

Sylvia Plath's circle of influence: the people who shaped her artistic path

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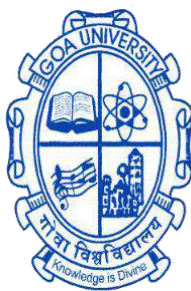
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I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, **“Sylvia Plath’s circle of influence: the people who shaped her artistic path”** is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline of English at the Shenoig Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Runa Menezes and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations given in the dissertation.

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This is to certify that the dissertation report “**Sylvia Plath’s circle of influence: the people who shaped her artistic path**” is a bonafide work carried out by Ms. Jolantha Xavier Fernandes under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in the Discipline of English at the Sheno Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University.



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Abstract

This dissertation titled as ‘Sylvia Plath’s Circle of Influence: The People Who Shaped Her Artistic Path’ is about how there were various other influences other than her family who were involved in shaping her artistic journey. This study attempts to reveal the significant influence that Plath's personal relationships—including those with her family, friends, mentors, and literary influences had on her creative growth through a thorough examination of these interactions. This research explores the ways in which the individuals in Plath's life shaped her writing style, themes, and creative process by analyzing her works, letters, journals and the works of her influencers. In the end, this dissertation aims to offer a thorough comprehension of the intricate network of influences that molded Sylvia Plath into the well-known poet and author that she is today.

Keywords: Influence, Literary, Sylvia Plath, Mental Health, Confessional Poetry, A. Alvarez, W.B. Yeats, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, Richard Sassoon, Emily Dickinson

CHAPTER 1: A Kaleidoscope of Art and Life: Tracing Sylvia Plath's Path and the Influences That Guided Her

“At her most articulate, meditating on the nature of poetic inspiration, [Plath] is a controlled voice for cynicism, plainly delineating the boundaries of hope and reality. At her brutal best—and Plath is a brutal poet—she taps a source of power that transforms her poetic voice into a raving avenger of womanhood and innocence.”

~Thomas McClanahan

1.1 Sylvia Plath: a brief overview of her life and work

On October 27, 1932, in Boston, Massachusetts, Sylvia Plath was born. While pursuing her master's degree at Boston University, Aurelia Schober, Plath's mother, met her professor Otto Plath i.e. Plath's father. Otto was a biology teacher who specialized in teaching bee science, or apiology, along with German. They both then got married in January 1932. Later in 1940, when Plath was eight years old her father died from diabetes. Most of her poems were defined by her relationship with her father and this had a drastic impact on her poems after her father's death. Plath maintained a journal since the age of 11 and had her poems published in regional magazines and newspapers. Her first ever national publication was in the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1950, just after graduating from high school. In 1950, Plath was enrolled at Smith College, where she graduated *summa cum laude* in 1955. After graduating from Smith College in 1955, she

received a Fulbright scholarship to study in England. During her time there, she met and married Ted Hughes, a fellow poet. They had two children together but they didn't have a successful marriage.

Sylvia Plath was one of the most influential and well-liked poets of the mid-20th century. Plath had a strong following in the literary world by the time she committed suicide at the age of thirty. Many readers became interested in her work in the years that followed, perceiving in her lone verse an attempt to document hopelessness, intense emotion, and a fixation with death. Joyce Carol Oates called Plath “one of the most celebrated and controversial of postwar poets writing in English” in the New York Times Book Review.

Plath is an incredible writer and poet, she is known for her confessional poetry which delves into her personal life and experiences. One of her most famous work is ‘The Bell Jar’ which is a semi-autobiographical novel. This was the only novel that she published because Plath struggled with mental health issues and tragically took her own life at the age of 30. Besides her novel she also published numerous poems and some of the famous ones include ‘Daddy’, ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Ariel’, and ‘Mirror’. These poems showcase her intense emotions, powerful imagery and unique writing style. Her work continues to be celebrated and studied for its raw honesty and powerful imagery.

1.2 Understanding The Importance of Influences in an Artist's Life

“I can't write without being a reader.”

~John Cheever

Influence plays a significant role in an author's life. It shapes their perspectives, inspires creativity and helps them grow as writers. Whether it's the works of other authors, personal experiences or even everyday interactions, influence can have a profound impact on their writing style, themes and storytelling.

Since early education is frequently the first exposure to the power of words and stories, its influence on a writer's skill cannot be understated. Education systems are crucial in fostering this emerging interest. A writer's favoured subject and narrative style might be shaped by their early exposure to a variety of literary genres. The impact of teachers is also very crucial in this process. An enthusiastic teacher sparks students' interest and cultivates a love of storytelling that has a lasting effect on the author's subsequent works. On the other hand, strict direction can inhibit creativity and cause writers to rebel in their stories. Essentially, the early education you receive acts as a rich soil on which the seeds of your imagination are sown and nurtured.

An author's relationships are fundamental to their life and frequently appear in their literary creations. Writers use their personal experiences to examine the intricacies and complexity of human relationships, whether they be romantic, familial, or friendship ties. These storylines can be included into their content to give it a relatable and emotional resonance. An author who has had a close friendship, for instance, might compose a poem or a short tale that honors the value of loyalty and connection. Writers can establish a stronger bond with their readers by evoking empathy and understanding through the sharing of personal narratives.

