

I. Question of Identity in Plath's Poems

Sylvia Plath's anger and rejection towards the society come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences she had had. As stated by Mazzenti, her "Biographical and historical material is absolutely necessary for any real understanding of Plath's work" (Mazzenti 197). Plath was born in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts on October 27 1932 to Otto Plath and Aurelia Schoeber Plath. Her father was Professor of German and entomology (a specialist on bees) at Boston University; her mother, a high school teacher, was his student. Both parents valued learning. In 1940 Otto died of complications from surgery after a leg amputation, and Aurelia's parents became part of the household to care for the children when she returned to teaching.

Plath was an outstanding student. Her first poem was published in *Winthrop*, in Boston Herald's children's section when she was eight years old. Her extensive publication of poems and fiction led her to selection for the College Board of *Mademoiselle* Magazine in 1953.

In her junior year at Smith, Plath made her first medically documented suicide attempt by crawling under her house and taking on endorse of sleeping pills. When her mother sought treatment for her, she was given bi-polar electroconvulsive shock treatments as an out- patient.

After graduating from Smith with honors in 1955, Plath obtained a Fulbright Scholarship to Cambridge University where she continued actively writing poetry, occasionally publishing her work in the student newspaper *Varsity*. It was at a party given in Cambridge that she met the English poet Ted Hughes.

Plath studied hard but her life in England was also sexual. As her writing showed, she was angry about double standard behavior and claimed for herself the right to as

much sexual experience as men had. She believed combining the erotic and the intellectual possible, and when she met Ted Hughes, she felt that life with him would be ideal. They were married in London on 16 June 1956, accompanied by Sylvia's mother.

After a honeymoon in Spain, the couple set up housekeeping. Sylvia passed her examination while Ted taught in a boys' school: in June they sailed for America. The next year Sylvia taught at Smith; in 1958 and 1959 they lived in Boston and wrote professionally. Ted's first poem collection *The Hawk in the Rain* won a major poetry prize. Sylvia's promise that she would make him a success seemed fulfilled.

Unfortunately, giving such single minded attention to Ted's work meant that developing her own voice as a writer was difficult. She visited Robert Lowell's class in poetry writing, where she met George Starbuck and Anne Sexton. Sexton's work became an inspiration to her. At this time Plath and Hughes also met for the first time, W.S. Merwin, who admired their work, was to remain a life long friend.

Upon learning that Plath was pregnant, the couple moved back to the United Kingdom. While there, Plath published her first collection of poetry, *The Colossus*. In February 1961, she suffered a miscarriage, and a number of her poems address this event. Plath's marriage to Hughes was fraught with difficulties, particularly surrounding his affair with Assia Wewill, and the couple separated in late 1962. She returned to London with their children, Frieda and Nicholas, and rented a flat at 23 Fitzroy Road in a house where W.B. Yeats once lived. Plath was pleased by this fact and considered it a good omen.

Plath took her own life on the morning of February 11, 1963. She was buried in Heptonstall less than a week after her death. Sylvia Plath's gravesite in Yorkshire is now visited by hundreds of people each year.

Plath's poetry poignantly reflects her struggles with despair and mental illness, while her efforts to assert strong female identity and balance familial, marital and career aspirations have established her as a representative voice for female concerns. She is frequently linked with confessional poets such as Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and John Berryman, all of whom directly expressed personal torments and anguish in their work. Many critics have noted that many of Plath's poems are dramatic monologues voiced by a character that is not necessarily autobiographical. Plath's verse is represented in several volumes. *The Colossus*, the only book of her poems published during her life time, collects poems dating from the mid to late 1950's. *Ariel* contains poems selected by Hughes from among the many works Plath composed during the final months before her death. *Winter Trees* collects several more of the *Ariel Poems* reprints most of post - *Colossus* and pre - *Ariel* verse, and *The Collected Poems* which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1982, features all of her verse, including juvenilia and several previously unpublished pieces in order of composition. Plath's early verse reflects various poetic influences evoking the mythic qualities of the works of William Butler Yeats and Ted Hughes, the diverse experiments with form and language of Gerard Manley Hopkins and W.H. Auden and the focus on personal concerns that dominates the verse of Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke. Most of her early poems are formal, meticulously crafted and feature elaborated syntax and well- developed metaphors. These early poems are more subdued in their subject matter, tone, and language than the later work for which she became renowned. This later work evidences the increasing frustration of her desires. Her ambitions of finding happiness through work, marriage, and family were thwarted by such events as hospital stays for a miscarriage and an appendectomy, the breakup of her marriage, and fluctuating moods in which she felt vulnerable to male domination and

threatening natural forces, particularly death. Following the dissolution of her marriage, Plath moved with her two children from the Devon countryside to a London flat, where the Irish poet William Butler Yeats had once resided, and wrote feverishly from the summer of 1962 until her death in February of the following year. Many of her best known poems including *Daddy*, *Lady Lazarus*, *Lesbos*, *Purdah*, and *Edge*, were written during this period and form the nucleus of *Ariel*. These poems which reflect her increasing anger, bitterness, and despair, feature intense, rhythmic language that blends terse statements, singsong passages, repetitive phrasing, and sudden violent images, metaphors and declarations. For example, in *Daddy* perhaps her most frequently discussed and anthologized work, Plath denounces her father's dominance over her life and, among other allusions, associates him with Nazism and herself with Jewish victims of the Holocaust, Plath's relationship with her husband supplied her with material for poems containing similarly violent imagery, where women are discussed as "dolls" and other objects of men's whims (Collected Poems 222-224).

So far, the poems written by Plath have been published in *The Colossus* (1965), *Crossing the Water* (1971), *Winter Trees* (1972), and *the Collected Poems* (1981). All these poems talk about Plath's state of mind, her fragmented self in some way or other. Known primarily for her poetry, Plath also wrote a semi autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. The book is often regarded as a *roman à clef* with the protagonist's descent into mental illness paralleling Plath's own experiences. Therefore, all these works have been taken into account for reference by this researcher.

As Plath's widower, Ted Hughes became the executor of Plath's personal and literary estates. His part on the relationship became controversial to some feminist accusers and particularly US admirers of Plath, who even accused him of murder. Hughes

himself never publicly entered the debate but later in his life he commented on Plath's struggle, explored their complex relationships through some books and essays, which haven't been missed out.

Plath's poetry poignantly reflects her struggle with despair and mental illness, while her efforts to assert a strong female identity and to balance familial, martial, and career aspirations as representative voice for feminist concerns. In order to demonstrate feminist concerns in Plath's work, her works have been compared to feminist writers of different times like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, Kate Millett, Simon de Beauvoir Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in this study.

Although most of Plath's poems were written in the early 1960s, the important point to be made is that today's readers find her work immediate. Plath's writing has been gaining currency. Thus, a number of critics and scholars have been analyzing her texts in the form of essays and books. Such relevant criticisms too have been taken into consideration by this researcher.

Sylvia Plath produced one of the most riveting poetic oeuvres in English. Her poems plunge into contradictions of mid twentieth century Anglo American selfhood and culture written within a remarkably brief time span. They emanate a heat and light that can still combust a reader today because of which the poet has been receiving a series of critical responses.

Almost immediately following her death critics began to take a closer look at Sylvia Plath's poetry. An anonymous reviewer from *Times Literary Supplement* called Plath's *Ariel* "one of the most marvelous volumes of poetry published for a very long time" (Alexander 342). Similarly, Observer Poetry editor, A. Alvarez, claimed that Plath was "the most gifted woman poet of her time" (qtd. in Paul 356). Irving Howe stated that

“it’s as if we are over heading the rasps of a mind that has found its own habitation and need not measure its distance from...or relation to, other minds”(Howe13).Considering Plath’s versatility in writing, Critic Arthur Oberg writes that the term “under which Plath chose to write her poems are unmistakably given, over and over and she was embracing “nothing less than “everything”, (Oberg 128-29).Definitely Plath could play child, adolescent, and adult, alternately, and at the same time. The critic further talks about Plath’s quest for love and says:

Sylvia Plath never stopped recording in her poetry the wish and need to clear space for love as unreal, to accompanying fears of being unable to give and receive love, and to eventually distortion and displacement of love in the verse. Loving completely or ‘wholly’ she considered to be dangerous from her earliest verse on. (148)

Critic Jeannine Dobbs compares Plath’s use of hostile and violent imagery to the poet’s strong resistance to the prospect of domestic entrapment as a wife and mother and says:

It is apparent from her life and letter that her commitment to writing was total and unwavering and that her commitment to domesticity, especially motherhood, was ambivalent. Paradoxically, it is out of her domestic relationship and experiences, which she came to feel, were stifling, even killing that the majority of her most powerful, most successful work was created. (Dobbs11)

Showing Plath’s tension between herself and the world in *A Disturbance in Mirrors: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* Pamela J. Annas writes: “Isolated both from a past tradition and present community” was difficult for her “to structure new alternatives” for her forthcoming future (Annas 183). However, her “quest for rebirth failed as it led her

continuously to the same world” (183). Plath did have difficulty changing and developing the self in the world in which she existed. Her self was inextricably bound with those of the patriarchal world.

Talking about the shift in the tones of her poems, Suzanne Juhasz said that she “appeared to repress certain themes that were influential on the imagery of her poems. Later, however, Sylvia begins to tell the truth” (Juhasz 102). Most of Plath’s *post Colossus* poems encompass total rejection of modern- world, views, family, society and self. In her poem “Daddy” she not only describes killing her father but alludes to killing her husband and all men. Sylvia’s rage against men and patriarchal construct makes Plath’s poetry an easy anthem for the feminist movement Lucy Rosenthal writes, “Miss Plath doesn’t claim to ‘speak for’ any time or anyone’ - and yet she does, because she speaks so accurately” (Rosenthal 365).

Talking about the mirror in Plath’s poem “Mirror”, Critic Freedman considers Plath’s use of the mirror as a symbol of female passivity, subjugation and Plath’s own conflicted self-identity caused by social pressure to reconcile the competing obligation of artistic and domestic life.

Here the figure gazing at and reflected in the mirror is neither the child nor the man, the woman is neither –as – mirror habitually reflects, but a woman. In this poem the mirror is in the effect looking into itself, for the image in the mirror is woman, the object that is itself more mirror than person. A woman will see herself both *in* and *as* a mirror. To look into the glass is to look for oneself inside or as reflected on the surface of the mirror and to seek or discover oneself in the person (on non-person) of the mirror. (152)

Though Sylvia Plath has been hailed as a feminist writer, some critics like Michelle Kinsley claim that Plath must be rebutted from the label of being a feminist, Kinsley in his *The Willing Domesticity of Sylvia Plath: A Rebuttal of "Feminist" Label* said

Where Plath's writing speaks of her inner dualities, and sometimes even to extreme resentment and jealousy of men for what they had that she did not, it also speaks of a woman in many contrasting senses of the world and to claim as hers some of the very things that so many women who call themselves feminist have rejected in their own searches for completion: love of a man, the raising of children, the creation of what she could create to live her dual stamps of woman and of Wit in indelible imprint on her world.(5)

Discussing her work, M.L. Rosenthal has written that "a genuine confessional poem has to be superbly successful artistically if it is to achieve [its] fusion of the private and culturally symbolic" (qtd. in Hoffman 501). The poems of Plath do have this power. However, her works have been attacked for their exclusive concentration on abnormally exacerbated states of feeling, and some critics denigrate the times in which such poems are taken as the measure of our society disease.

The dialectical tension between self and world is the location of the meaning in Plath's late poems. In *Totem* she writes:

There is no terminus, only suitcases

Out of which the same self unfolds like a suit

Bald and shiny with pockets of wishes

Notions and tickets, short circuits and folding mirrors (Collected Poems 264).

While in the early poems the self was often imagined in terms of its own possibilities for transformation, in the *post-Colossus* poems the self is more often seen as trapped within a closed cycle. One moves but only in a circle and continuously back to the same starting point. The *Ariel* poems record the self *in* the world rather than the self *and* the world. The possibilities of the self are intimately and inextricably bound up with those of the world.

Sylvia Plath's sense of entrapment, her sense that her choices are profoundly limited, is directly connected to the particular time and place in which she wrote her poetry. The recurring metaphors of fragmentation reification and abstraction of the individual – in Plath's late poetry are social and historically based. Like they are images of *kitchens, iceboxes, adding machines, typewriters* and *depersonalization of hospitals* as in "The Applicant", and cannons of trains of wars in "Daddy".

Plath's controlled stanzas, heavy with assonance and consonance, her elaborated syntax with its inversion and subordinate clauses, her ingenious metaphors – all these look revolutionary. Isolating both from a past tradition and a present community, she quests for rebirth. This leads her continuously in a circle back to the same self in the world. However, what Plath has bequeathed us in her poems is a brilliant narrative of the struggle to survive.

Sylvia Plath's life, though short, has left a mark on the literary work as well as society. With such well known works such as *The Colossus, The Bell Jar, Ariel* and priceless journals that delve into the mind of a troubled woman, it is clear that Plath battled with social constructions, family, and self acceptance. Plath endured a great deal of rejection from the literary world during her life time. Such rejection was great frustration to Plath, as her works were criticized not on their own merit but rather her sex

and her husband. She was commonly referred to as the wife of Ted Hughes, the famous poet. Clearly, as demonstrated in her later works, these gender injustices enraged Plath. In “The Munich Mannequins” written circa two weeks before her suicide, Plath resentfully depicts man’s desire for the perfect woman, a mannequin, ‘Naked and Bald in their furs/Orange lollies on silver sticks, / Intolerable, without minds’ (Collected Poems 262). These feelings and attitudes propelled Plath’s work ahead of its time, appealing to a radical feminist movement that expelled ten years later.

In the half century following her suicide Sylvia Plath has become a heroine and martyr of the feminist movement, In fact she was a martyr of the feminist to the recurrent psychodrama that staged itself within the bell jar of her tragically wounded personality, Twelve final poems written shortly before her death, define a nihilistic metaphysic from which the death provided the only dignified escape. Plath once said that she would like to call herself “the girl who wanted to be God and if she “were not in this body” she wonders where she would be and predicts that perhaps she is “destined to be classified and qualified both” but she cries against it (qtd. in Kinsley 5).

Sylvia Plath wrote and died immensely. Her poems constructed stunning psychological landscapes and exhibited a verbal complexity rare in twentieth century poetry. Plath’s work is valuable for her stylistic accomplishment, its melting and serious elements, its ribald fashioning of near and slant rhymes in a free form, its terse voicing of themes.

