her life. He suffered from fatal illness, making her suffer from mixed feelings of love and anger that she clearly reflects in her poetry, in general and in "Daddy," in particular. It shows Plath's anger towards her father, but in its second stanza, she modulates the images of anger with the images of glorification and sacredness. Thus, she says:

You died before I had time-  
Marble\_ heavy, a bag full of God,  
Ghastly statue with one grey toe  
(ll. 7-9)

These images clearly state Plath's mixed emotions of estimation and inner burden. She sees her father as huge as a "Ghastly statue" that reflects her admiration of his power. But the word "statue," as it is repeated in many of her poems, together with the "Marble heavy" image present something or someone that forms an obstacle in her life. This is also presented in her early poem, "The Colossus," to indicate a huge but broken statue, hence, her father's image controls her identity and shapes her life as Aird asserts.

Moreover, her admiration of her father lies in her inspired idea that her father, by dying, was able to achieve what she cannot achieve, that is death and freedom. As in the "Full Fathom Five" and in "Man in Black," her admiration was directed to her father's heroic deed which is reflected in his semi-suicide death. Hence, her suffering with the image of her father reflects her struggle with the idea of death itself.

In fact, the image that is associated with Plath's father in "Daddy," is shifted to a political dimension. As in

"Lady Lazarus," she once again unifies her father with a German-Nazi, and her own self with a tortured Jew. Thus, the image of the imagined Nazi Father becomes that of

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.  
(ll. 31-35)

Plath is pressed by the dominant image of her father in her life, she cannot overcome his dominance. This image of the "engine" is previously hinted at in "Tulips," when Plath was suffocated by the redness of the tulips, describing them as "rust-red engine." Commenting on the political dimension of "Daddy," Plath indicates that the poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father was a Nazi and her mother part Jewish. The daughter has to act out the awful little allegory once before she is free of it.

Then, she uses the black motto of Nazism to portray the blackness and the cruelty of her father, declaring that her father

Not God but a swastika  
So black no sky could squeak through  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.  
(ll. 47-48 and ll.50-51)

The image of the "swastika", which is an ancient symbol, used in the twentieth century by the German Nazi party in the form of a cross with its ends bent at an angle of 90, intensifies the black and dark atmosphere of the poem and, hence, of Plath's own life. It confirms the first image of the "black shoe" in which the persona of the poem lived like a foot for 30 years. Therefore, the father's cruelty is like the cruelty and blackness of the Nazi officers that suffocates the Jews and the description of her father as a "brute" and "devil" intensifies the imagined aggressive attitude of her father.<sup>28</sup>

At this stage of her life, another man, whose cruelty is as strong and destructive as her father's, is involved. She substituted the father figure in her life with this man. "A man in black with a Meinkampf look" (l. 66). He is her husband, Ted Hughes, who betrayed her and left her alone with her children. By the image of "a Meinkampf," Plath also associates the starkness and cruelty of her husband with that of the Nazi officers. She states the clue that reveals this model as her husband when she states:

The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know,  
(ll. 73-75)

They enjoy the protection and intimacy of a marriage life for seven years. After that, he developed a love affair with another woman, bringing the collapse of her happy marriage life. The image of the "devil" and the "vampire," show Plath's feeling to unify the cruelty of her father with that of her husband; both of whom she decides to terminate and free herself from: "If I've killed one man, I've killed two." (l. 72)

By using this legend, Plath metaphorically succeeds to revenge from her sufferings, asserting that she has turned to be a cruel person out of the cruelty of her torturers, so she transmutes her anger at her father and her unfaithful husband into a stake which pierces his/their heart.

Hence, Plath ends "Daddy" in the same way she ends "Lady Lazarus," she creatively succeeds to use



imaginary images to achieve her end. In both poems the persona uses an annihilating way to get her aim. In "Lady Lazarus," she burns herself and out of the "ash" she resurrects to avenge herself from her torturers, whereas in "Daddy," she turns into "vampire" and kills them. Those aggressive images intrude into Plath's poetry and her life, paving the way to her final and rush movement toward suicide and death. This rush movement is clearly revealed in the title poem, "Ariel."

Actually, "Ariel." is written in mid-January 1963, depicting Plath's resolution and dedication to the idea of suicide and death. She reaches a point of a complete conviction in the inevitability of death. Her subjectivity becomes the center of her poem, projecting, through a series of images, her pushing way toward self destruction and death.

Critics see the title of the poem through three viewpoints. The first is directly related to Plath's favorite horse, which she used to ride weekly. This horse once bolted to expose the poet to an experience from which the poem is derived, Hughes asserts that her horse bolted and she came all the way home to stables about two miles, hanging around the horse's neck.<sup>30</sup> While the second recalls Shakespeare's Ariel in *The Tempest*, who is an ethereal spirit, that represents Prospero's control on fire and air. The third refers to a biblical allusion that makes of Ariel, the horse, the lion of God, as Hebrew word is translated and used in the Bible. Plath, identifying herself as "God's lioness" directly uses this third allusion.<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to separate the above three viewpoints because they are emblems of the poet's emotional states that push her towards destruction and death. A. Alvarez asserts that the difficulty of this poem lies in separating one element from another. Yet that is also its theme; the rider is one with the horse, the horse is one with the furrowed earth, and the dew of the furrow is one with the rider. The movement of the imagery, like that of the perceptions, is circular.

