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## Exploring Metaphor in Sylvia Plath's Poetry Collection: A Study in Literary Research

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan bahasa metafora dalam koleksi puisi Sylvia Plath, khususnya menganalisis puisi-puisi seperti "Mirror", "Morning Song", "Lady Lazarus", dan "Tulips". Penelitian ini menyoroti eksplorasi terampil Plath terhadap tema-tema seperti identitas, keraguan diri, dan konflik emosional melalui penggunaan metafora yang jelas dan berdampak. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan naratif kualitatif berdasarkan metode yang diuraikan oleh Miles dan Huberman (1994), penelitian ini meneliti setiap metafora secara rinci. Temuannya mengungkapkan bagaimana Plath menggunakan bahasa metafora untuk menyampaikan emosi dan wawasan yang mendalam tentang pengalaman manusia. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa metafora Plath bertindak sebagai alat yang ampuh untuk membahas konsep-konsep seperti penghapusan diri, isolasi, pencarian jati diri, dan dinamika yang kompleks antara kehidupan individu dan ekspektasi masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *Puisi, Bahasa Metafora, Analisis Puisi*

## Abstract

This research explores the use of metaphorical language in Sylvia Plath's poetry collections, specifically analyzing poems such as "Mirror," "Morning Song," "Lady Lazarus," and "Tulips." The study highlights Plath's skillful exploration of themes like identity, self-doubt, and emotional conflict through the use of vivid and impactful metaphors. Employing a qualitative narrative approach based on the method outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), the research examines each metaphor in detail. The findings reveal how Plath utilizes metaphorical language to convey profound emotions and insights into the human experience. The study concludes that Plath's metaphors act as a powerful tool for addressing concepts such as self-erasure, isolation, the quest for selfhood, and the complex dynamics between individual lives and societal expectations.

Keywords: *Poetry, Metaphorical Language, Poetry Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

A literary work is a piece of writing with great artistic merit expressed in exquisite language. A literary work is any branch of writing that uses words as the building blocks to tell a meaningful story, visualise a scene, or convey an idea. Literary works are prized as pieces of art with a literary aesthetic, which is distinct from everyday forms. Literary works are an expression of life's complexity. Literary works themselves have an important part in life, which is expressed in the form of culture, understanding, and the author's reflection on a story related to anything. A work of art that convey the intricacy of life are considered literary masterpieces. This existence is full of art, which is defined as creation and is referred to as literary. Literature is more significant than historical or cultural artefacts because it speaks to people's languages, customs, and cultures literature introduces us to many worlds.

Evans. V (2013) in his book: *Metaphor, Lexical Concepts and Figurative Meaning Construction* stated that "Literary works frequently have moral substance in addition to artistic merit; this content can take many forms, from political and social criticism to instructional components. Shakespeare, one of the most well-known writers in England, is a prime example of this, having written classic plays like Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Romeo and Juliet. Dollimore & Sinfield Shakespeare's works, then, demonstrate the richness and depth of his storytelling, incorporating not only aesthetic beauty but also delving deeply into the reflection of his era life."

Sylvie Meiliana, (2020: 51) Poetry is a type of writing in which the poet expresses their ideas and feelings via the unique and lovely use of words. Because of its distinctive qualities, it stands out from other literary works. Poetic, rhythmic, and frequently metaphorical language characterise poetry. It may make use of literary tropes like metaphors and similes

in addition to using thick and effective language. Poems have various structures as well; paragraphs are replaced with stanzas and lines. Poems use diction, imagery, style, typography, concrete words, rhyme, and other aspects to create its physical structure.

The works of Sylvia Plath that are worth analysing for their metaphorical depth are the poems entitled "*Mirror*," "*Morning Song*," "*Lady Lazarus*," and "*Tulips*," are notable for their complex figurative language, nuanced beauty, and deft word choice. These works not.