Her poems reveal a perspective and a language use that are utterly unique. Yet they are also related to the Renaissance, Romantic, Modernist and Cold War rhetoric, she inherited and to the postmodernism that her work helped to generate radical protest for all the female surviving in anguish and fragmented identity.

Plath's poems seethe with anger, hope, desire and disappointment. They glow with brilliant turns of phrase. They construct breathtaking images of the injured body and psyche – the trepanned veteran / Dirty girl of “Cut” for example. And they evoke their social and political milieu in a telling way, expressing the dilemmas of a woman enmeshed in a sexist, racist and classist social structure, yearning for affirmation, waist deep in history as in “Daddy”, “The Colossus”, and “The Applicant”.

Ariel the slim volume of poems published posthumously under Sylvia Plath's name in 1965 has become an iconic document in twentieth century history. The title poem *Ariel* is closely identified with the disturbing power of a poetic voice whose reverberations were felt to be, from the outset, distinctively, even scandalously, female and embodied.

Intensity, imagination and attention to the evolving self characterize many of Plath's poetry like “The Munich Mannequins”, “Tulips”. She handled very painful and intense subjects such as suicide, self – loathing Nazis, shock treatment and dysfunctional relationships. Her poem “Lady Lazarus” shows an amazing sense of control. On the other hand in “Fever 103degree”, “Purdah”, “In Plaster,” and “Edge”, the poet laments her abandonment and demonstrates her despair and rage against the society. Thus, this researcher wants to focus more on the above mentioned poems by Sylvia Plath.

In her brief but momentous career, Sylvia Plath rewrote the story that woman writers could tell in poetry and to some extent, in fiction and diaries as well. Writing avant la lettre of American feminism and before Andrienne Rich's feminist awakening, Plath wrote unforgettable poems concerning women's victimization, rage and rebellion. Having studied Sigmund Freud and James Frazer, she also wrote poems with psychoanalytic and mythic dimensions, the most startling and unsettling poems of her

time. These poems enact loss and devastating fashion that wonders how the reader, much less the author can survive.

Plath's life is crucial and problematic in any consideration of her texts, because one cannot clearly distinguish the traumas she experienced from those she constructed in her texts. Yet one should not simply identify the one with the other. Plath redraws every boundary, including the one separating life from art.

II. Feminism: A Theoretical Modality

Feminism is the belief in the right of women to have political, social, and economic equality with men. It is a disclosure that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender difference, advocate equality for women, campaign for women's right and interests. Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in a wide range of areas within Western and Eastern society, ranging from culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights i.e. rights of contract, property rights, voting rights; for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights including access to contraception and quality parental care; for protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay, and against other forms of discrimination.

The basic fact is that our civilization is pervasively patriarchal. It is organized in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic. From the Bible and Greek Philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an Other, or kind of non-man, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important scientific and technical inventions and the major works of civilization and culture. Women themselves are taught, in the process of being socialized, to presuppose about male superiority and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination.

A major aim of feminists thus has been to reconstitute the society in order to do justice to females. Female patterns of living and dealing with the world have produced in

women a point of view different from that of their brothers. This point of view can not be easily accessible to men because it is conceived by them as being either odd or unimportant, since the norms of our culture are based on masculine experience and adapted to male roles and behavior.

Discussing on why women had to write Elizabeth Janeway said, “The fragile creatures who once lived there have decided to get up and leave, en masse, and as they do, they express some quite violent opinions about the experience”(Janeway 348). She explains that women were determined to write because they felt that they had to come out of the place where there was victimization and limitation of women’s power. Talking about the contribution of the women writers and its affect on men Janeway writes “certainly moving and vital female figures are not absent from the work of men, but there they seem to serve different purposes” and they “create crisis for male protagonists” (352).

Feminism is concerned with the marginalization of all women: that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. Feminists believe that as our culture is a patriarchal culture, one is organized in favor of interests of men. Feminists’ literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts. Their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature and literary criticism. Feminist critics therefore study sexual, social, and political issues once thought to be “outside” the study of literature.

Adrienne Rich, a contemporary American poet, describes feminism as “the place where in the most natural organic way subjectivity and politics have to come together” (qtd. in Gelpi 114). This critical stance allows feminism to protest the exclusion of women

from the literary canon, to focus upon the personal, to exhibit a powerful political orientation, and to redefine literary theory itself. Feminist literary criticism is not just another interesting approach, like a concern for sea- imagery or metaphors of war in medieval poetry. In fact it represents one of the most important social, economic, and aesthetic revolutions of modern times.

Feminists examine the experiences of women from all races and classes and cultures, including, for example, African, American, Latin, Asian American, American Indian, lesbian, handicapped, elderly, and Third World subjects. Annette Kolodny aptly describes this richness as a “playful pluralism”, for it exhibits liberal tolerance, interdisciplinary links, and an insistence on connecting art to the diversities of life (qtd in Kolodny197).

The word “feminism” appeared first in France in the 1880s, Great Britain in 1890s and the United States in 1910. The Oxford English Dictionary lists 1894 for “feminism”, and 1895 for “feminist”. Prior to that time “Woman’s Rights” was probably the term used most commonly. The history of feminism has been divided into three waves.

First- wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It focused primarily on gaining the right of women’s suffrage. The term, “first wave,” was coined retrospectively after the term *second- wave feminism* began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities.

Second –wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. Second wave Feminism has existed continuously since then, and continues to coexist with what some people call *Third- wave*

feminism. The *second-wave* feminism saw cultural and political inequalities as extricably linked. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of a sexist structure of power. If *first-wave* feminism focused upon absolute rights such as suffrage, *second-wave feminism* was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end of discrimination.

The *Third-wave feminism* began in the early 1990s. The movement arose as a response to perceived failures of the *second-wave*. It was also a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the *second-wave*. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's "essentialist" definitions of the feminity, which (according to them) over-emphasized the experiences of upper middle class white women.

Feminism is a word that evokes different images for people. Many forms of feminism exist to suit many different forms and thought. As with every social movement, feminism encompasses a variety of political tendencies. Feminism ideology can take many different forms. In the 1970's, women started developing a theory which helped to explain their oppression. Pockets of resistance began to organize and challenge patriarchy. By the 1980's, however, feminists started disagreeing on particular issues linked to feminism. What was once one theory began to branch out into many theories that focused on different feminist issues. Today, there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists. Each definition of feminism depends on a number of factors including one's own beliefs, history and culture. The most well known branches of feminism are *Liberal* and *Radical* Feminism.

Liberal feminism seeks no special privileges for women and simply demands that everyone receive equal consideration without discrimination on the basis of sex. It asserts

the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism and theory, which focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own action and choices. Liberal feminism looks at the personal interactions of men and women as the starting ground from which to transfer society into a more gender-equitable place.

Liberal feminism tends to have a neutral vision towards different gender. It requires women to mold themselves to fit a citizenship that it perceived to have already been constructed in the welfare of men. According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society. Issues important to liberal feminists include reproductive rights and abortion access, sexual harassment, voting, education, fair compensation for work, affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women. Feminist writers associated with this tradition are amongst others Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and Rebecca Walker. Virginia Woolf is another important name which cannot be missed out while talking about those feminists who leniently showed their disagreement towards the male dominated social structure.

Mary Wollstonecraft has been very influential in her writing as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) commented on society's view on the woman and encouraged women to use their voices in making decisions separate from the decisions previously made for her. What she most wanted for women was personhood. Wollstonecraft denied that women are, by nature, more pleasure seeking and pleasure giving than men. She reasoned that if they were confined to the same cages that trap women, men would develop the same flawed characters. She claims that women can be rational than men

not because they are women but because they are less privileged in terms of education than men. She writes, “And how can they then expect women, who are only taught to observe behaviour, and rather than morals, to despise what they have been all their lives labouring to attain?” (Wollstonecraft 396).

Virginia Woolf is an important figure who disliked the word ‘feminist’ and never adopted a feminist stance but continually examined the problems faced by women writers. As a novelist, Woolf had not had much concern on politics and women’s right to vote. But her treatment was rather psychological, social and economic dimension of society which suppresses women. Projecting a feminist consciousness, she hoped to achieve a balance between a male self- realization and female self annihilation.

A Room of One’s Own (1929) is one of the most significant feminist texts of the twentieth century. Woolf’s essay was the first literary history of women writers and its nature has been anticipated by many of the concerns of feminists. The work was based on two lectures given by the author in 1928 at Newham College and Girton College, Cambridge. Woolf addresses the status of women, and women artists in particular, in this famous essay which proves that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write. Woolf celebrates the work of women writers, including Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Brontes. In the final section Woolf suggests that intellectual freedom requires financial freedom.

In *A Room of Ones Own* Woolf ponders the significant question of whether or not a woman could produce art of the high quality of Shakespeare. In doing so, she examines women’s historical experience as well as distinctive struggle of the woman artist. The narrator begins her investigation at Oxbridge College, where she reflects on the different educational experiences available to men and women as well as on more material

differences in their lives. She then spends a day in the British Library perusing the scholarship on women, all of which has been written by men and all of which has been written in anger. Turning to history she finds so little data about the everyday lives of women that she decides to reconstruct their existence imaginatively. The figure of Judith Shakespeare is generated as an example of the tragic fate a highly intelligent woman would have met with under those circumstances. In light of this background, she considers the achievements of the major women novelists of the nineteenth century and reflects on the importance of tradition to an aspiring writer.

For Woolf money is the primary element that prevents women from having a room of their own, and thus, having money is of the utmost importance. Because women do not have power, their creativity has been systematically stifled throughout the ages. Woolf writes, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 4) and proposes a novelistic approach to defending it, using a narrator called “Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please” (5), which states that it’s not a case of any particular woman. Each woman is a victim of male in some form or the other.

While Woolf is describing Oxbridge University in chapter one, her attention is drawn to a cat without a tail. The narrator finds this cat to be out of place, and she uses the sight of this cat to take her text in a different direction. The oddly jarring and incongruous sight of a cat without a tail—which causes the narrator to completely lose her train of thought—is an exercise in allowing the reader to experience what it might feel like to be a woman writer. Although Woolf goes on to make an interesting and valuable point about the atmosphere at her luncheon, she has lost her original point. This shift underscores her claim that women, who so often lack a room of their own and the

time to write, cannot compete against the men who are not forced to struggle for such basic necessities.

Throughout *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf emphasizes the fact that women are treated unequally in her society and that this is why they have produced less impressive works of writing than men. To illustrate her point, she creates a woman named Judith Shakespeare, the imaginary twin sister of William Shakespeare. The writer uses Judith to show how society systematically discriminates against women. Judith is just as talented as her brother William, but while his talents are recognized and encouraged by their family and the rest of their society, Judith's are underestimated and explicitly deemphasized. Judith writes, but she is secretive and ashamed of it.

The writer characterizes the situation of gifted Elizabethan women as unhappy, facing not only the world's difference but hostility. She quotes the words of Mr. Oscar Browning "the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man" (53) and shows how women were demoralized.

Woolf surveys writings of aristocratic writers such as Lady Winchelsea and Margaret of Newcastle and argues that their talent is distorted by anger and bitterness because of the "sneers and laughter" of male contemporaries (62). She presumes that only childless aristocrats with understanding husbands would be able to write literature at that time. Woolf acknowledges the accomplishments of Aphra Behn, from whom she dates "the freedom of the mind" that writers need, and who also "proved that money could be made by writing at the sacrifice, perhaps of certain agreeable qualities: (62). Woolf then declares that "by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and distracted mind, but was of practical importance" (64). While speculating about why the four major women writers Jane Austen, The Brontes and George Eliot of the 19th century wrote

novels and not poetry, Woolf understands that it was because they did not have a room of their own and they had to write in “the common room” (66).

Woolf closes the essay with an exhortation to her readers to quit the tradition that has been so hardly bequeathed to them, and to increase the endowment for them. She suggests every woman to let Shakespeare’s sister come out from each woman and survive who she says lives in “you and in me, and in many other women” but they cannot be in places like colleges and libraries for “they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed” (113).

Critics of liberal feminism argue that its individualist assumptions make it difficult to see the ways they argue that underlying social structures and values degrade women. They assert that liberal feminism reflects only the values of middle-class white women and has largely ignored women of different races, culture or classes. These critics believe that women’s suffrage is insufficient to emancipate women. It has also been criticized for only concentrating on the legislation aspect in the fight against patriarchy, and for not breaking down the deeper ideologies of society and patriarchy.

Radical Feminism maintains that women’s oppression is the first, most widespread, and deepest oppression. Radical Feminism considers the male controlled capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist, as the defining feature of women’s oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the other system and its value are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any

significant way. Some radical feminists see no alternatives other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals.

Radical feminism promotes the basis for many of the ideas of feminism. These feminists usually clash with the ideals of the liberal feminists because radical feminists believe society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy, not just through acts of legislation. They reject most scientific theories, data and experiment not only because they exclude women but also because they are not women-centered. Radical feminism suggests that because men, masculinity, and patriarchy have become completely intertwined with technology and computer systems in our society, no truly feminist alternative technology exists.

To radical feminists, women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. It is the model of all other kinds of oppression. Because oppression is so entrenched in people's thinking, changes in the structuring of society alone are not sufficient to overcome it. The attitudes of men must be changed and a state of equality made manifest in the power dynamic between men and women. Radical feminists' focus is on widespread cultural awakening rather than on scholarly debate. Their political vibrancy comes in part from the fact that they are saying something relevant and true about men that can almost universally be appreciated by women, and their logic is predicated on politics rather than precise theory and thus they become the be-all and end-all for a diversity of people. Though radical feminists' cultural logic may seem unrefined compared to the scholarly approach, it has the power to empower women of every corner of the world.

Radical feminists do not view practice like prostitution as a harmless private transaction. On the contrary, they believe that it reinforces and perpetuates the

objectification, subordination, and exploitation. A prostitute, in their view, does not act out of free choice but is a victim of coercion in both the most subtle and direct forms. These feminists view the source of men's sexuality as deriving in part from the culture and not exclusively from source of men's sexuality as deriving in part from biology. According to this line of thinking, prostitution and pornography as factors in male experience only exacerbate his self-serving belief in the primacy of his sexuality. His role as the dominant sex is reinforced in his mind as something very real, when in fact it is not.

While liberal feminists fought for women's right to vote, and equal opportunities in education and the workplace, radical feminists concentrated on the more personal aspects of women's oppression; the exploitation of women in pornography, domestic violence and sexual abuse amongst others. Through their campaigns, this branch of feminism aimed to change the mindset of women suffering patriarchal abuse and to reveal the dirt that was swept under the rug years ago to public attention. Their campaigns led to the establishments of women's refuges, rape counseling services and women only centers offering them safety, advice and access to employment and education.