The whole poem, hence, attracts the readers' attention with suspense and emotional connection. Plath emphasizes that she is identified with her horse; they become one entity:

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.  
(ll. 5-9)

This image of movement of the horse reflects Plath's movement toward death, turning everything around her into white; she is not interested to see the redness of the "Berries." She finally enjoys the whiteness, the sense of freedom represented in her way toward death, as King asserts that "Ariel" is

...one of the poems which deal directly with death- and in particular, temptations of suicide.... The flight into death is celebrated as the new means whereby a fragmented sense of identity can be unified in a totality of meaning.

This fragmented personality is shown through images of the body and of concrete objects. They refer to Plath's fragmented personality; "heels," "knees," "the furrow," and the "brown arc." They represent the tangible existence that the persona willingly wants to leave. Unlike the environment that prevail "Tulips" with its slow movement and hesitation:

The movement in which the poet at least seems able to relate to her surroundings and to affirm her sense of existence appears, ironically, only in its extraordinary flight toward death and destruction. That it is a destructive flight, despite the excitement, becomes evident in the closing lines<sup>35</sup>

In addition to her identification with her horse, Plath portrays herself as well as the kind of poetry that she writes in this period, in this journey, through a cluster of images. First, she identifies herself with a rebellious figure, "Godiva," who decides to take off her clothes to be white and pure. She removes those restrictions which threaten her gift to be like a rebellious Godiva and rides free, fast, unclothed and fully herself towards her goal.<sup>36</sup>

Then, after being free, she becomes an intangible thing, getting an ethereal spirit, and, hence, the link with Shakespeare's Ariel. Plath asserts, "And now I / Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas." (ll. 22-23), a state of death in which Plath feels the utmost sense of relief and freedom. The image of the sea with its recurrent motif appears here to reaffirm Plath's longing for death.

Consequently, after reaching this death; she imagines that, through rebirth, she acquires a new and strong identity, thus, she

Melts in the wall  
And I  
Am the arrow,  
(ll. 25-27)

Many critics suggest that the image of "arrow" is a symbol of manhood, of man's superiority that Plath yearns to get, in order to avenge her torturers. Thus, like "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy," Plath shows her permanent desire for death and rebirth. But in "Ariel," she flies away like an arrow towards the sun, which is a symbol of man, that means she flies toward her oppressors to kill them. Yet, in this poem, she finally realize her tenderness as a female whose soul is as beautiful as the dew.

In such images, Plath ends her life as well as her poetry. She finally realizes her goal and dies, acquiring a sense of freedom from her painful life. She, actually, commits suicide and dies in February 1963.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> P. R. King, *Nine Contemporary Poets: A Critical introduction* (London: Methuen & Ltd., 1997), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.170.

<sup>3</sup> Annette Lavers, "The World as Icon: On Sylvia Plath's themes," in *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, ed. Charles Newman (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1970), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> William V. Davis, "Sylvia Plath's 'Ariel'" (URL: <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>), Retrieved January 16, 2017, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Lavers, p.102.

<sup>6</sup> Ted Hughes, "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems," in *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, pp.193-194.

<sup>7</sup> Eileen M. Aird, *Sylvia Plath: Her Life and Work* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973), p.102.

<sup>8</sup> Gail Caldwell, "The Darkening World of Sylvia Plath" (August 6, 1989, URL: <http://www.plathonline.com/articles.html>), Retrieved March 12,2017.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> King , P.177.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Newman, "Candor is the Only Wile", in *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, p.109.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> Aird, p. 72.

- <sup>15</sup> Richard Gray, "American Poetry of the Twentieth Century" (URL: <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm> ), Retrieved February 22, 2017.
- <sup>16</sup> Aird, p. 72.
- <sup>17</sup> Gray, p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Aird, p. 73.
- <sup>19</sup> Renee R. Curry, "White Women Writing White: H. D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness" (URL: <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>), Retrieved February 22, 2017, p. 7.
- <sup>20</sup> John Rosenblatt, *Sylvia Plath: The Poetry of Initiation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 39.
- <sup>21</sup> King, p. 183.
- <sup>22</sup> Aird, p. 78.
- <sup>23</sup> King, p. 184.
- <sup>24</sup> Lynda Bundtzen, *Plath's Incarnation: Women and the Creative Process* (New York: University of Michigan, 1988), p. 237.
- <sup>25</sup> Rosenblatt, p. 41.
- <sup>26</sup> Aird, p. 80.
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in Paul Alexander, "Holly Secrets" in *The Nation*, vol. 254, Issue: 11( March 23, 1992): 385.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Rosenblatt, p. 44.
- <sup>30</sup> Hughes, p. 194.
- <sup>31</sup> William V. Davis, "Sylvia Plath's 'Ariel,'" in *Modern Poetry Studies* (1972, URL:<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>), Retrieved May 26, 2017, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> A. Alvarez, *Sylvia Plath: A Memoir* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 179.
- <sup>34</sup> King, p. 180.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 181.
- <sup>36</sup> Kathleen Margaret Lant, "The Big Strip Tease: Female Bodies and Male Power of Sylvia Plath," in *Contemporary Literature*, (Winter 1993 URL:<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/index.htm>), Retrieved May 26, 2017. p. 8.

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