An author can also be influenced by other authors and that too can have a profound impact on their writings. Firstly they can be influenced by the style and writings of other authors. An author can become familiar with a variety of writing styles and strategies by reading the works of other authors. They might be motivated to try out novel character

development techniques, story structures, or even poetic language. They can develop their own distinctive voice and broaden their creative horizons by being exposed to a variety of writing styles. Secondly, writers who connect with new topics and ideas can be introduced by other writers. This may arouse their interest and inspire them to investigate related ideas in their own writing. Ideas from one author can spark a whole new creative universe in the imagination of another, creating a cascading effect of inspiration. Excellent writing has the capacity to arouse deep feelings in readers. When a writer finds inspiration in another writer's work, they could try to evoke the same feelings in their own writing. They might pick up skills in developing gripping narratives, creating tension, or evoking strong feelings via language. Lastly, Through mentorship programs or by making contacts in the writing community, writers might occasionally get to know one another personally. These connections can offer priceless advice and assistance. An established writer can encourage an aspiring writer to exceed their literary limitations and achieve new heights by sharing their knowledge and providing comments. Overall, the influence of other authors can be a powerful force in shaping an author's work. It's like a beautiful tapestry where different threads of inspiration come together to create something unique.

Here are some examples of some famous authors and their influencers:

J.K. Rowling was influenced by Rudyard Kipling, Stephen King by Richard Matheson, William Faulkner by James Joyce, Haruki Murakami by Franz Kafka, Ralph Ellison by T.S. Elliot.

These pairings show how literary influences can appear in an author's work in a variety of ways, such as stylistic decisions, narrative structures, or thematic components. For example, you might observe a similarity in rhythm between Ralph Ellison's writing and T.S. Eliot's poems, which is a reflection of Eliot's impact on Ellison. Every writer has a distinct voice that they create over the course of their career due to the interaction of several

inspirations. It is clear that authors who read widely and profoundly throughout a wide range of genres and historical periods have a rich palette at their disposal for their own storytelling projects. Thus keep in mind that every tale shared is a part of a greater dialogue between authors from the past, present, and even the future.

1.3 The Power of Personal Narrative: How an Author's Life Shapes their Writing

Everybody's personality is shaped by their own experiences and the environment they live in. Similarly, an author's writing is shaped by their experiences in the past. The author's past, including their gender, color, and socioeconomic status, had a stronger influence on their writing than other factors.

The backdrop of an author's writing can be greatly influenced by their gender, which can determine many of the possibilities and experiences that help the author choose how to develop the character in their work. The author analyzes their own gender in their works using that internal experience. Understanding and being aware of an author's racial experiences is crucial since it greatly influences the way they choose to write. Authors' backgrounds and life experiences shape their perspectives and understanding of the world. Writers tend to have more compelling reasons for writing, and they will emphasize information that bolster these reasons while ignoring details that are not grounded in their prior experiences. An example could be T. Washington's novel 'Up From Slavery', this novel is about Washington's life and his journey from slavery to becoming an influential educator and leader. His personal experiences and struggles greatly influenced his writing, shedding light on the harsh realities of slavery.

Childhood experiences, life events, socio-economic influences, etc all of these aspects can be noticed in an author's work. The power of personal experience can also be a

good source of inspiration for an author to shape the literary works. It can be their on triumphs, struggles or their relationships by which the author can create more authentic and relatable content. An author can express their grief through a poem or a sad short story, by sharing this they can connect with the audience who have been through similar experiences. Similarly an authors beliefs can shape the themes and messages he/she wants to convey to their audience, allowing them to explore and challenge societal norms, cultural expectations and personal ideologies. By doing so the author can inspire their audience to reflect on their own beliefs and also the author gets the power to influence the hearts and minds of their audience which helps them change their mindset for the better.

The historical and cultural environment in which writers live has an impact on their lives as well as on the literature they produce. An author's narrative may incorporate societal, political, and cultural events that have shaped their life, offering a diverse range of viewpoints and views. An author who experienced a major historical event, for example, can include details from that event in their writing. Through examining the effects of history on people and society, writers can challenge established narratives, expose undiscovered experiences, and illuminate crucial lessons. Their art takes on the qualities of the environment around them, providing spectators with a more profound comprehension of the intricacies of the human condition.

1.4 The Art of Literary Connections: Exploring the Theory of Intertextuality

“The term intertextuality refers to the relationships or links that may be found among different books or texts.” (Collin’s Dictionary)

“the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text”. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

“Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life. In the Postmodern epoch, theorists often claim, it is not possible any longer to speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art”. (Allen 2000)

In the 1960s, Julia Kristeva first used the term "intertextual" to describe her examination of Bakhtin's ideas on Dialogism and Carnival. The word "intertextual" comes from the Latin word "intertexto," which means "to intermingle while weaving." According to her, all texts are "in conversation" with one another and cannot be fully read or comprehended without being aware of this relationship. Since then, intertextuality has emerged as a fundamental feature of postmodern analysis and works alike. It is important to remember that the act of creating intertextuality was present for a really long time than the actually developed theory of intertextuality.