Radical feminists ideology was that women no longer had to put up and shut up, that they were not mentally or physically inferior to men and that they were armed with legislation giving them equal, legal rights in education, work and marriage. This was this patriarchy's greatest challenge. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* must be regarded as the pioneer of such radical feminism. She became a commentator on the evolving social order, especially of its effects on the status of women. Ann J Lane says of Gilman that, "she used her energies and her gifts in an effort to understand the world and her place in it and

to extend that knowledge and those insights to others" (Lane 229). Furthermore, "she saw the submergence of women as a critical handicap retarding the best development of society" (232). Thus, although she was never trained in the methods of social science research and critique, Gilman should be recognized for her contribution to our knowledge in this area in addition to her recognition as a radical feminist.

She recognized the inequalities inherent in the structure of the working world which excluded women from most jobs, relegating them to the world of the home where they worked from sunrise to sunset, their only compensation being the roof over their heads. They had no income over which they had complete control, a situation she wanted them to remedy and as such, made a primary endeavor. Lane says of this,

She took the restructuring of relations between men and women as a central focus of her new vision. Gilman asserted that attention needed to be paid initially to the ways in which people's lives had to be altered in their homes, in their families, in their intimate relations, and that no changes in social relationships could be expected to come automatically. (231)

Gilman describes this predicament in great depth in works such as: *Women and Economics* (1898), *Concerning Children* (1900), and *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1904). Through popular fiction as well as intellectual writing and speaking, Gilman attempted to reach a wide variety of people with her social commentaries, especially women, in an attempt to awaken them to her revolutionary ideas. These concepts continue to intrigue feminists in the social sciences as can be attested by her inclusion in many books on early feminism and her inclusion in women's studies courses. Her radical ideas have truly taken a root today. With the "third-wave" of feminism now working for

many of the same social changes Gilman advocated, her life and work are an inspiration to feminists young and old.

In her semi autobiography *The Yellow Wallpaper (1892)*, she depicts the escape of women from the pressures of seemingly a seemingly unwanted marriage and consequent marriage into a new self housed in the wallpaper of her bedroom. Gilman's disdain for the state of forced marriage facing women of the time comes across vividly in this harrowing story. It is the story of a young mother who has been diagnosed as suffering from a nervous disorder. The male character "John" is representative of patriarchal society and its repressive regimes. The narrator of the story represents oppressed, trapped womankind. She refers to herself as one' or myself' her name is never revealed. The omission of a name would indicate that she has not yet found' herself or does not yet know herself. The fact that her husband fails to call her by her name indicates her unimportance. She is instructed by her husband and brother, both of whom are doctors, to abandon all intellectual and social activities. Locked in the attic of a rented hall, which the narrator believes, is haunted, her condition worsens, but her husband fails to recognize her situation. She says, "he does not believe I am sick!" (Gilman 531). John "does not know" how much she really suffers and he thinks "there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him" (533).

The story highlights the social stereotypes prevalent at that time. John is active, dominant, practical and unemotional whilst the narrator appears passive, sub-ordinate, emotional and irrational. When the narrator observes the queer atmosphere of the property, her husband, laughs at her. The narrator, as a woman, is not taken seriously and this highlights her inferior status in the society. Her husband has forbidden her to write. Though she knows that it is making her situation worse, she accepts her husband's

command quietly. She says, she believes that “congenial work with excitement and change” would do her good but she is helpless and cannot do anything against John’s will (531). The narrator’s husband John is determined to make her dull. He doesn’t even let her look out of the window as he is afraid that it might develop her creativity. The narrator says that John “has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story- making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency” (533). The woman in the story says that she tries to be what she is not but it suffocates her. She knows that her husband does not like her writing and considers it to be something absurd. But she asserts that she will write as it makes her relieved. She says that she knows John would think it “absurd” but she says she “must write what I feel and in some way- it is such a relief!” (563). She begins to use the wallpaper as a screen to project her imagination onto, then turns it into a text which she begins to interpret, a practice, she says, she has undertaken since childhood. The paper which had at first repelled her then begins to fascinate her. She begins to see a figure lurking behind the paper, a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. She says that this figure shakes as though she wanted to come out of the wall and claims that “the faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to go” (537). This is a metaphor of the narrator’s struggle to break free from the restrictions her husband and patriarchal society in general has placed on her. The narrator again says she thinks “there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over” (540).

She, at first, creeps, then shakes the paper, disrupting the pattern of patriarchy society so readily adopts. Then the narrator begins to help her by tearing off the paper, liberating herself and symbolically tearing down the rules and structure of patriarchy. During the day, she notices many creeping women and she says she wonders if they all wanted “to come out of that wallpaper” as she did (542). The use of the phrase “to come out” here illustrates the narrator’s emancipation. She now wants to stay in the room, she is not forced to. She decides not to let those in who would not let her out. She is making her own decisions. The traditional roles are being reversed and this is indicated in the change of language. She is no longer a wallflower, a woman restricted to the house like paper which is glued to the walls; her mind is free and liberated from patriarchal ideology.

At the end of the story John faints and she creeps even over him. This shows that John or men can not tolerate revolution from women and the narrator’s creeping over him shows women’s victory over men. It represents the fading of masculinity and patriarchy at the end. In this way Gilman used the story to openly disagree with her own experience of being requested to quit any literary involvement and her contention of the general social expectation and regulation on women.

There are many women writers have radically attacked on the patriarchal society which underestimates females. Among them Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and Simone de Beauvoir are the five names which cannot be missed out. This school of feminism has been marked by the works such as Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own*, and Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Women in the Attic*.

These writers have advanced a confrontational attack on male hegemony, advocating a complete overthrow of biased male cannon literature.

Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 feminist masterpiece, *The Second Sex*, has traditionally been read as an application of existentialism to the problem of women. The work contained detailed analysis of women's oppression. The writer challenges the deep rooted male chauvinism and all the previous ideologies created by male about female with the images like fragility, passivity, weakness and the inferior sex.

The gathering feminist movement very much disagreed and argued that women's writing expressed a distinctive female consciousness, which was more discursive and conjunctive than its male counterpart. Such consciousness was radically different and had been adversely treated. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* documented the ways legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists had striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. Beauvoir's concept of feminism advocated the individual existence of woman as free from the suppressive relationship with male and thus she wanted to break all the binary relationship like male/ female constituted by male to establish male supremacy over woman. Women had been made to feel that they were inferior by nature and though men paid lip-service to equality, they would resist its implementation. Some men might be sympathetic to women's issues, but only women themselves knew what they felt and wanted.

As existentialists believe that man is accidental and is thrown on the earth among multiple possibilities of choices, Beauvoir also believes that ironically and claims that woman is also accidentally thrown in the male society and thus has multiple of choices of

herself. Beauvoir's central thesis is that under patriarchy woman is the Other, and that 'one is not born a woman, but becomes one. Simone de Beauvoir says this has held back women. It has maintained the perception that women are a deviation from the normal, that they are outsiders attempting to emulate normality. She says that, for feminism to move forward, they need to break out of this assumption. What peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she - a free and autonomous being like all human creatures - nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. De Beauvoir argues that women are not fully human because femininity is defined by men, that they are the second sex or the 'other' in a world in which humanity was primarily defined in terms of the identity of man.

What Beauvoir discovers in her multifaceted investigation into woman's situation, is that woman is consistently defined as the Other by man who takes on the role of the Self. As Beauvoir explains in her Introduction, woman "is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (Beauvoir 16). The first conclusion of her essay is that the whole feminine history has been man made. Beauvoir states that this can be drawn from a general overview of history. She says, "-and in the past all the history has been made by men. At present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men-they have no doubt of it and women have scarcely any (21).

Beauvoir talks about the situation of women that compel them to be under men as they are economically weaker than men. She remarks on the seeming appearance that men control the lives of women, and will only allow women to dominate when it suits their own interests and not the woman's interest. Beauvoir thinks that this discrimination has rooted in the society because women are economically weaker than men. Women are

scared to protest because they think that it may result to economic risk. She mentions, that man “the-sovereign will provide woman- the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence: thus she can evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance” (21).

Beauvoir asserts that women can rebel if they are empowered. She gives examples from the history and explains how women have been defeated in the past. This she says is “woman’s sole defense against the domestic slavery” in which she is bound and it is this “economic oppression” to which she is subjected (86). She declares that women cannot emancipate themselves only by equal right in law. This is possible only when she is economically powerful and she can be emancipated only when “she can take part on a large social scale in production and is engaged to domestic work only to an insignificant degree” (86). Nevertheless, it is not possible to consider woman simply as a productive force for she has multiple work to carry out in order to satisfy her man. Beauvoir says, it is “impossible to regard woman simply as a productive force; she is for a man asexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object-an Other through whom he seeks himself” (90).

The most radically rich discussion comes in Beauvoir's analysis of myths. There she tackles the way in which the preceding analyses (biological, historical, psychoanalytic, etc.) contribute to the formulation of the myth of the "Eternal Feminine.” Beauvoir introduces the myth created by self (male) about female (other). Different writers, intellectuals and religious institutions have created such myths in which women have been dominated by constructing stereotypical, mythical images of weak and powerless women and these males have confined women within a narrow territory. This

paradigmatic myth, which incorporates multiple myths of woman under it (such as the myth of the mother, the virgin, the motherland, nature, etc.) attempts to trap woman into an impossible ideal by denying the individuality and situation of all different kinds of women. In fact, the ideal set by the Eternal Feminine sets up an impossible expectation because the various manifestations of the myth of femininity appear as contradictory and doubled. For example, history shows us that for as many representations of the mother as the respected guardian of life, there are as many depictions of her as the hated harbinger of death. The contradiction that man feels at having been born and having to die gets projected onto the mother who takes the blame for both. Beauvoir writes,

As group symbols and social types are generally defined by means of antonyms in pair, ambivalence will seem to be an intrinsic quality of the Eternal Feminine. The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the pervasive virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals death, that every virgin is pure spirit of flesh dedicated to the devil. (284)

Thus woman as mother is both hated and loved and individual mothers are hopelessly caught in the contradiction. This doubled and contradictory operation appears in all feminine myths, thus forcing women to unfairly take the burden and blame for existence. The writer says, we could “multiply examples” but they would “invariably lead” women to the same conclusions (282). She further says that when a man describes woman, “each writer describes his general ethics and the special idea he has of himself; and in her he often betrays also the gap between his world view and his egoistic world view” (282). Beauvoir goes on attacking on such myths which always have been the powerful weapons for males to dominate women. They regard that women are by birth

the lower sex. All myths are created by male to make a sort of immanent images of females. Males always want women to be docile and never equal to man. A woman is considered to be a “true woman” only when she is submissive, veiled and dependent to men. The writer writes that in men’s eyes it is “not enough to have a woman’s body” nor to assume the female function as “mistress or mother” in order to be a true woman and in “sexuality and reality” woman as “subject” can claim “autonomy” but to be a “true woman” she must “accept herself as the Other” (291).

Book II of *The Second Sex* begins with Beauvoir's most famous assertion that one is “not born, but rather becomes, a woman”(295). By this, Beauvoir means to destroy the essentialism which claims that women are born "feminine" (according to whatever the culture and time define it to be) but are rather constructed to be such through social indoctrination.

Beauvoir illustrates how women are forced to relinquish their claims to transcendence and authentic subjectivity by a progressively more stringent acceptance of the passive and alienated role to man's active and subjective demands. Despite women’s devotion and hard work a man never shows his gratitude to his woman. He takes his woman’s devotion for granted. Many a times it happens that wives are pregnant but they cannot have children and husbands act in such a way that wives have to abort the child as well as take the blame solely for the action. Though husbands also want their wives abortion they pretend as though it is not their wish and charge their wives for the callous act but inwardly they get relieved. Beauvoir says that men universally “forbid abortion” but individually they “accept it as a convenient solution of a problem” as they are able to “contradict themselves with careless cynicism” (509).

Finally Simone de Beauvoir asserts that women must destroy the males' superiority if they want to build their own world where they have their own identity and dignity. She strongly affirms that society "codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior: she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority" (726). Thus, Beauvoir logically asserted that the reason for the male dominance of society lay in an overt system of oppression instituted by males and enforced through laws and culture. This essay struck society like a bombshell. The publication of Simone de Beauvoir will always remain a watershed moment in the history of feminist thought.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1968) was also a groundbreaking work in the history of feminism. Praised and denounced when it was first published in 1970, *Sexual Politics* not only explored history but also became part of it. Kate Millett's book fueled feminism's second wave, giving voice to the anger of a generation while documenting the inequities had been neatly packaged in revered works of literature and art of a complacent and repentant society. Kate Millett named it, illustrated it, exposed it, and analyzed it. The words were new. What was "sexual politics"? The concept was new. Millett meant to prove that sex is a status category with political implications. She pointed to male dominance in sex, including intercourse. Social sex roles originated in and were determined by biology or a supernatural divinity. The male was the figure of action, even heroism. He alone was made in God's image. He ruled in religion, marriage and politics as conventionally understood. His sovereign place as head of the family was unchallenged. Millett called this arrangement "patriarchy", which she described as males dominating females.

The book has set the scene for the creative explosion of feminist literary studies that transformed the field in the 1980's. Launching a major new area of investigation, the

book uncovered matter of suppression of female with a more ferocious voice. Perhaps the most important contribution of this work was the new definition of politics introduced by Millett, and its implication for the view in political theory that 'politics' only occurs among group of people, as opposed to animals and only when reasoned argument and negotiations as opposed to violence or war are occurring. Millett's argument is basically that politics is the exercise of power in whatever form. Her idea of power, and her definition of politics, is the basis of many arguments made by radical feminists about the violence of men towards women.

In introducing the term 'sexual politics' one must first answer whether the relationship between the sexes can be viewed in a political light at all. Millett says that the answer depends on how one defines politics. According to Millett, politics is not just about institutions and meeting in public or cultural spheres, politics is also about violence and the private sphere. Neither is power just about economics and class. Politics exists in nearly every relationship and between groups of people, but the most fundamental form of power is that of men over women, namely patriarchy. She says that the term politics shall refer to "power-structured relationships, arrangements" whereby one group of persons is controlled by another (Millett 23). Millett claims that sexual domination is the most persuasive ideology of our culture, and provides its most fundamental concepts of power. She asserts that the word politics is enlisted here "when speaking of the sexes" primarily because "such a word is eminently useful in outlining the real nature of their relative status" historically and contemporarily (23).