One kind of communication that is often used in literary works to highlight their richness and uniqueness is metaphor. According to Shorakhmetov, Shotillo. (2024: 3) in his book "*The Power of Metaphor: Exploring the Impact of Figurative Language in Literature*".

*"A metaphor, a powerful form of figurative language, serves as a vivid tool for expression by drawing associations between dissimilar concepts without explicitly stating a comparison. Essentially, it functions by evoking similarities based on imagery rather than outright stating them, thus stimulating the reader's imagination and conveying complex ideas in a more engaging and colorful manner. By utilizing words or phrases in a way that diverges from their literal interpretation, metaphors add depth and layers to communication, sparking deeper insights and emotional connections."*

The ability to recognize and understand the minute details and complexities that are present in metaphorical expressions is crucial to reading proficiently, including personification, metaphors, and similes, figurative language attempts to bridge the gap between the concrete and the abstract by bringing fantastical elements into the written word, stimulating the reader's imagination and striking a deep emotional chord.

"*Mirror*" The poem depicts a woman who, every day, sees herself aging in a mirror; more precisely, it depicts a personified mirror that watches as the woman's youth wanes. It's obvious that the woman dislikes growing older and losing her youth and beauty—two crucial social currencies for women in a society where men predominate, particularly in Plath's day. The woman in the poem faces her own death every morning in the mirror, illustrating the agony of aging.

"*Morning Song*" is composed of eighteen lines and divided into six stanzas. It describes a mother's joy upon receiving her new baby. Plath employs personification, metaphor, simile, and paradox in this poem.

In *Lady Lazarus*. A creative spurt in the months leading up to her suicide in 1963, Sylvia Plath penned "Lady Lazarus" in 1962. In the poem, Lazarus—whom Jesus notably raised from the dead—is mentioned in passing. In addition to dying and rising again, the female speaker of the poem does so several times, and not always joyfully. Every revival is like a

circus act for a "peanut-crunching crowd" hungry for a peek at the speaker's "scars." In *Tulip* Plath wrote this poem. She eventually shortened the poem, which was formerly titled "*Sickroom Tulips in Hospital*." She draws on recurring themes in her work for this piece, including death and its purity, imprisonment.

Previous research that examines Sylvia Plath's poetry is research conducted by Faradika, Vicha. (2018). In her thesis entitled '*Lexical Metaphor Used In Sylvia Plath's Selected Poems As A Depiction Of Sequence Changes Of Death Ideas And Its Relation To Poet's Suicide*'. This study is qualitative and descriptive. The process of non-participation observational method is used to gather data from all of the poems that Plath has chosen, with an emphasis on the emergence of lexical metaphors. Referential and distributional identification techniques are employed in data analysis to elucidate the forms of lexical metaphor. The primary method used in this study to examine the data classification of lexical metaphors is systemic functional linguistics theory, specifically the lexical metaphor by Halliday (2004). L.G. Alexander (1963) Durkheim (1966)'s theory of suicide and poetic devices to evaluate Plath's reasons for suicide.

Astuti, Amelia Y., and Chalesti Chalesti (2022) in their research "*Analysis of the Meaning of Sylvia Plath's Poems Which Reflected to Her Life and Death : A Language Stylistics Analysis*". The found meaning of the poem to be conveyed in this research is obtained by first determining the level of linguistic characteristics. Next, determine the meaning that these features convey. This study examines five poems by Sylvia Plath. "Daddy (1962), Ariel (1962), Lady Lazarus (1962), Poppies in October (1962), and Edge (1963)" are the titles. The first problem is to identify the linguistic elements that convey the poem's meaning. This is done by applying the phonological and semantic levels of language stylistics.

The writer tries to focus only on metaphor concept language of the three Sylvia Plath's poems; they are *Mirror*, *Morning Song*, *Lady Lazarus* and *Tulip*.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods, as highlighted by Pillai, Anila & Kaushal, Urvasi. (2020) are qualitative, it is fundamental in the realm of academia and various other fields due to their structured approach in gathering valuable data for specific objectives. These methods serve as the cornerstone of any research endeavor, providing systematic guidelines and direction. The significance of research methods lies in their ability to offer a precise framework for researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret information effectively.

