

## Introduction

Sylvia Plath, her name has its echo nowadays in everywhere. Maybe 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 status, inspiring dozens of biographies and critical studies. The rise of Plath to this iconic status has been rapid in the aftermath of her death. She is one of the confessional poets and then considered as one of the most important and influential poets of the twentieth century.

In her lifetime, she published only one collection of poems, *The Colossus*, and one novel, *The Bell Jar*, the posthumous publication of the magnificent poems of *Ariel*, of her edgy and finely crafted stories and sketches, and of her *Letters Home* and *Journals*. 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 self, the body, motherhood, and death. The latter was a repeated event whether during her own life or through her writings.

Generally speaking, death is represented in literature in various ways shifting from being an ominous terrifying force to a means of fulfillment and new beginnings. Death 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. So the absence of the father had influenced her emotional life negatively to the extent that it is reflected clearly in her poems. Thus, this study aims at casting light on the images of death in one of her poems "*Lady Lazarus*" on the one hand and identifying the biographical reflections of the author in the poem on the other.

## Background of the Study

Robert Bagg<sup>(1)</sup> (1969), conducted a study entitled “*The Rise of Lady Lazarus*”, in which he commented on Plath’s freeing of the self through imagined self-annihilation and her refusal to accept the self’s limitations. However, Irving Howe<sup>(2)</sup> (1973), in his study “*The Critical Point of Literature and Culture*”, wrote that Plath’s violent, hysterical tone in her confessional poetry is an attempt to make up for its other weaknesses. He also pointed out that her talent was notable. Thus, according to Fred Moramarco<sup>(3)</sup> (1982), who conducted a study entitled “‘Burned-up intensity’: *The Suicidal Poetry of Sylvia Plath*,” on the literal destructiveness of Plath’s later style and how her earlier poetry actually aided in keeping her alive. Moreover, Alicia Suskin Ostriker<sup>(4)</sup> (1986), in her study on Plath’s solutions for detachment entitled “*Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America*”, described Plath’s answers for escaping one’s body and one’s world: poetic manipulation and death.

## Statement of the Problem

This research aims to shed light on Plath’s “*Lady Lazarus*” poem, 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 this poem in particular, as well as her psychological attitudes throughout all her life. Her “*Lady Lazarus*” reveals much about her as a creative writer and it also reveals death in various ways, ultimately her death just few months later.

This study attempts to answer the following main question: What are the biographical reflections of Plath’s own life and their relationship with images of death in her *Lady Lazarus*’ poem?

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1 Robert Bagg had been part of the English Department at the University of Massachusetts. A widely published poet, his first volume of poetry, *Madonna of the Cello*, was nominated for the National Book Award. (Bloom, 2001)

2 Irving Howe (1920–1993) was Distinguished Professor of English at Hunter College. He wrote many works of literary criticism, including books on Faulkner, Hardy, and Sherwood Anderson. He also edited numerous literary volumes, as well as works on politics and Judaism. (Bloom, 2001)

3 Fred Moramarco is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University. He has published numerous articles on modern and contemporary American poetry, fiction, and drama. (Bloom, 2001)

4 Alicia Suskin Ostriker is a professor of English at Rutgers University. She has written *Vision and Verse in William Blake*, as well as numerous works of poetry. (Bloom, 2001)

The study will equally endeavor at responding to other sub-questions: How are Sylvia Plath's melancholy and depression reflected in her works and what images of death are revealed in the poem due to her psychic disorders?

## Aims of the Study

As stated earlier, the current study will choose Sylvia Plath's poem "*Lady Lazarus*" as a sample to analyze the images of death and uncover the biographical reflections of the author in the poem. 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 poem. The research hence will delve into Sylvia'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 English Literature with a deeper understanding of the relationship between Plath's life and her writings. It will also help to demonstrate clearly her psychological troubles and her view of life from the eye of death.

## Method

To present an analytical evaluation of Sylvia Plath's poem, 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. As a matter of fact, this approach relies on the works of Sigmund Freud<sup>5</sup> and his levels of awareness; the unconscious, conscious, and moral judgment. Through the theory of the unconscious, the study will provide an explanation for the analogies of Plath's life with her poem "*Lady Lazarus*".