According to Millett the ruling sex maintains and extends its power over subordinate sex. She declares that patriarchy is the root of all the other forms of power. This process is pervasive throughout cultural life. Females to be ruled by males are

considered as the birthright priority and Millett thinks it is so because “our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy (25). She again states that “every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands (25).

Millett described the approval of the female to this male-over-female paradigm as a process of socialization in which women were constrained to be passive, ignorant, valued if at all for bearing children, a function shared with animals; men were distinguished by the distinctly human characteristics. Women were socialized to accept both the superiority of men and their own inferiority, which was then justified by assertions of male biological superiority: men were physically stronger.

In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. The limited role allotted the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience. Therefore, nearly all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity (in their own way animals also give birth and care for their young) is largely reserved for the male. (26)

Millett blames that all the human activities are largely reserved for the male and this she thinks helps men to rule women. Millett discusses on how our culture encourages “the male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to thwart her own to turn them inward” which results male “to have aggression reinforced in his behaviour, often with significant anti- social possibilities” and in case of women, the “feminine virtue of passivity”(31). This gives the license for male to oppress female physically as well as mentally.

Millett blames the patriarchy for the ongoing domination of women. She says that traditionally patriarchy “granted the father nearly total ownership” over wife or wives and children, including the “powers of physical abuse” and even those “murder and sale” (33). But the sadder part is that “the existence of sexual hierarchy has been re-affirmed and mobilized to “punish” the female quite effectively (36). Millett also talks about romantic version of love and says that it is a grant which the male concedes out of his total power. She writes, that the concept of “romantic love” affords a means of “emotional manipulation” which the “male is free to exploit” as “love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideology) pardoned for sexual activity” (37).

The writer talks about how patriarchy existed in its entire ugly particular, to trace its origin and history and how it kept on dominating women. She wonders why even when this patriarchal arrangement of male rule and control of our society is so obvious, is never acknowledged or discussed. She suspects that it may be because such discussion is regarded by males as dangerous. The writer feels that there must be a sexual revolution from women’s side that would eliminate the negative aura with which the sexual activity has been surrounded. “A sexual revolution would require, perhaps first of all, an end of traditional sexual inhibitions and taboos, particularly those that most threaten patriarchal monogamous marriage: homosexuality, “illegitimacy”, adolescent, pre- and extra – marital sexuality”. (62) The writer believes that when the females start the revolution by following all these means then the sexual domination by male over female can come to an end. She writes,

The negative aura with which sexual activity has generally been surrounded would necessarily be eliminated, together with the double standard and prostitution. The goal of the revolution would be a permissive single standard of

sexual freedom, and one uncorrupted by the crass and exploitative economic bases of traditional sexual alliances. (62)

Millett gives a flashback of history of US and England and informs how the law always discriminated male and put women's life in peril. She writes, "A father, like a slaver, could order the law to reclaim his chattel-property relatives when he liked. Wives might be detained against their will; English wives who refused to return to their homes were subject to imprisonment". (67) Millett discusses on how women had been betrayed by men in the early ages even when they were working for longer hours, for smaller rewards than men. Women had always done menial labor and in return they had only wanted to be paid for their efforts, have some dignity, and when paid they wanted to be allowed to retain and control their earning. But what they received were only callous political and economical taboos. She states, "In embarking upon the intellectually and socially responsible employment which the professions constituted, pioneers in each field met with ruthless and nearly overwhelming opposition in law, medicine, science, scholarship, and architecture". (85)

Identifying patriarchy as a socially conditioned belief system masquerading as nature, Millett demonstrates in detail how its attitudes and systems penetrate literature, philosophy, psychology, and politics. Her incendiary work rocked the foundations of the literary canon by castigating time-honored classics- from D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* for their use of sex to degrade and undermine women. Referring to D.H. Lawrence she says "The sexual revolution had done a great deal to free female sexuality. An admirable astute politician, Lawrence saw in this two possibilities: it could grant women an autonomy and independence he feared and hated, or it could be manipulated to create a new order of

dependence and subordination, another form of compliance to masculine direction and prerogative"(240-241). Kate Millett declared of Miller as a "compendium of American sexual neuroses" and says that his value "lies not in freeing us from such afflictions" but in "having had the honesty to express and dramatize them" (295). Her study of him in rather sardonically salutes Miller for his contribution to society in articulating "the disgust, the contempt, the hostility, the violence, and the sense of filth" associated with sexuality which "had never so explicitly been given literary expression before" (295-296).

Hence, Millett opposed the prevailing critics, and insisted that social and cultural contexts must be studied if literature were to be properly understood. The critics up to then had maintained that the author was the authority. Millet boldly asserted that the author must be questioned or even disagreed with. According to Millett, this conflict between the reader and the author exposes the premises of the author's work. The prevailing image of the reader until then was of being primarily passive/feminine, since the reader was basically the unquestioning recipient of authoritarian discourse.

Millett's work was a significant milestone in feminist literature, and did much to bridge the gap between the academic struggle and the actual fight in the trenches for women's rights, but her work was also criticised on several counts. She powerfully gives a clear, well-articulated agenda: to demonstrate the existence of patriarchy. She exposes patriarchy, in all its ugly particularities, to trace its origins and history, and to begin a radical critique of its insidious presence in our society. She cut through the history of culture, identifying male writers who derogated women as fictional characters, writers, and fellow human beings. Because of the book's fierceness, the importance and scope of

her arguments are largely signified today. Its radicalism and significance for achievements in literary criticism is entirely anticipated by many female writers.

Another feminist writer who emerged to shatter the male centric history by challenging its biasness and partiality was Elaine Showalter. She boldly attempted to reconstruct the history which would reflect the true potential of female writers and their writing. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) shows how women's literature has evolved, starting from the Victorian period to modern writing. She respected the works and lives of women writers describing the ways in which their circumstances affected their creativity and analyzing what they had accomplished. Launching a major new area for literary investigation, the book uncovered the long but neglected tradition of women writers and the development of their fiction from the 1800s onwards. Showalter chronicles three historical or evolutionary phase of female writing.

In the 'feminine' phase dating from about 1840 to 1880, the writers accepted their roles as female writers no matter how biased it was. During this phase many female writers wrote under male pseudonyms and even "superfeminine" little pseudonyms in order to "disguise their boundless energy" and a "powerful economic motives and keen professional skills" (Showalter 1231). As the women of this period could not express their views overtly, their implied opinions could be inferred by the readers only through deep concentration. In the words of Showalter, "the feminist content of feminine art is typically oblique, displaced, ironic and subversive, one has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text" (1231).

In the 'feminist' phase dating from 1880 to 1920, the female authors dramatized the plight of the women and depicted the harsh or cruel treatment of female characters. Showalter writes, "In the Feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the

vote, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood” (1231).

Showalter names the phase ongoing since 1920 as “female” phase where the feminist critics concern themselves with developing a particularly female understanding of the female experiences in arts, including a feminine analysis of literary forms and techniques. (1232)

The writer asserts that most criticism of novels by women focuses only on a few novelists recognized as major figures like Jane Austen, The Brontes, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf. She states that once we broaden the horizon we will find hundreds of more female writers who have penned equally significantly. She says that when we “go beyond Austen, the Brontes, and Eliot, say to look at a hundred and more of their sister novelists, we can see a hundred and more of their sister novelists, we can see patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition” which correspond to the “development phases of any subcultural art”(1231).

Showalter urges that the exclusion of female voice must stop, and for that what is needed is a feminist criticism that is genuinely women- centered and says, “As we see in the analysis of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history’ we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be. (1227)

Showalter coined the term “gynocritics” or “gynocriticism” which she says is a program “to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based in the study of female experience, rather than adapt male models and theories” (1227). According to Showalter gynocriticism is the label to be

given to the study of women writers and it deals with the study of history, style, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women “which have developed hypotheses of a female subculture including not only the ascribed status, and the internalized constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women” (1227).

Showalter emphasizes on the necessity for female to have a separate literature of their own. She writes that without an “understanding” of the “framework of the female subculture”, we can “miss” or ‘misinterpret” the themes and structures of women’s literature, fail to make necessary connections within a tradition (1228). She is afraid that the experience of women may disappear, be mute, invalid and invisible if women will themselves to go back to sleep and, thus, she encourages them to wake up. She writes, “The task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision”. (1228)

In this way, Elaine Showalter investigated how the society in which female authors work and function shapes women’s responses, goals and points of view. She concerns her task with the need for a female discourse where women can create a language peculiar to their gender and firmly believes women’s own literature will permanently reside in the society. She confidently writes, “one thing is certain: feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay, and we must make it a permanent home.” (1233) Showalter, therefore, overtly attacks on the absolute stream of male domination and advocates for the female language to express and interpret the strength of women.

The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar is a perfect illustration of burning, patriarchal-hating, feminist literature. The two writers examine the works of Jane Austen, Mary Shelly, Charlotte and Emily Bronte and George

Eliot. They address such topics as mothering, living within enclosures, doubling of characters and of the self, women's diseases, and feminized landscapes, and they make the interesting argument that female writers often identify themselves with the literary characters they detest. Gilbert and Gubar point out the monster/ madwoman, the angel/ heroine figures as well as elements of the author's antipatriarchal strategies. This struggle stemmed from male writers' tendencies to categorize female characters as either pure, angelic women, or rebellious, unkempt madwomen. Gilbert and Gubar claimed that female writers should strive for definition beyond this dichotomy, whose options are limited by a patriarchal point of view.

The two authors show how the Freud inspired Bloomian critical theory, the "Anxiety of Influence," which illustrated the pressures that poets and writers have to exceed the accomplishments of their forefathers, is a blatantly sexist, male-oriented structure. This Oedipal-based structure completely excludes any way in which female writers are able to define themselves without rejecting their female qualities. Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar assert that the Anxiety of Influence is an exclusivist literary structure that forces women into a rebellious, and often self-destructive, subculture, identified as the "Anxiety of Authorship" model. In this model, Gilbert and Gubar question the ability of the "anxious woman" writer to even contemplate her status as a uniquely female writer. Where Bloom finds competition and aggression between male writers and their precursors, women struggle just to recognize themselves as writers.

In this theoretical chapter of one of the seminal works of Feminist literary criticism, Gilbert and Gubar seek to define what it means to be a woman writer in a patriarchal culture where, since time immemorial, the pen has consciously and unconsciously been conceptualised as a metaphorical penis and the author viewed in

terms of a father who ‘inseminates’ a text with his meaning. The central question for feminists, according to Gilbert and Gubar, is thus, “does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she ‘talk back’ to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint?” (Gilbert 1235).

To answer this, Gilbert and Gubar go back to the theories of literary history proffered by Harold Bloom, to wit, his account of the process by which writers “assimilate and then consciously or unconsciously affirm or deny the achievements of their predecessors” (1235). They find Bloom’s theory of the ‘anxiety of influence’ particularly useful in this respect, to be precise, the writer’s “fear that he is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors . . . assume essential priority over his own writings” (1235).

Gilbert and Gubar underscore that Bloom’s Oedipal model of the ‘strong poet’ (whereby a “man can only become a poet by somehow invalidating his poetic father” (1236) is undoubtedly a masculinist one but one, as such, eminently suited to understanding the patrilinearity of Western literary history and the “psychosexual and sociosexual con-texts by which every literary text is surrounded” (1236). They say

Certainly if we acquiesce in the patriarchal Bloomian model, we can be sure that the female poet does not experience the “anxiety of influence” in the same way that her male counterpart would, for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her.(1236)

They contend that Bloom’s theory less recommends or perpetuates than it analyses the “patriarchal poetics and attendant anxieties which underlie our culture’s

chief literary movements” (1236). There are two questions which accordingly present themselves to Gilbert and Gubar. Firstly, can feminist critics speak of and thus study, as Elaine Showalter does, for example, the existence of an autonomous tradition of women writers? Gilbert and Gubar seem uncomfortable with the idea that one can completely sever the ties linking women’s writing with the male-dominated canon. Moreover, even if this were desirable, they do not want to simply reverse Bloom’s model and to speak, thus, of a similar Oedipal process dominating relations between literary women, especially given the questions surrounding the applicability of Freud’s essentially andocentric theories to women and the controversial nature of his model of femininity. Secondly, if the answer to the first question is no, where and how can / does the female writer (especially earlier ones like the Brontës) fit into the male literary tradition as described by Bloom? How can his theory of the ‘anxiety of influence’ be adapted to explain the female tradition? In answer to this, Gilbert and Gubar assert that women writers experience what they term an “anxiety of authorship” (1236) for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her.

The writers state that their anxiety is more marked as the females have to struggle against the society and against men’s suppressive reading of women. They give number of reasons why women have to struggle so hard to construct the place of their own, unaffected by male domination. Gilbert and Gubar state

The loneliness of the female artist, her feelings and alienation from the male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of the male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self

dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention- all these phenomena of ‘inferiorization’ mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self- definition and differentiate her efforts at self- creation from those of her male counterpart. (1237)

Moreover, Gilbert and Gubar argue that just as the male artist’s struggle against his predecessor takes the form of what Bloom calls revisionary swerves, flights, misreading, so the female writer’s battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process . . . not against her (male) predecessor’s reading of the world but against his reading of *her*. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization. Her revisionary struggle . . . often becomes a struggle for what Adrienne Rich has called ‘Revision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction. . . .’(1237).

Importantly, according to Gilbert and Gubar, the female writer often can begin such a struggle “only by seeking a *female* precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal authority is possible” (1237). In other words, where, for Bloom, the paternal relationship between the male writer and his predecessor is inherently conflictual and accordingly conceptualised in Oedipal terms, literary maternity is, by contrast, exemplary and peaceful, according to Gilbert and Gubar. It is in this way that the female writer seeks to “legitimize her own rebellious endeavours” (1237). At the same time, it is a fact that one of the consequences of living in a patriarchal society is that women experience their gender “as a painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy” (1237).

Gilbert and Gubar also write that women suffer from all sort of disease when they try to reject patriarchy as these illnesses are the consequences of inescapable chains of

patriarchy. They write, “ rejecting the poisoned apples her culture offers her, the woman writer often becomes in some sense anorexic, resolutely closing her mouth on silence (since – in the words of Jane Austen’s Henry Tinsley- “ a woman’s only power is the power of refusal”), even while she complains of starvation” (1241).

The writers finally state “the literary woman has always faced [equally] degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world” (1244) but still they have to reject patriarchal literature. Hence, Gilbert and Gubar’s emphasis on the deceitful strategies of the woman writer makes her careful to seek freedom of being read as more than exceptionally articulate victims of a patriarchally engendered plot.