The main source of data in this study are poems The poetry —*Mirror, Morning Song, Lady Lazarus, and Tulips*—are all poems from Sylvia Plath's collection titled *Ariel* (1965). *Ariel* is one of Plath's most famous and powerful collections, published posthumously, and it contains many of her most well-known poems. Through these powerful works, Plath delves deep into themes that resonate with readers across generations, touching on aspects of personal identity, the complexities of motherhood, the stark reality of mental illness, and the profound existential struggles that define the human experience.

In the process of conducting data analysis, the researcher employed a theoretical framework known as "Data Reduction," developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), to streamline the complex datasets into more manageable components. This strategy involves breaking down the data into smaller, more meaningful units, a method that is widely accepted among researchers. The sequential approach to data reduction comprises three fundamental stages: firstly, the consolidation of the raw data through various techniques to aid in simplification and condensation; secondly, the organized presentation of the refined data in a comprehensible format for thorough examination and interpretation; and thirdly, the meticulous verification of the processed data to ensure accuracy and reliability. Through the systematic application of these steps, the researcher successfully navigated through the intricate dataset, ultimately deriving valuable insights and conclusions that contribute to the advancement of knowledge within the research domain.

#### 1) Data Reduction

Data reduction is a key process in research methodology, involving steps to refine, organize, and condense data for insights. Researchers document outcomes, classify data, and integrate insights from interviews to create a structured narrative. This approach facilitates analysis, interpretation, and informed decision-making.

#### 2) Data Display

The goal was to convert raw data into a structured, understandable format. The researcher meticulously followed defined processes, sorting and organizing the information. By categorizing and presenting data meticulously, accessibility and comprehensibility were enhanced. The structured format enabled comprehensive analysis.

#### 3) Data Verification

The researcher meticulously analyzed students' use of figurative language in poems, drawing on Perrine's theory. They then evaluated how students conveyed thoughts and emotions through different forms of figurative speech.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Poem "Mirror"

Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror" uses figurative language to explore themes of truth, aging, and self-perception. In the first line, the mirror declares, "I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions," employing a metaphor to describe the mirror as an objective, unbiased reflector of truth. The mirror's precise nature highlights its role as a symbol of absolute truth, offering a stark, unfiltered reflection of the self. This aligns with the theme of objectivity, showing how the speaker (the mirror) delivers reality without distortion or emotional influence, creating a harsh awareness of self.

The mirror's role as a witness to the passage of time is emphasized through metaphors and personification in the lines "In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish." The metaphor of the young girl being "drowned" in the mirror signifies the overwhelming loss of youth, consumed by time. The image of the "old woman" rising daily reinforces the relentless, cyclical nature of aging. The repetition of "day after day" underscores the constant, inescapable passage of time, while the comparison to a "terrible fish" evokes a sense of alienation and dread associated with aging, framing it as a predatory force.

The metaphor of drowning further deepens the sense of loss, suggesting that youth is submerged and unreachable in the mirror's reflection. The mirror, while capturing this lost identity, also highlights the existential nature of self-perception. The phrase "drowned a young girl" speaks to the irreversible impact of time, where one's youthful self is slowly overwhelmed and swept away. This sense of loss resonates with the theme of the inevitable passage of time, with the woman unable to reclaim or hold onto her past self.

As the poem continues, the image of the woman's reflection in the lake—"I see her back, and in the evening / I see her in the lake"—introduces a layer of distortion. The lake's reflection contrasts with the mirror's exactitude, symbolizing how self-perception can become unclear and distorted, especially as one faces aging and the changes it brings. This shift in imagery suggests a disconnect between how the woman perceives herself and the unchanging reflection offered by the mirror, highlighting the confusion that often accompanies identity as it evolves over time.