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<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud is a scholar, psychiatrist (1856–1939). He is an Austrian neurologist best known for developing the theories and techniques of psychoanalysis. (<http://www.biography.com/people>)

## Work Planning

As it was previously mentioned in the introduction and in order to surround the poem with a well comprehension either from the writer's or readers' perspectives, this study is going to be divided into two chapters, theoretical chapter and analytical one.

Primarily, the first chapter is entitled "Sylvia Plath's life and psychoanalysis". Inasmuch as it is difficult to interpret Plath's poems and "Lady Lazarus" in particular, but once you dig deeper into her life and have a closer look on what she went through as a child and as a student, her father's death, and her jumbled relationship with her husband Ted Hughes <sup>6</sup> you begin to see common themes that appear in her literary works. Therefore, Plath's life is an important phase to start with in this research which is represented in her biography emphasizing the most important information and events that happened to her. Hence, psychoanalysis as an approach, its definition, its main thinkers, and its levels will be tackled, because there's a strong relationship between Plath's mental struggles and her writings. In other words, how her life's events affected her works especially poetry.

On the other hand, the second chapter, which is entitled "Images of Death and Biographical Reflections in "Lady Lazarus" poem", is going to tackle the images of death that appeared in the "Lady Lazarus" poem, either the death of the poet's father or her attempting suicide for two times hence her committing suicide four months later. Besides, Plath's perspective of death taking into consideration how her own life reflected on this poem as well as analyzing the poem as a piece of literature, despite the fact that her death was illustrated within the lines of the poem.

Finally, as it was introduced in the beginning, this research will come to a solution of the problem on the conclusion according to the information that are based on a well comprehensive analysis of the poem.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward James "Ted" Hughes, OM (17 August 1930 – 28 October 1998) was an English poet and children's writer. Critics routinely rank him as one of the best poets of his generation. Hughes was British Poet Laureate from 1984 until his death. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>)

## **Bibliography**

### **a- Books**

- 1 Plath, Sylvia. The collected poems, Ed. Ted Hughes. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
- 2 Howe, Irving. The Critical Point of Literature and Culture. New York: Horizon, 1973.
- 3 Suskin Ostriker, Alicia. Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America. Boston: Beacon, 1986.
- 4 Freud, Sigmund. Rereading Freud: psychoanalysis through philosophy, Ed. John Mills. New York: State of University of New York, 2004.
- 5 Bloom, Harold, Ed. Sylvia Plath: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide (Bloom's Major Poets), Pennsylvania :Chelsea House, 2001.

### **b- Articles**

- 1 Bagg, Robert. “*The Rise of Lady Lazarus*” *Mosaic*: 2.4 (1969): 34, 35–36.
- 2 Moramarco, Fred. ““Burned-Up Intensity”: the Suicidal Poetry of Sylvia Plath.” *Mosaic*: A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature 15.1 (1982): 146-148.

## Glossary

### **Lazarus:**

Lazarus of Bethany, also known as Saint Lazarus or Lazarus of the Four Days, is the subject of a prominent miracle attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John, in which Jesus restores him to life four days after his death. The Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions offer varying accounts of the later events of his life.

### **Confessional poetry or 'Confessionalism':**

It is a style of poetry that emerged in the United States during the 1950s. It has been described as poetry "of the personal," focusing on extreme moments of individual experience, the psyche, and personal trauma, including previously taboo matter such as mental illness, sexuality, and suicide, often set in relation to broader social themes. It is sometimes also classified as Postmodernism. The school of "Confessional Poetry" was associated with several poets who redefined American poetry in the '50s and '60s, including Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and W. D. Snodgrass. (I. Ousby, 1995)

### **Psychoanalysis:**

It is a set of psychological and psychotherapeutic theories and associated techniques, created by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud and stemming partly from the clinical work of Josef Breuer and others. (Gay& Peter& Freud, 1995)

### **Unconscious:**

The part of the mental function in which thoughts, ideas, emotions, or memories are beyond awareness and rarely subject to ready recall. It contains data that have never been conscious or that were conscious at one time, usually for a brief period, and later repressed. (Medical Dictionary, Online)