We can clearly say that women have been denied the recognition and the responsibility that they deserve and that they have earned. Despite their commitment and contributions, they are all too often refused leadership positions, treated as second class citizens, told to make coffee, and put on display as sex objects. Many of these women have reacted against such violence and have organized themselves around the strong contradiction within social movements which fights for self-determination and equality.

Women argue the assumptions that they are followers and men leaders that women naturally are better with children and men better at organizing, that women should type and men should discuss issues. Such assumptions have denied women not only equality within progressive movements, but even more basically the freedom to choose for themselves what they could and should think and do.

Women’s own home itself becomes a site of oppression for many women who sacrifice their livelihood in exchange for the family. The desire to cultivate a self that resists the private house is often a struggle that women today still encounter as they navigate a society that silences their existence. Balancing work and family, a husband’s

career and old-fashioned attitudes are holding women back. The cause of women's oppression is men's urge to dominate and control them. History is the story of the unchanging patriarchal structures through which men have subjugated women. The only way to abolish these structures is for women, of whatever social class, to unite against men, of whatever class.

Women have been fighting and seeking for their own identity from a long time. Feminism has emerged as a strong movement for attacking the social construction of prejudiced patriarchy, which underestimates females. Sylvia Plath is one another name of such women who boldly fought against such society. In Sylvia Plath's work and in her life the elements of pathology are so deeply routed and so little resisted that one is disinclined to hope for general principles, such origins, applications, or lessons. Her fate and her themes are hardly separate and both are singularly terrible. Her work is brutal like the smash of a fist, and sometimes it is also mean in its feeling. Literary comparisons are possible, echoes liberate occasionally, but too, nobody can she be compared in spirit, in context, in temperament.

Although Plath was not an activist in the traditional sense of the world, she protested radically her socially constructed gender roles in the way she could. Perhaps she was born ahead of her time and if she had lived long enough to see the burgeoning feminist movement; she would have affirmed those values in a public arena. At closer inspection, her death was the greatest representation of what was happening to the young talented women in the 1950s that did not conform to social norms. Like Gilman in *The Yellow Wallpaper* Plath challenges the male's ego, struggles against the confinement discovers her lost self and makes her speechless woe get heard by the whole world.

Plath has undoubtedly become a feminist role model and an icon as well as a source of feminist descent. She is an idol in feminism as an example of a great talent: stifled, ignored and rewritten. She must be looked at as a radical feminist because of the way she attacked on the male hegemony and tried to seek her own identity. Her psychic distress is signaled through brutal self-revelation and violent imagery. The declaration of the woman's ability to eat men like air sounds a note of revenge against male figure the poet identifies as her enemy. Her poetry displays an overriding preoccupation with estrangement and fragmentation with the contemporary society.

III. Plath's Search for Individuality: The Self standing outside the Self

Plath's poetry draws on the concept of depersonalization, the experience of a profound sense of detachment from one's everyday, 'personalized' self, replete with full individual personality. This detachment generally takes the form of the perception of oneself as being at a distance from oneself, of existing outside of one's own body, and observing the former self. It constitutes the abstraction and transformation or evolution of the self into a new form. It is not to be regarded as the individual's loss of personality, but rather personality's loss of the power to be the sole defining aspect of the individual. This loss is caused by acute self-observation, and the depersonalized, distanced, extremely self – aware mind comprising the aspect of the individual's new identity.

Sylvia Plath was a uniquely troubled individual, whose originality of vision was reflected by her often dark, brooding poetry. Through her poetry, Plath expressed her personal view on a variety of recurring themes, including the obstacles faced by a woman poet, influences that shape the self, the allure of death, and several others. Sylvia Plath had conflicted feelings on domesticity; she felt compelled to fulfill the expectations of a married woman and mother yet she also passionately believed women were competent and deserved the right to break free of their domestic restrictions and pursue careers. She had been tired of all these. In her Journals she once wrote, "I would live a life of conflict, of balancing children, sonnets, love and dirty dishes; and banging an affirmation of life out on pianos and ski slopes and in bed in bed in bed" (Collected Poems 126) . Her poetry takes a strong stance on the various aspects of power in the area of gender relations. She takes on a unique approach to criticize and reject patriarchal attitudes and values by using

distinguished language and stylistic feature. She attempts to exorcise the oppressive male figures that haunted her life served as one of the fundamental themes in her poetry.

Plath's poetry is rich with manifestation of the ecstatic self in the form of the disembodied, elevated, self – observing speaker. The emergence of this figure commences with a process of abstraction of self from self; a struggle subsequently arises between forces of discord in the old, personalized ontological state and the experience of harmony potentially inherent in the depersonalized self. The tension frequently takes the form of a conflict between dullness and incandescence, death and sexual fever, corporeality and spirituality, stasis and motion.

This self which emerges victorious in this conflict is characterized by the speaker's rapturous pleasure at her attainment of a new, extreme locus of power and the possibility and the emotional, spiritual and cognitive benefits that this affords her. Foremost in these are the evocation of an ecstatic love of self and the emphatic self assertion of a resoundingly vocal individual. Plath's ecstatic speaker's new ontological states, while ostensibly involving death, namely the death of the self, subvert this self – destruction by rendering the metamorphic origin of an apocalyptic, apotheosis – like experience which is inherently creative and life affirming.

Her writing style in itself represents her inconsistency with the world. The idea of revenge for the self by the self, the linking of suffering and sin provides her with powerful, original images and diction with complex, ambivalent attitudes, such as marriage and motherhood. Plath's poetry is rich with manifestations of the ecstatic self in the form of the disembodied, elevated, self- observing speaker. The emergence of this figure commences with a process of abstraction of self from self. The independent self

which emerges victorious in this conflict is characterized by the speaker's rapturous pleasure at her attainment of a new, extreme locus of power.

III.i. "Fever 103 degree"

The author of this poem, Sylvia Plath used her works as a way of expressing her own personal battles in life. She was on the surface, the perfect student, daughter, mother, etc. But she was a sad and depressed woman underneath the surface. She dealt with these feelings of unhappiness and hatred towards men in many poems. "Fever 103 degree" in particular seems to be dealing with progressively worsening illness which she feels has been caused by men. Her outcry to reject the patriarchal world and her desire to segregate herself from male chauvinism can be seen in this poem.

The poet starts with her disdain for male. She compares men to cereus – three headed dog that guards the gates of hell and condemns men's voice.

The tongue of hell

Are dull, dull as the triple

Tongues of dull, fate cereus

Who wheezes at the gate Incapable

Of licking clean. (Collected Poems 231)

Plath states that men are not capable of accepting genuine, pure stuff. In the latter part of the poem she mentions that she is pure and since men are capable only of licking dirt, they don't deserve to get her. This sort of radical revolt is demonstrated throughout the poem.

The 'flickering' of the tenth stanza signifies the start of the process of constituting an abstraction of the speaker's essential self from her 'old' personalized self (where she

was men's self), with its ague tendon, the sin, the sin and its fraught state of malaise as symbolized by the "tender cries", the weighty stultifying "yellow sullen smokes" and the "ghastly orchid" (231).

The speaker looms large in the remaining half of the poem, "I" appearing ten times more frequently here than in the former half, as she describes the effect of her fever in terms of corporeal and spiritual:

Three days, three nights,
 Lemon water, chicken
 Water, water makes me retch
 I am too sure for you or anyone.
 Your body
 Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am lantern

 My head a noon
 Of Japanese paper my gold beaten skin
 Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive. (231)

Plath's rage towards male is out of control and she shows a wish to displace herself from such a male dominated society. The process of displacement of the speaker becomes explicit in the final section of the poem, starting with the fifteenth stanza.

I think I am going up
 I think I may rise
 The beads of hot metal fly, and love, I

 Am a pure acetylene

Virgin

Attended by roses. (232)

She concludes the poem conveying the message to men that she is as pure as water. She cannot be tempted by them at any rate and her mind can rest in peace only when she will be able to disintegrate herself from these males. Paradise will be the only such place for her. Thus, she is accepting this fever with pleasure as it is building a ladder for her to go up in heaven her dreamland and she does not want to see any men over there.

By kisses, by cherubim,

By whatever these pink things mean,

Not you, nor him.

Not him, nor him.

(My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats) --

To paradise. (232)

III ii **“In Plaster”**

This fifty- six lined poetry describes how Plath has become two separate people and how she feels a sort of suffocation being “In Plaster”. The two selves she’s referring to are her role as a perfect reflection of feminine ideal in male eyes and Plath as an individual without any split personality. In other words, the poem “In Plaster” represents Plath’s struggle in relation to her acceptance of her woman’s body and her perceived lack of creative and artistic power.

Plath describes her virtual self, or an ideal self for the society as a white person, and her real self, or the self that she desires for as a yellow person. She claims that the white self has no personality, it's like a dead body but still she confesses that it's superior to the yellow one.

And the white person is certainly the superior one.

She doesn't need food; she is one of the real saints.

At the beginning I hated her, she had no personality --

And I was scared, because she was shaped just the way I was

Only much whiter and unbreakable and with no complaints. (Collected Poems 158)

So, this body in plaster is in the four boundaries of the male dominated world. She's dumb, quiet, stupid, but still perfect. This body in plaster wants the yellow ones' or Plath's integrated self's help at the beginning. Plath feels pity for her, her patience and does give some of herself to this white person.

"Without me she wouldn't exist, so of course she was grateful. I gave her soul; I bloomed of her as a rose" (158). But later on the white body takes so much from the yellow one that the yellow one seems to be hollow. The same white body, whom the yellow one had favored thinking that its calm and timid starts humoring upon the yellow body.

She stopped fitting me so closely and seemed offish

I felt her criticizing me in spite of herself,

As if my habits offended her in some way.

She let it in the drafts and became more and more absent – minded.

And my skin itched and flaked away in soft pieces
 Simply because she look after me so badly. (158)

From these lines we can know that as Sylvia tried to be a little tilted towards a female that men in society wanted, this self or this female started overshadowing the real Sylvia Plath who is an artist, who is a whole.

This white body then starts feeling that she is much superior to the yellow one and wishes for its death.

She wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior.
 And I'd been keeping her in the dark, and she was resentful--
 Wasting her days waiting on a half – corpse!
 And she began to hope I'd die. (159)

Plath understands that she can exist only if she wears a mask on her face, be what she isn't but what the others want and kill her happiness and desires.

From the latter half of the poem Sylvia starts accepting that even though she wants to get rid of the body that is in plaster, she can't. She must be inside this male chauvinism as it has uprooted her own yellow body so much.

I wasn't in any position to get rid of her.
 She'd supported me for so long I was quite limp--
 I had forgotten how to walk or sit.
 So I was careful not to upset her in any way. (159)

However, the poet ends her poem stating that she is collecting her strength to break the male boundary and make not only herself but the entire womanhood believe in the strength of the woman. She says, "I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her, and she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me" (159).

Thus, here in this poem Plath accepts the injustice, suffocation quietly but ends the poem with a positive note that she will bring this injustice to an end and make her body free from the plaster put by men. She conveys the message that it is not easy to reject yourself the way others have made you, the *you* that is shaped by their views and standards. It would make them happy if you stayed their way. But you should stay with your actual self and grow of your own accord through your own standards.

III. iii. “Cut”

“Cut” falls in the midst of the wildly bitchy, Gorgonian waves of poems describing the day – to – day particular hells of Plath’s domestic life. Plath symbolically cuts a cord, a tie to her domestic life, her husband, parents, friends, in – laws, her sick body, etc, and attempts a casting off, transcendence, an escape. The poet develops the tone by describing the motives, feelings and essence of self – mutilation, as a form of escapism. She challenges the stereotypical idea that cutting yourself is painful and pointless through creating a non – miserable atmosphere and explores how this one cut distracts and relieves her from her reality, the emptiness in her life.

In spite of its light appearance, “Cut” is very dark indeed. This poem is in the form of free verse, and there are not many traditional poetry techniques used, which makes it seem so much more real and the absence of rhyme makes the poem resemble thought patterns. The title sets the context of her entire poem, as the messages emerge from one cut.

It is obvious from the first line that this poem is about escapism. “What a thrill” suggests that this cut is deliberate and conveys Plath’s temporary feelings of pleasure and excitement (235). She manipulates the use of metaphor throughout ‘cut’ to express her meaning. In the second line she introduces the metaphor of an *onion*, symbolizing that cut

is not just a random cut, but has layers to it, which represent the meaning this cut has in her life.

What a thrill-

My thumb instead of an onion.

The top quite gone

Except for a sort of hinge. (Collected Poems 235)

The onion also symbolizes the role of women in society. The fact is that she relates her cut to onions with cooping as a household duty. It displays her discontentment with her sole. The next two lines describe how the cut left a hinge of skin behind. This is a metaphor of a door and strengthens the message that this 'cut' is a release for her.

In lines 11-14 the blood that is pumped out from her heart falls onto the floor

Your turkey wattle.

Carpet rolls

Straight from the heart.

I step on it. (235)

The line 'I step on it', suggests that she tries to fight the pain and the next two lines "clutching my bottle/of pink fizz" tells us that she pours a painkiller onto the wound (235). Plath now claims that cutting herself is a celebration, and thus gives these last two stanzas a greater understanding of her control, relief and peace. The next lines, "out of gap/a million soldiers run, /redcoats' everyone" symbolize two things, that blood is rushing out of the wound and it also introduces the ongoing metaphor of a battle between herself and patriarchal society (235).

The "the thin/papery feeling" juxtaposes her emotional dissociation from the wound to the horrific detail of the cut and the bloody images of conflict it suggests. It

stands for her sense of depersonalization, for the separation of self from self, and is juxtaposed to that devaluation of human life which is a necessary precondition to war, the separation of society from itself. In this context, it is significant that one would take a pill to kill a feeling of substancelessness and depersonalization. The reference to the “Saboteur”, “Kamikaze” and the “Ku Klux Klan” from line 27 to 30 represent the sabotage of ones’ own well being and physical body through deliberate damage, the recklessness towards herself when “cutting” and the outward act of anger and hatred of her existence (235). She uses the military imagery in the last stanza and throughout the poem to represent both the control she felt when cutting, and the feeling that is like a command that is powerless to refuse.

Hence, the poem “Cut” is about the pain between the world and pain that the world has made. It is a reflection of Plath’s intensity, of her ability to imbue the banal and mundane with great significance not only with her poetry but also within her own life.

III. iv. **“The Munich Mannequins”**

Plath assesses the product of patriarchal culture throughout “The Munich Mannequins” with her metaphorical depiction of female oppression embodied. The poet, through her lyricism, clarifies a depiction of the impact patriarchy has had upon women. The poem provides a clearer image of the everyday effect of female suppression with an emotional tinge into which the aridness of theory is unlikely to delve.