Ultimately, the mirror's role as both a passive observer and recorder of time emphasizes the existential tension between how we see ourselves and the inevitable changes that occur. The repetition of "day after day" reinforces the monotonous, cyclical

nature of aging, making the confrontation with self an ongoing process. Through the mirror's unwavering reflection, Plath explores how time shapes identity, presenting aging not only as an external change but also as a profound internal experience that challenges one's sense of self. The poem powerfully underscores the complex interplay between truth, self-perception, and the passing of time.

#### Analysis of Poem "Morning Song"

In Sylvia Plath's "Morning Song," various forms of figurative language are employed to explore themes of motherhood, the complexity of identity, and the delicate nature of early childhood. The poem opens with metaphors and similes, such as "I have fallen in love with you / The way the moon falls in love with the dark," which compares the speaker's maternal love to the inevitable and gravitational pull of the moon to the night. This establishes the deep, instinctual, and unconditional nature of maternal attachment.

Personification also plays a significant role, as seen in "All night your moth-breath / Flickers among the flat pink roses." The baby's breath is given human-like qualities, symbolizing fragility and vulnerability. The "flat pink roses" metaphorically represent the stillness and innocence of early motherhood, highlighting the delicate nature of the child's existence. The alliteration of "moth-breath / flickers" further emphasizes this fragile, almost ethereal quality.

In the second stanza, the speaker uses metaphors like "cow-heavy and floral" to describe her physical state, contrasting the burden of motherhood with her feminine identity. The phrase "cow-heavy" conveys physical exhaustion, while "floral" represents femininity, illustrating the complex, sometimes conflicting roles a mother navigates. The simile "Your mouth opens clean as a cat's" highlights the baby's innocence and simplicity, emphasizing the pure, unfiltered needs of a child.

As the poem progresses, the imagery deepens with the metaphor "swallows its dull stars," suggesting that the child absorbs the mother's past dreams and aspirations, gradually replacing idealism with the more mundane realities of motherhood. This transition is further symbolized by the metaphor "handful of notes," representing the baby's early attempts at communication, which are both fragile and full of potential. The rising vowels, compared to balloons, symbolize the child's growth and development, representing the early stages of life and the hope and joy that come with it.

Overall, the figurative language in "Morning Song" underscores the intricate emotions of motherhood, from the overwhelming love and responsibility to the sense of

transformation and self-reflection. Through metaphors, similes, personification, and symbolism, Plath portrays the complex bond between mother and child, capturing both the beauty and burden of this transformative experience.

#### Analysis of poem "Lady Lazarus"

In Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," figurative language plays a crucial role in exploring themes of survival, death, trauma, and identity. The poem begins with the speaker using metaphors such as "I have done it again" and "One year in every ten," referring to her repeated suicide attempts. These lines underscore the cyclical nature of death in her life, where each decade is defined by the recurring trauma of trying to escape existence. Plath also uses unsettling metaphors, such as describing the speaker as "a sort of walking miracle" with "skin bright as a Nazi lampshade," emphasizing the grotesque nature of survival and the emotional cost of continuing to live after each suicide attempt.

As the poem progresses, Plath explores the burden of survival through metaphors like "My right foot / A paperweight," which represents the heaviness and immobilization the speaker feels, both physically and emotionally. The speaker's fragile state is symbolized by phrases like "skin and bone," portraying the depletion and fragility resulting from the repeated cycles of life and death. The poem also delves into the objectification of the speaker's body, with lines like "These are my hands / My knees," reducing her to mere parts, exposing her to public scrutiny and exploitation.

Plath intensifies the sense of alienation and dehumanization by describing how her suffering becomes a spectacle for the "peanut-crunching crowd" and how she is "unwrapped" for their voyeuristic pleasure. This exploitation of her pain adds to the theme of objectification, where the speaker's identity is reduced to an exhibit. The rhetorical questions "Do you see my name in the directory? / Do you see my tomb in the graveyard?" express the speaker's existential crisis, questioning her worth and recognition by others, even in death.