Sylvia Plath opens “The Munich Mannequins” with an emotionally charged address of the disdain socially associated with barren women:

Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.

Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,

The tree of life and the tree of life. (Collected Poems 262)

She is referencing the wisdom she associates with fertility by evoking images of yew trees, which are considered to symbolize acumen. Plath addresses the continuity inherent in feminist with 'the tree life' assertion, which references fertility and reproduction. The poet articulates the negative social circumstances surrounding fertility.

Fertility is closely linked, physiologically and philosophically, to menstruation. Plath discusses menstruation lyrically, yet theoretically effectively:

Unloosing their moons, month after month, to no purpose.

The blood is the flood of love,

The absolute sacrifice

It means no more idols but me. (262)

Plath refers to menstruation as 'the absolute sacrifice'. This may be referring to the manner in which a girl is, at least in American culture required to leave childhood and joyously embrace womanhood after the occurrence of her first menstrual period. The entrance to womanhood occurs at the onset of puberty, whereas men are not socially pressured to behave in a mature fashion until a much later time. Leaving childhood before a girl is emotionally prepared to do so could be considered a 'sacrifice' for the good of the continuance of the species. Therefore, Plath pinpoints the crucial role that menstruation plays in a young girl's self identity and psychological development. It is indeed a young girl's loss of freedom and control over her choices.

From the tenth line, the poet proceeds to interpret the conventional features our society expects of a woman by employing the images of mannequins:

So, in their suffer loveliness, in their smiles

These mannequins lean tonight
 In Munich, morgue between Paris and Rome,

Naked and bald in their furs
 Orange lollies on silver sticks

Intolerable, without minds

The snow drops its pieces of darkness. (262)

The exploitation of women is inherently connected to society's misinterpretation of a role identifiable only as 'other'. The powerlessness commonly attached to the capacity for giving life is a lucid juxtaposition that Plath addresses in the poem. On the other hand, the "loveliness" and "smiles" featuring the mannequins are exactly those patriarchal societies to women. On the other hand, the poet defines the city where these mannequins lie – Munich – is the "morgue between Paris and Rome" since it is also the place the massacre of the Jews is maneuvered and the lifeless mannequins are probably a metaphor of the slaughtered Jews. Therefore, by the employment of the imagery of the mannequins, the linkage between the sacrificed female and the suffering Jews is thus established, similarly, "Orange lollies on silver sticks" reference the disposability with which patriarchal culture discards the feminine. A lolly is disposed of once its sweet center has been demolished. Women are discarded by patriarchal culture once their purpose, as reproductive vessel, has been served. Once the role of "mother" has been fulfilled, women become 'intolerable without minds', as they have provided their cohesiveness for greater whole. Plath hence directly confronts society's blatant exploitation of women in this section.

The poem proceeds on pointing out the deadening of human beings, their disappearance and fragmentation and accretion into the objects that surrounds them. The only remaining sign of a girls' presence is "the domesticity of these windows/The baby lace, the green leaved confectionary, The men here are described in terms of their shoes, presents in the anonymity of hotel corridors, where

Hands will be opening doors and setting

Down shoes for a polish of carbon

Into which broad toes will go tomorrow. (263)

People accrete to their things, are absorbed into their artifacts. Finally, they lose all sense of a whole self and become atomized. Parts of them connect to their shoes, parts to their suits, parts to their lace curtains, parts to their iceboxes, and so on. There is nothing left; people have become reified and dispersed into a cluttered artificial landscape of their own production and female. All males have been compared to Germans. These men keep on torturing women and women continue tolerating the torture with glitters and remain voiceless.

The thick Germans slumbering in their bottomless Stolz

And the black phones on hooks

Glittering

Glittering and digesting

Voicelessness. The snow has no voice. (263)

Because the world she describes as a place created by men rather than women (since men are in control of the forces of production). Plath sees men as having ultimate culpability for this state of affairs which affects both men and women. But men have gone further

than this in their desire to change and control the world around them. Man has transformed woman into a puppet.

Therefore, Plath provides an image of the effect a patriarchal culture has on women. This assesses the general meaning inherent in “The Munich Mannequins”, the ability to differentiate them and strengthen their self – identity has been stolen from women. They are forced, by a male – dominated culture, to live and think as faceless beings, as mannequins. Sylvia Plath is consistent in assessing various aspects of the situation of women through this lens throughout the poem.

III. v. **“Purdah”**

Plath’s poem “Purdah” can be seen as a cry out to the world for the need of her own unveiling from societal and familial pressures. The title itself, by definition, is a veil worn by women to hide them from males. Veiling, while a very contemporary issue, since the invasion of Afghanistan and the rebuilding of the country, holds much meaning to Plath and women of her time for very different reasons. The pressures put on women to appear their best, to fit in the societal mold of the perfect woman, to want only children and a husband in a happy home, can be seen as its own kind of veiling. A veil separates the person wearing it from the outside world and not only puts a distorted image for those viewing the veiled individual but also creates a distortion for the person looking out from behind the veil.

“Purdah” in the beginning demonstrates the persona as a passive and submissive fellow. She is just a mere object. The poet considers herself a dainty, enigmatic creature, getting ready to be a puppet for her husband. She is no more than a jade stone and she is beside the male not as a person but as a motionless object.

Jade –

Stone of the side

The antagonized

Side of green Adam, I

Smile, cross – legged. (Collected Poems 242)

By veiling an individual, you are marking them as other, as not good enough to show their true selves. Many feminists argue that women's status in society is a result of being other. Women are often defined as what men are not, they are the other to the male. Plath writes:

My visibilities hide

I gleam like a mirror.

At this facet the bridegroom arrives

Lord of the mirror! (242)

Here the poet is expressing how her husband is the mirror she is reflected from. She gleams like a mirror and he is the lord of not only the mirrors, but by her own definition, but also her. When he looks at her he sees a reflection of himself, in an essence sees her as his other, another reflection of all that he stands for. She feels that she is merely a reflecting object, which reflects only the thing that comes in its focus without any preconception.

The horror of the husband is so secure that even in his absence, she conceives herself to be relegated to him.

Even in his

Absence, I

Revolve in my
 Sheath of impossibilities. (242)

Whether or not Plath was aware of the ideology of women being placed as other, or that she just felt it herself, she has taken one of the main tenets of the feminist movement into play here. A big part of feminist thought this means is that in order for women's voices and stories to be heard and become a vehicle for change they must take their own personal situations and show how they mirror the overall suppression and status of women in society. By calling attention of her feeling as the reflection of her husband, she has made her secondary status known and opened it up for evaluation.

While acknowledging her othered status, Plath also furthers her strapped stance in the last stanzas of the poem stating "And at his next step/I shall unloose/I shall unloose.... /from the small jeweled/doll he guards like a heart....." (244). Plath understands that she is objectified by her spouse, as a "small jeweled/doll he guards like a heart". A doll is a representation of not only the ideal female self but also can be seen as a social tool which prepares young girls for the roles of motherhood (244). Plath is also stating her desire to escape and unloose from the veil is not only a representation of what she is kept from but can also be seen as the veil of her children and family that keeps her from realizing her dreams and declaring.

And finally she concludes the poem declaring that she desires to be a lioness and unveil this 'purdah'.

The lioness,
 The shriek in the bath,
 The cloak of holes. (244)

The Purdah that has been put on Plath is a representation of the veil placed over many women of her time, who were forced to live up to other's dreams and never actualize their own potential or dreams. Purdah is thus one of Plath's most forceful statements about power – the power to assume a new identity, to shed the “veil” of harem wife and destroy her former persona as “small jeweled/doll” (244).

Purdah reveals Plath's conviction that undressing has become for her a powerful poetic gesture, and in this poem it is the female speaker who finally disrobes – and here she attempts to appropriate the power of nakedness for herself. Plath does not simply contemplate from the spectator's point of view the horrors and the vigor of the act of undressing; now her female subject dares to make herself naked, and she does so in an attempt to make herself mighty.

III. vi. **“Tulips”**

The poem “Tulips” written by Sylvia Plath is a poem that uses extremely vivid language and detail. The poem is called “Tulips” although tulips play a minor role in the poem. This poem is more about the observation of tulips than it is about actual tulips. The poem includes nine stanzas, with seven unrhymed lines in each one. The meter and rhythm varies in each verse, as Plath's writing displays the uneven sensations and psychological instability with which she certainly struggled.

In the poem, the speaker finds herself moving towards the freedom and purity that lies in the death, symbolized by the hospital's whiteness; however, the vivid redness of the tulips, which represents the living, colorful world that forcefully pulls her back to the painful reality. These symbolic uses of colors, explore the speaker's ultimate desire to be

free from a life filled with the bondage of her close ones and her profound responsibility as a wife and a mother.

Whiteness in the poem represents freedom and tranquility to the speaker. While the speaker is lying on the hospital bed, she is "learning peacefulness" in her silent freedom. The whiteness of the hospital room's walls, of the nurses' caps, and of the pillow on which she rests creates a world of serenity and stillness that separates her mind and physical body from her miserable reality. As a result, she feels herself detaching from her social and moral duties. In the speaker's mind, the whiteness around her is so pure that she feels like "nobody" in it. She wants to "[have] nothing to do with" her husband and child and their hurtful "little smiling hooks"(Collected Poems 160). She yearns to reach for the liberation from life and to fall into the eternal peacefulness. Through the admiration and experience of the whiteness, the speaker expresses her intent to die.

As the whiteness stands for the liberation that the speaker seeks, the redness of tulips acts as the reminder of her burden and responsibility in the world outside the hospital room. The speaker sees the tulips' redness as a source of danger because "it hurts [her]" and threatens her liberation. She feels it like "red lead sinkers round [her] neck"(160). Its appearance has woken her from her numbness and brought her back to the painful reality that she is not ready to confront. It speaks to her "wound" and "upsets" her mind with its lively color (160). The vivacity of the tulips' redness ruins her peacefulness. That redness is vigorously opposed to the whiteness of hospital room; it corresponds with life and raw consciousness that exist in stark contrast to the speaker's fantasy of perpetual peace. Consequently, by denying the presence of the vibrant redness of the tulips, the speaker simply denies her current vitality and yearns for the ultimate

freedom.

From the very first sentence, we feel and see the distracting view that comes from someone who wants to be left alone in a solitude all their own. "The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here"(160). Since winter represents the final stages of life and tulips come in spring time, it seems she is giving us a visual picture of the confusion she was feeling, as well as her suffering. The poet describes the scene immediately, and the fact that she provides the color of white for the reader to focus upon gives the view of her need for healing, since white is clean and pure. The contrast between the white, sterile surroundings and the tulips are too distracting.

The message within the first seven lines seems to be that she wants to cleanse, or strip her body and mind of the pain. We know this from her expression of giving her name, clothes, history and body away. "I am nobody," (160) means that she felt completely empty and void of any need. To her, this feeling is peaceful, pure and serene.

The second stanza uses a strange image: that of the poet's head being the eye in between two white lids. Once again, the white space is used almost playfully by the poet. It is an unusual image, for the image is somewhat discomfoting, being an eye that refuses to shut, suggesting restlessness. This is further enhanced by the line following this, "Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in"(160). Though this eye has lids it is restless; it takes everything in. This may reflect the state of mind the poet is in as she lies on her bed and takes in all that there is to see in a restless and helpless manner. The scenes from her bed are that of nurses passing one after the other: this flow is colorless and monotonous, for all of them are "just the same as another, so it is impossible to tell how many there are"(160). The poet uses yet another image in what is proving to be a

poem of much fertile imagery: she compares the nurses to gulls, benign and without color. This world that she lives in now is thus a uniform white, a placid and bland world.

Then she calls herself a “pebble” — something inanimate. The nurses tend to her body as water tends to pebbles — they “pass and pass” trying to smooth her wounds. The rhythmic and soothing properties of water etch deeper symbolism into Plath’s narrative process. “They bring me numbness in their bright needles”(160).She is in utmost despair. In the loss of herself, she finds tranquility. In spite of being alive, she wants to embrace death. She wants to be purified and cleansed because she wants to be pure when she embraces death. She feels guilt-ridden when she looks at the photo of her husband and child. She wants to escape but they keep her hooked on. Thus, the element of frustration and derangement is introduced in this stanza.

In the fourth stanza, the poet once again brings in the problem of her identity. She has not lost all, for she is “stubbornly hanging on to [her] name and address”(160). There is a sense of struggle here, for she battles to save her identity from those who “swabbed [her] clear of [her] loving associations” (160).The use of the swab is part of the hospital motif. Another theme comes in here, that of purification, purging and catharsis. The poet is purged of all her identity, all that is familiar: her tea set, her linen, her books – these are all purged out of her as she undergoes her treatment and the doctors’ care. She says that she is “a nun now; I have never been so pure” (160) .This is the result of the catharsis of her identity. This ties neatly the three ideas and motifs of white, of identity and of catharsis; her identity is bleached white and purged, and she is “pure” now. She also sees herself as a “thirty-year-old cargo boat” which have run the course and are now merely hanging on to what is left of her. Now she is stripped of her identity and feeling, she is

almost reduced to an object (160).

Plath says in the fifth stanza:

I didn't want any flowers; I only wanted
 To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
 How free it is, you have no idea how free -
 The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
 And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
 It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
 Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet. (161)

It's customary to send flowers to a funeral. They symbolize a tribute to the life of the one who has died. She says, "I didn't want any flowers" (161). It's as if she is saying it's too late to pay tribute to her life. She simply wants others to let go of control and allow her to rest in peace. She uses phrases such as, "Utterly empty," to describe what it might feel like to die. Her expression of feeling free is described as, "it asks nothing" (161). She also indicates a reference to the last rites by use of the phrase, "communion tablet." She might have been referring to the perfect peace she is seeking when she wrote, "What the dead close on, finally." To me, this sounds as if she is longing for death, but the tulips might symbolize her awareness of life (161).

The flowers, as described in the sixth stanza, are stark and red. They seem to inspire fear in the poet. She compares them to "an awful baby" swaddled in white. This colorful imagery adds to the poet's pain, just like "a dozen red sinkers" dragging her to the depths of despair (161). The tulips are now hostile and dangerous animals, red being a color of danger and hostility. From the poet's images, we sense the pain that the arrival of

the tulips-presumably flowers sent to comfort her.

A confession of loneliness appears in the seventh stanza. Perhaps unnoticed before, Plath knows she is under close supervision now, or possibly, a suicide watch. "I have no face," she writes, and "I have wanted to efface myself" (161). This point portrays her self-destructive depression. She fears the tulips too, for there is now an irrational and paranoid fear of them. They are described as "eating" her oxygen, destroying her ability to live (161).

The next stanza describes the disturbances the tulips bring. They change the calm air into one "filled up like a loud noise", one full of "snags and eddies" (161). They force her to concentrate, to fill herself up with life once more. Although she has a paranoid fear of the tulips, they bring her back to life from the previous lifelessness and dehumanization that has occurred due to her stay in this institution. Indeed, she describes her attention as "playing and resting without committing itself" (161). While the tulips are not pleasant to her, they force her back to life once more. The treatment of the doctors, surgeons, nurses and anesthetists have slowly robbed and eroded her into a pebble, an eye which sees but does not have any life. The tulips forcefully and thus perhaps unpleasantly remind her of a reality that can be hurtful and hostile, but is nevertheless what is real.

The last stanza shows this process of bringing life back to the poet. The walls "seem to be warming themselves" (161). Though the tulips are still hostile, and she feels that they ought to be "behind bars like dangerous animals"; this danger brings the feel of her heart back to her – "its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love for me" (161). The last line leaves us wondering if she found new insight in the end. Although we know the outcome of Sylvia Plath's life, one might assume that at another time in some other life,

she might have seen the light of truth “The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea and comes from a country far away as health” (161).

This poem reflects the same depth, grief and creativity that were expressed within the life of Sylvia Plath. With a mind ahead of its time and her ability to write such lines with depth of perception, how sad it is that she was never able to comprehend her value. The cruel irony of Sylvia Plath's depression was the fact that it blinded her eyes from seeing her amazing ability to write with the depth that comes from wisdom. Because of her beautiful mind, we are left with the gifts she left behind, and “Tulips” is one of them.

III. vii. **“The Applicant”**

Sylvia Plath's Poem “The Applicant” explores many issues; in particular it looks at the ideas of feminism and the role of women in a marriage. Through examining areas such as the concerns of the poet, the methods and the language used, “The Applicant's” true meanings and statements will become clear. Plath's early poetry is well-crafted and traditional, but her late poems exhibit a desperate brilliance and photo-feminist cry of anguish. In “The Applicant”, Plath exposes the emptiness in the role of wife, who is reduced to an inanimate ‘it’. She is trying to portray the way that women are represented in both marriage and society. Plath is showing how the marriage of a man and women can sometimes be seen as a business contract or, rather, a purchase. This is shown throughout the poem with lines such as, “Will you marry it? It is waterproof, shatterproof, Proof against fire and bombs through the roof” (Collected Poems 221). Plath has also shown to us clearly how she believes that women in society are seen as separate parts and not as complete beings. Sylvia Plath's sense of entrapment, her sense that her choices are profoundly limited, is directly connected to the particular time and

place in which she wrote her poetry. The recurring metaphors of fragmentation and reification—the abstraction of the individual—in Plath’s late poetry are socially and historically based. They are images of Nazi concentrations camps, of “fire and bombs through the roof” (221).

Sylvia Plath had gained a high level of recognition not only through her potent verses but even more so through her tumultuous life, plagued by agonizing circumstances. However, the poem “The Applicant” is a reflection of another depth of emotion, seemingly incongruous to torment, called humor. More precisely, her particular style is intermingled with sarcasm and acerbic commentaries on the state of marriage. By exemplifying stereotypical roles, Plath’s words embody a caustic irony. This, in turn, reflects the decade in which the poem was written, a momentous era of awakening of repressed feminism in the 1960s. Marriage, therefore, is portrayed as an absurdly narrow existence perpetrated by weak men and obliviously tolerant women within cultural paradigms.

With this poem, Plath makes a statement against the ideals society imposes on what true functions a wife and husbands serve. Women are generally characterized as docile, fragile creatures who should serve as unwavering epitomes of loyalty. Mockingly, the poet suggests that such women eventually become automated, mechanical versions of a person. Men, similarly, are then portrayed to desire and accept these qualities as inherent or necessary to being good women. Plath also calls marriage the man’s “last resort,” implying the impotence or incompleteness for which the woman would be able to compensate (221).

In this poem there seems to be three people involved: a man, a woman and an

interviewer. The one who is being interviewed is the man, who is “the applicant”. The interviewer represents the system, the one who is requiring a man to marry a woman.

In the first stanza, the applicant is described as a whole made of artificial pieces as a machine, beginning with an imagery of dehumanization. We are so involved in this system, that we have become a part of this artifact ourselves.

First, are you our sort of a person?

Do you wear

A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,

A brace or a hook,

Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch.(221)

The speaker asks only for physical features, he does not ask about the man’s other qualities, suggesting that the marriage being offered here does not require any emotional attachment and that it is merely an arrangement.

In the second stanza, the speaker offers him a hand, which personifies the marriage to a woman. He says that the men’s hand is empty. But he soothes the man stating that now he is giving the applicant a woman, to make his life comfortable.

How can we give you a thing?

Stop crying.

Open your hand.

Empty? Empty. Here is a hand. (221)

In the third stanza, she describes the woman’s role in society as they are supposed to serve their husbands and do whatever they tell them. The speaker refers to women as “it” as they are nothing until they get married so the marriage is guaranteed because there

is no other possible option for them to be recognized in society. It also gives an identity to women as they get their husband's name when they get married.

To fill it and willing

To bring teacups and roll away headaches

And do whatever you tell it.

Will you marry it?

It is guaranteed. (221)

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, a suit is offered to the applicant. Without that suit he is "naked", so it means that marriage is the only choice and he will be defined by the suit he will wear. If you don't wear that suit you will be looked badly from society, meaning that a person who doesn't marry a good woman does not have a good role in society. The suit that man is wearing or the woman that he is getting is "waterproof, shatterproof, proof /against fire and bombs through the aloof" (221).

In the sixth and seventh stanzas, she refers to a woman's role saying that she is just an empty-mind who acts just in a family role. The poet appeals her with qualifying adjectives as "sweetie", as a usual husband does. She asks her to come "out of the closet" because she doesn't even exist unless the black suit needs and wills her to be its and she is seen as making contact with the world only through the medium of the man. Her social existence depends upon her husband's recognition (221).

Then, the stages of marriage come into scene "but in twenty- five years she'll be silver/In fifty gold" (221) shows how with time she will become more wooing to serve and a better wife. However, at the beginning she is presented only as a paper. However, she is like a toy "a living doll" made to serve the man as "it can sew, it can cook" but also

“talk, talk, talk”, which are the roles usually expected for a woman to do in marriage (221).

In the final stanza, the speaker mentions that “there is nothing wrong with it”, that it is perfectly functional, like a machine. This woman is like the answer the man is looking for, the “poultice” that soothes his pain and an “image” or a pleasant sight for his “eye”. As his last sales pitch attempt, he refers to the woman as the man’s “last resort”.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.

You have a hole, it's a poultice.

You have an eye, it's an image.

My boy, it's your last resort.

Will you marry it, marry it, marry it. (221)

Utilizing humor as her vehicle, Sylvia Plath encapsulates the faulty rationale of the established institution and its consequent corruption of love. To her it has become a practical rather than emotional bond; it has entered the realm of an “applicant” rather than a partner or spouse. Through the dialog format of the poem and the questioning tone, Plath points accusingly at apathy and conformity as the culprits. The presentation may be facetious, but the reader comes away with the disturbing realization that this situation is not so laughably uncommon.

III. viii. “Edge”

“Edge” was written six days before Sylvia Plath committed suicide on February 11th 1963 and it is supposedly her last piece. It holds a despairing reflecting tone as Plath reaches the edge of her life.

The form of the poem itself bears an interesting aspect. It consists of ten stanzas, which each only contains two lines, which are held in an enjambment. The second line of each stanza is always half of the construction and meaning of the first line of the following stanza. So this break of verse is also an edge between the stanzas, which builds another parallel between form and content of the poem. The poem does not follow a certain rhyme scheme but it contains various impressive internal rhymes or assonant constructions. These words contribute to the calm tone of the poem and intensify the abundant images given.

Plath distances herself from the poetic "I" as she speaks of "the woman" or "her" (Collected Poems 272). So, whoever speaks in the poem takes up the same perspectives as the reader can do. The entire lines present a sense of calm, imbued with drama. The tone is not hysterical or unsettling but rather tranquil and relaxed. The poem has a floating stream of words and this adds to a balanced and serene atmosphere within the poem.

This poem also encompasses the feminist Plath, as it is a poem in which she finally sees "The woman is perfect" (272). While the poem is about death as an ultimate state of perfection to Plath, she closes off her roles in life in the final element of death. Plath views death in "Edge" as the final step in perfecting life.

In the first and the second stanzas she writes, "Her dead / Body wears the smile of accomplishment" (272). This suggests a smugness that she has won against the wound that is causing her so much of pain.

Plath views her life as a long journey she has faced taking care of family and children, a view that comes out in the fourth and fifth stanzas. In these stanzas she writes, "Each dead child coiled, a white serpent, / One at each little / Pitcher of milk, now empty", a line that reflects her duties as a mother are also now done (272). The pitchers

of milk are representative of her breasts, now empty in death; she must no longer worry about caring for her children. Plath sees death as an escape from the mundane everyday life of caring for the children and family.

In the seventh and eighth stanzas she says “.....when the garden/Stiffens and odors bleed / From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower” (272). Here, she describes the odors of the flowers. However they are night flowers. Plath could have considered night to death and flowers to herself indicating that this death that she is calling soon is sweet, deep and full of odor.

The poet finishes the poem with-

The moon has nothing to be sad about,

Staring from the hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks cackle and drag. (272)

The moon is a symbol of womanhood and motherhood, and Plath is alluding to the fact that the moon knew the death of the woman was coming, and therefore could not be sad about it. The moon is also said to drag, referring to the tides of the ocean, or it can be furthered to be seen as an exploitation of women, in their daily routines drag on and therefore the moon could not be sad because the death of the woman was the end to her daily routine which held her back.

Plath views death as the final step in life that has been surrounded by constant obligations to her children: her death is perfection in its final escape from the uniform put on her in “The Applicant” and “Edge” therefore supports the belief that Plath was yearning for death all her life due to earlier traumatic events. She however celebrates her death in a relaxing and soft manner.

III. ix . “Daddy”

Sylvia Plath uses her poem, “Daddy”, to express intense emotions towards her father’s life and death and her disastrous relationship with her husband. The speaker in this poem is Sylvia Plath who has lost her father at age ten, at a time when she still adored him unconditionally. Then she gradually realizes the oppressing dominance of her father, and compares him to a Nazi, a devil, and a vampire. Later, the conflict of this relationship continues with her husband which led to a short and painful marriage. In “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath, the author illustrates her feelings of anger and resentment towards her father and husband along with being oppressed for most of her life through her poetic devices of vivid metaphor, imagery, rhyme, tone, and simile.

The conflict of this poem is male authority and control versus the right of a female to be herself, to make choices, and be free of male domination. Plath's conflict begins in her relationship with her father and continues with her husband. The intensity of this conflict is extremely apparent as she uses examples that cannot be ignored. The atrocities of Nazi Germany are used as symbols of the horror of male domination. The constant and crippling manipulation of the male, as he introduces oppression and hopelessness into the lives of his women is equated with the twentieth century's worst period. Words and phrases such as “Luftwaffe, Panzer-man, and Meinkampf look” (Collected Poems 222-224) are used to describe her father and husband as well as all male domination. The frequent use of the word “black” throughout the poem conveys a feeling of gloom and suffocation. Like many women in society, we know that Plath felt oppressed and stifled throughout her life by her use of the simile "...I have lived like a foot/ For thirty years, poor and white,/Barely daring to breathe or Achoo” (222).The use of similes and metaphors such as "Chuffing me off like a Jew/A Jew to Dachau,

Auschwitz, Belsen." and "I think I may well be a Jew clearly show the feelings of anguished hopelessness and the ripping agony she must have felt(222-223).

The speaker begins with a taunting "You do not do, you do not do / Any more, black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot / For thirty years" (222). In the second line, it sounds as if the speaker is name-calling someone "black shoe," but then as she continues, she claims she had lived in that shoe for thirty years(223).And she shows her dissatisfaction by asserting that she was "poor and white" and could hardly breathe, and she even feared to sneeze(223). By the second stanza, the speaker is out of control with hatred and disgust at the character she refers to as Daddy. She seems annoyed that this character died before she had a chance to kill him.

Plath begins by incorporating images of her father, "a head in the freakish Atlantic," describing her childhood with him by the sea, and "Ghastly statue with one grey toe"(222) referring to his gangrene. Plath says, "I used to pray to recover you. Ach, du" (222) Using the past tense of "I used to" places the reader with the connection that she does not pray for his recovery any longer. Nazi imagery of barbed wire and concentration camps wafts into the poem. When Plath writes about her struggle to connect with her father, she even goes as far as using some German phrases, "ach, du," in an attempt to connect with his German background. The speaker loses herself in delirium, metaphorically linking her Daddy to a Nazi and herself to a Jew in death camps such as Dachau and Auschwitz. She rails against Daddy: "I never could talk to you. / The tongue stuck in my jaw" (222). Her tongue "stuck in a barb wire snare." She spits out her bitter comparison: "I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew" (222-223).

Slowly Plath's poem drops a few hints that the person she is writing of is her husband, as well.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who
Bit my pretty heart in two. (223)

Plath writes of the cleft in her husband's chin and calls him a devil, even though it is not in the foot, like a devil would have, and goes on to state that this "devil" has broken her heart. Hughes did indeed break Plath's heart in two, when he cheated on her with a woman who was renting their flat in London, an affair which devastated Plath.

The following lines describes Plath's early suicide attempt. Plath had a desire to be united again with her father, and she figured that dying was her only way. But after three days of being semi-conscious in her family's basement, she was found, and literally "stuck together with glue" after she was placed in a hospital where she received electroshock therapy.

At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.
But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue.

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Meinkampf looks. (223)

Plath then goes back to describing her husband and father using the color black, perhaps representing a void of sorts in her life, like a black hole. The hole that Hughes made when he left her, the hole that Otto Plath left when he died.

Plath writes,

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

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know. (224)

This passage shows Plath's boiling hatred towards the two men, her desire for them both to die. "With this metaphor, Plath is portraying the semi-autobiographical speaker as being unable to distinguish between the man she has spent seven years being married to and the father who died when she was ten.