In the final stanzas, Plath uses metaphors like "The sour breath / Will vanish in a day" to suggest the fleeting nature of death and suffering, implying that even the horrors of her existence will eventually fade. The metaphor "The flesh the grave cave ate will be / At home on me" connects death and rebirth, emphasizing the cyclical nature of life and death, and the inevitability of death's return. Overall, the figurative language in "Lady Lazarus" vividly conveys the speaker's complex relationship with survival, death, and identity, highlighting



the pain of living after repeated suicide attempts and the dehumanizing effects of public scrutiny.

#### Analysis of Poem "Tulip"

In Sylvia Plath's "Tulips," the speaker navigates deep emotional isolation and detachment, using vivid metaphors and imagery to portray her inner turmoil and the erosion of her identity. The metaphor of the tulips being "too excitable" contrasts with the cold stillness of winter, highlighting the speaker's discomfort with the vitality and emotions around her. Her desire for emotional numbness is evident in lines like "I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions," where she expresses a desire to escape the intensity of life, choosing detachment over engagement.

The speaker's surrendering of her identity is symbolized by giving her name and personal belongings to the nurses, signifying a loss of agency and a withdrawal from her past self. The metaphor of a "thirty-year-old cargo boat" stubbornly holding onto her identity suggests her resistance to fully letting go of her past, even though it feels like an emotional burden. This conflict between the desire to detach and the weight of personal history is also seen in the imagery of her personal possessions sinking out of sight, symbolizing the dissolution of her former life and the loss of connection with her previous identity.

Throughout the poem, the tulips, which are initially described as painful and intrusive, symbolize the speaker's emotional overwhelm and resistance to life's demands. Their brightness contrasts sharply with the speaker's desire for detachment and purity, which she ironically finds in her "nun-like" detachment from the world. The paradoxical imagery of the tulips being both light and heavy captures the tension between the beauty of life and the suffocating emotional burden it represents to the speaker.

Ultimately, the poem portrays the speaker's struggle with emotional detachment and the dissolution of self. Through metaphors like "swabbed me clear of my loving associations" and imagery of sinking possessions, Plath illustrates the alienating effects of isolation and the painful loss of connection with one's identity. The speaker's attempt to find peace through withdrawal only deepens her sense of emptiness, as symbolized by her struggle with the overwhelming presence of the tulips. The poem reflects a profound sense of emotional disconnection, with the speaker's attempt to escape herself leading to a painful realization of the loss of her past and identity.

## CONCLUSION

In her exploration of identity, self-doubt, and emotional turmoil, Sylvia Plath intricately weaves together complex themes within her poetry collection, skillfully employing vivid metaphors that resonate deeply with readers on an emotional level. Through her celebrated works such as "*Lady Lazarus*," "*Tulips*," "*Mirror*," and "*Morning Song*," Plath demonstrates a remarkable ability to infuse her metaphors with profound emotional depth and profound insights into the human condition. Each metaphor she constructs functions as a powerful lens, allowing the reader to gain a clearer understanding of abstract concepts like self-erasure, emotional isolation, the unyielding struggle for personal control, and the delicate, often painful coexistence of beauty and suffering.

These metaphors, carefully chosen and intricately crafted, draw readers into the speaker's inner world, providing an intimate glimpse into the speaker's emotional turmoil and personal conflict. More than just literary devices, these metaphors also act as a reflective tool, offering readers a means of engaging with and contemplating the deeper meanings within the poetry. In doing so, Plath creates a compelling commentary on how one's personal experiences, along with the pressures and expectations placed by societal norms, intricately shape one's understanding of self and identity. Her metaphors serve as a bridge that transcends simple language, forming a profound connection between the reader and the existential realities they confront in their own lives.

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