"Daddy" concludes with,

There's a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always knew it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through. (224)

The ending of "Daddy" goes back to her "pretty red heart" being broken and retaliates with a stake in the vampire's "fat black heart" to kill him. Plath transmutes her anger at her father and her unfaithful husband into a stake which pierces his/their heart. The last section declares that the villagers "always knew it was you" whereas Plath did not, "Daddy is gone" and the monster-husband may resemble him but is not him (224). Plath's speaker can finally exorcise her father's memory by rejecting the husband—symbolically killing not one man, "but two" (224).

"Daddy" is a negative, dark poem. However, at the conclusion of the poem it is clear that Plath was able to resolve her conflicts. She has also been able to evoke great amount of power within the poem to the readers. One can see this from her use of vivid metaphor, imagery, rhyme, tone, and simile as major poetic devices. She finishes the poem with a powerful, "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (224) showing that she has finally reached freedom.

III. x. "Lady Lazarus"

"Lady Lazarus" is an allegorical figure, constructed from past and present images of femininity, congealed fantasies projected upon the poem's surface. The poem reflects Plath's recognition at the end of her life that the struggle between self and others and between death and birth. The Lady of the poem is a quasi-mythological figure, a parodic version of the biblical Lazarus whom Christ raised from the dead.

At the beginning of the poem, she is cloth or material: lampshade, linen, napkin; in the middle, she is only body: knees, skin and bone, hair; toward the end, she becomes a

physical object: gold, ash, a cake of soap; finally, she is resurrected as a red-haired demon. Each of these states is dramatically connected to an observer or observers through direct address: first, to her unnamed "enemy"; then, to the "gentlemen and ladies"; next, to the Herr Doktor; and, finally, to Herr God and Herr Lucifer. The address to these "audiences" allows Plath to characterize Lady Lazarus's fragmented identities with great precision. For example, a passage toward the end of the poem incorporates the transition from a sequence of body images (scars-heart-hair) to a series of physical images" (opus-valuable-gold baby) as it shifts its address from the voyeuristic crowd to the Nazi Doktor: (Collected Poems 244-247).

"Lady Lazarus" is a poem about a woman who wants to commit suicide. In the beginning of the poem, in stanzas two and three, the woman describes herself. Her skin is "Bright as a Nazi lampshade" and her face is featureless, fine Jew linen" (244). The reason why the words Nazi and Jew are used when she describes herself is to show the controversy in her life. Nazi and Jew are opposites, and that shows how torn she is inside, how she wants to escape the world. Lines 20 and 21: "I am only thirty./ And like the cat I have nine times to die." followed by the ninth stanza: "This is Number Three./ What a trash/ To annihilate each decade"(244) show that she does not want to live anymore. She has tried to kill herself twice already, and this will be the third time. Line 21 can either suggest that she has nine chances of committing suicide, or that she has to try nine times before she manages to do it.

Stanzas four, six, ten and eleven all hold evidence that she was a mummy. Line ten: "Peel off the napkin", stanza six: "Soon, soon the flesh/ The grave cave ate will be/ At home on me" and line 28: "Them unwrap me hand and foot" and also stanza eleven: "These are my hands, / My knees. /I may be skin and bone? (244-245); all of these lines

suggest that she was a mummy, but then she was brought back to life. Even the lines where she described her face to be featureless, fine Jew linen” (245) seem to make sense now; she was describing her embalmed body.

In stanza 22 there is again a reference to the Germans: “So, so, Herr Doktor. / So, Herr Enemy” which means she finds the doctor, who obviously brought her back to life, her enemy, because he stopped her from achieving her goal (246). What is important is that the doctor/enemy is a male figure.

The last six stanzas are parallel to the beginning of the poem, but this time she is not a mummy; she dies another way. Lines 69 to 71: “The pure gold baby/ That melts to a shriek./ I turn and burn” and stanza 25: “Ash, ash,”/ You poke and stir/ Flesh, bone, there is nothing there”(246) show that she has burned to death and now nothing can bring her back to life.” The pure gold baby” probably refers to her being very valuable (245). Stanza 15: “Dying/ Is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well” (245) refers to the embalming and the burning. She wants to die in style. Stanza 26 shows what is left of her: “A cake of soap, /A wedding ring, /A gold filling” (246).The soap refers to the fact that soap was made out of ash in the old days. Furthermore, in this stanza the soap is used as some kind of symbol for purity. Her burning to ashes was a purifying ritual. The fact that her wedding ring was also left behind probably refers to an unhappy marriage. She is disappointed with men and wants to leave them behind. Consequently, the fact that the wedding ring did not melt when she burned to death also symbolizes the fact that it was something she did not want to take with her; her new, better life after death would not include any men.

The last two striking stanzas give evidence to this theory:

Herr God, Herr Lucifer,

Beware
 Beware.
 Out of the ash
 I rise with my red hair
 And I eat men like air. (247)

She insinuates that God and Lucifer are Germans and men, and therefore her enemies. She claims to be more powerful than them, because she warns them. The final line is a warning to all men, not women, but men. This suggests that she has been hurt by men and that might even be the reason for her suicide. After killing herself, she can reincarnate as a powerful female avenger. The simile "I eat men like air" can be analyzed to mean that men are nothing, because air is virtually nothing. It can also mean that destroying men would be as easy as taking-in the air.

Using the phoenix myth of resurrection as a basis, Plath imagines a woman who has become pure spirit rising against the imprisoning of others around her: gods, doctor, men, and Nazis. This translation of the self into spirit, after an ordeal of mutilation, torture, and immolation, stamps the poem as the dramatization of the basic initiatory process.

III. xi. "Ariel"

"Ariel," the title poem of Sylvia Plath's posthumous volume of the same name is one of her most highly regarded, most often criticized, and most complicated poems. The ambiguities in the poem begin with its title, which has a three fold meaning. To a reader uninformed by Plath's biography "Ariel" would probably most immediately call to mind the "airy spirit" who in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a servant to Prospero and symbolizes Prospero's control of the upper elements of the universe, fire and air. On

another biographical or autobiographical level, "Ariel," as we know from reports about the poet's life, was the name of her favorite horse, on which she weekly went riding. .

"Ariel" is the symbolic name for Jerusalem. "Ariel" in Hebrew means "lion of God."

A poem like "Ariel" possesses power and importance to the degree to which the horseback ride Plath once took becomes something more—a ride into the eye of the sun, a journey to death, a stripping of personality and selfhood.” Ariel" is probably Plath's finest single construction because of the precision and depth of its images. The rider is one with the horse, the horse is one with the furrowed earth, and the dew on the furrow is one with the rider. The movement of the imagery, like that of the perceptions, is circular.

Plath implicitly reinterprets the experience as symbolizing the race of life, the pressure of existence, the struggle to control and overcome many kinds of constraints, the suicidal thrust towards death, and the process of growing up into the adult world. She makes it symbolize the female protest against the “dead hands”, “dead stringencies” (Collected Poems 239) of the male dominations and the inhumanities by identifying herself with lady Godiva, a similar female rebel.

As she wheels by sticking to the horse, she has sensations focusing on the body; she feels as if her “mouth is full of blood” and her “thighs are peeling off”(239).At the end of the poem, however, she feels as if she is evaporating like the morning dew and dissolving into the elements. She says that she is an arrow being shot into the face of the sun.

And I

Am the arrow,

The sew that flies

Suicidal, at one with the drive

Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning. (240)

The sun is the symbol of the male traditions which she means to protest and avenge. But the dissolution is not extinction. It is rather a rebirth and salvation of the protesting female. The repeated phoneme *me* in “I”, “flies”, “Suicidal”, “drive” and “eye” underlies her pulsating self-assertive new existence of a woman, one which is inherently life-affirming in its quality of insistent vocal self-presentation and its evocation of the optimism of the dawn of a new existence(240).

This poem can be seen as the poet’s desire to break free from the duties, traditions and expectations of society. In addition to this, there is a notion of power. The speaker is invested with power. She is able to escape the reality and perhaps create a new one- the one in which she will be dominant and will invest complete power. The change of images following one another in quick succession and the quick pace of change give us the impression that the speaker is flying on the horse and wants to get away with supremacy.

III. xii. **“Mirror”**

Sylvia Plath’s poem, “Mirror,” symbolizes the troubled self of the woman, especially the woman artist who has to reject the given masks imposed on her by the patriarchal society and see herself as an artist and an individual. The mirror imagery in Plath’s poetry, therefore, signifies the consciousness of the woman-speaker who verbalizes the creative process of a woman artist in the domain of male-dominated literature. The woman artist has to resist the critical and judgmental male gaze to arrive at her own autonomous self –expression.

It is organized into two, nine-line stanzas of free verse with no specific, overarching end rhyme or rhythmic scheme which is typical of Plath's confessionalist style which places emphasis more on the content of the narrative than on formal structures. Freedman believes that, "Plath uses mirror as a symbol of female passivity, subjection, and Plath's own conflicted self-identity caused by social pressures to reconcile the competing obligations of artistic and domestic life" (Freedman 152).

The mirror represents the unfeeling male view of a woman and what is socially expected of her: possessing an idealized beauty and ever-lasting youth. As the persona ages over the years, the mirror cruelly reflects the changes in her appearance. Age becomes the persona's defect and shortcoming and thus her source of anxiety and dismay. The mirror projects what is thought of the woman as she grows older. It claims to reflect the truth, and by implication, the representation of the patriarchal perception of a woman's existence, her worth only as a beautiful object, and her worthlessness when she is no longer young and beautiful. Against the male's definition of womanhood, which idealizes beauty and youth, the persona looks inside to discover the true self, what she was as a person and what she has become, maturing by age.

The woman's autonomous identity and perception of self are, therefore, in conflict with the stereotype of the dominant male society. The tension increases as the persona is perplexed by this identity crisis. If she chooses her inner self and her own independent definition of identity, when looking in the mirror, she no longer sees the beautiful girl, but the "terrible fish" (Collected Poems 173). It is, indeed, the persona, the woman in the mirror, who rebels against the established image of idealized womanhood. The terrible fish is the persona's demon, the critical gaze which views her as aging and ugly. The persona confesses the bitter reality of her present existence: "In me she has

drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a “terrible fish”(173).The terrible fish, then, is the projection of the woman’s multi-dimensional identity: the socially imposed identity in conflict with a confused, self-searching identity, in a quest for confirmation. Yet, the mirror refuses to comfort the woman by announcing its indifference and impartiality: “I am silver and exact. I have no preconception” (173).

The persona is marginalized as the mirror, “The eye of a little god” (173) assumes its power as the centre of consciousness. The woman is desperately trying to identify her true self through this reflection, yet the mirror controls her self-perception by insisting that it is truthful and discreet: “Whatever I see I swallow immediately” (173). This conflict and the woman’s anxious demand for a true reflection of her very self are further silenced by the mirror:

A woman bends over me,
 Searching my reaches for what she really is.
 Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
 I see her back and reflect it faithfully.
 She rewards me with tears and agitation of hands. (173)

Therein lies the bitter sadness of this poem, the paradox in which she is stuck whereby she fears the emergence of her true self as a terrible process which may further alienate her from society, and yet at the same time it tears her apart to view the essence of who she truly is as terrible.

Therefore, the root of the struggles described in Plath’s poetry is the fact that she suffered from an underlying mental illness and had a history of depression, suicidal tendencies and her mental therapy, with electro-shock treatments. Her published poetry

exposed how she expressed what it felt like to be like her. The poetry gave unflattering information about details of her personal life. Plath's poetry is intriguing because of its exploration into the conflicting world of death and despair, domination and segregation, motherhood and birth. Her works are full of rage and violence, rich with imagery and language. Her poetry is a candid commentary about the life of a modern woman, wife, mother, sexual stereotype creature of nature. Plath's poems are regressive fantasies that speak of a separated fragmented self rather than a universal one. The insurmountable masculine oppression is what led to Plath's obsessive preoccupation with alienation. Even though her life and her reputation have been marked by her mental illness and eventual suicide, when studying her poetry, it is important to consider her writing for its honest exploration of intimate insecurity and her desire to destruct patriarchal, conservative world.

Feminist readings of Plath's poems have dwelt on their recurrent tropes of wound, bleeding, mutilation as signs of an internalized violence. Regardless of the critical debate about Plath's theme and motifs, the poet must always be valued for her pioneering efforts to expose the absurdity of conventional feminine models and her attempts to establish equal footing for women in a male dominated community.

IV. Speakers in Plath's Poetry as Assertive Individuals

Sylvia wrote prolifically from the age of eight until her suicide at the age of thirty. Her combined works do not tell the story only of a feminist writer but of woman searching for recognition in a male dominated society. Through her works, one can see her roles as an over achieving daughter, a frustrated young woman, a betrayed wife, an exhausted mother, and a posthumous figure heading for activism. Throughout her struggle to be in and out of this world, her only aim is to gain herself identity and authority.

Plath's work is mostly dark, tormented and confused but it is also amazingly lucid and candid. The honesty of her poetry is quite important. She speaks with poignancy and frankness, often using words to spear absent, unknown or intangible adversaries. She has provided us with a rare glimpse into the effect of the modern world and its voicelessness. Her writing is real, raw and truthful, capturing the tragedy of individuals becoming "Orange lollies on silver sticks" (Collected Poems 262). Certainly her poetry provides a real insight into life and death, desire and failures, rebellion and triumph for the female in the past and present and even for the generations to come.

Her poems describe an opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self, between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is. She demonstrates a continuity of theme and expression concerning central division of the self. Her work is a compelling account of the presence of split. She rejects masks and roles and refuses to accept the limitations of her biology. An analysis of her poems reveal that the woman persona of her poems represent her own mutilated self' tormented by both past and present and resulting in deep sense of crisis. She feels exploited and cheated by

the society of which she is a part. Plath seems to find no way out of her tormented inner world and knows that there can be no easy solution. Plath protests against the marginalization of women and social injustices and communicates a powerful female sensibility in her poetry. Her self-assertion is clear in her poems where she rebels against the norms of patriarchal society to defend and secure her identity in the world. She refuses to fit in the constructed role and refuses to be weak and passive and self-less, self-denying, sacrificing.

Plath relates her own painful experiences in the form of dramatic monologues using a persona who eventually triumphs over an adversity by regaining the self that has been lost before the struggle of the poem. Her talents manifested in her ability to flay open her flesh and expose the anguish of her soul, to portray the depths of her own depression and madness that needled beneath the exterior façade and touched the heart on a profound level. For women who suffer from severe loss of self identity, her words are like an echo from the subconscious that haunts the soul.

It is of course this quest for self identity that made her voice strong as a radical feminist. Plath made desperate efforts to balance on the 'razor edge' of the opposing forces of life and death. Kali – like, Sylvia's poetry embodies the profound inter relationship. Haunted herself, Plath continues to haunt our culture today.

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