In its most basic form, intertextuality is a method of text interpretation that emphasizes the idea of words and thoughts being borrowed from one text to another. Every writer reads the texts that have been written before them, both before and throughout the writing process. By allusions, impressions, references, citations, quotations, and links, s/he either appropriates ideas from earlier or contemporary writings and discourses in the network or is in some other manner impacted by the other texts. As a result, there will always be echoes and remnants of the other texts in an author's work, whether those references are made overtly or implicitly, directly or indirectly. In addition, layers of

meaning will be there rather than a single, definitive meaning that is meant to be developed by the author's creative vision. According to the theory of intertextuality, a critic's perception of a text will be shaped by all the presumptions and connotations surrounding the text to which it refers or from which it contains traces when the text is read in that context. It would not be misleading to say that the reader's or interpreter's reflection on the meaning of the text at hand is shaped by quotations from, absorptions of, insertions into, and transformations of another text because a network of other texts provides them with the contexts of possible meanings.

Texts are not created in isolation, but rather they are influenced by other texts that came before them. This may include direct references, allusions, or even the borrowing of themes, characters or in some cases even the plot. Here are some well-known examples of intertextuality:

1. Disney's *The Lion King* is based on Hamlet storyline by William Shakespeare.
2. Homer's *Odyssey* serves as the inspiration for the structure of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.
3. *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, *The Sword in the Stone* by T.H. White, and *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien are all referenced in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

A similar conviction that a work's meanings can be expanded—even if they fall into specific, predefined categories—is also evident in the Middle Ages, with their multi-layered interpretation of texts. The idea that God's symbolic book should be understood as the created world in its radiant order and hierarchy was popularized by church fathers and medieval theologians. If this were the case, then the things that made up the world functioned as a kind of theological lexicon. Therefore, when God wrote the Bible, His own words pointed, not only literally, to the objects found in His other book, the *Book of Nature*, but also, because those words were imbued with God's meanings, they also had a

spiritual meaning. Somehow, at a time when literature was subservient to theology, what was true of religious texts was also extended to secular ones, and biblical interpretation already rested on an intertextual practice. Every literary work was considered to have its roots in the Bible and could be read as such; this perspective can be thought of as a medieval adaptation of what modern writers such as Borges have imagined. It made sense for individual writers to reject originality and attempt to imitate God's style if God's two Books were meant to have multiple meanings.

However, Renaissance literature demonstrated a conscious understanding of discourse as open-ended, incomplete, and open to countless interpretations—possibly for the first time in Western culture. The mid-eighteenth century saw a new push in writers' attempts to separate themselves from the writings of earlier writers and to claim their own creative space. However, the eighteenth century brought with it a renewed interest in originality, which contrasted with the lack of interest that, as we have seen, dominated the literary world during the classical period, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. brought about a reappraisal of originality as the sole genuine indicator of an author's brilliance. At that point, the idea of influence emerged, sowing the seeds of a methodology that would eventually be related to intertextuality but distinct from it.

Originality cannot be viewed as a quality that readers or writers should value from an intertextual standpoint. The idea that an author's most distinctive sections may be those in which their ancestors are most strongly felt was first put forth by T. S. Eliot (1971, 784). While tradition had frequently led to reading an author's work in the context of those who had come before it, Eliot was the first to suggest that influence flows both ways: while analyzing a work, one must take into account those who have come before it, but one must also be conscious of the fact that the work of the deceased poets alters and enriches its meaning when read in the context of writings by later authors. T. S. Eliot, a remarkable

figure in the context of modernist poetry, qualified the New Critics' understanding of the work of art as a self-sufficient whole, a complete system, in spite of his undeniable influence on their ideas. Such an approach represents the stance that subsequent theories of intertextuality have attempted to undermine. It has roots in the romantics and is connected to the concepts put forth by Symbolism and Modernism. As a result, Eliot's quasi-intertextual theories regarding the simultaneity of all literary works and the ongoing process of rearranging their relationships with one another can be considered surprisingly contemporary.

G rard Genette's approach to the topic of intertextuality, like that of Michel Riffaterre and Jonathan Culler, can be seen as an attempt to draw boundaries around the definitions of intertextuality advanced by Kristeva, Derrida, Barthes, and others, as they have proven to be challenging to apply to the actual analysis of texts. Unlike Bakhtin and Kristeva, who have broad interests ranging from language to social, political, and philosophical spheres, Genette focuses primarily on the literary text in the strict sense of the word. He claims that the term "intertextuality," which refers to the literal and effective presence of another text in a text, is inadequate and suggests the term "transtextuality," which refers to anything that connects texts, whether explicit or implicit. As a result, even though his focus is on the specific literary work, he admits that it can no longer be studied in isolation.

Genette emphasizes the global nature of the concept of transtextuality in *Palimpsestes*, his "last word" on intertextuality, and provides five subcategories (1989, 10-15):

1. The relationship of co-presence between two or more texts is known as intertextuality; it is the effective presence of one text in another through citation, allusion, or plagiarism.

2. Paratextuality: the relationships that exist between a text's title, subtitle, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, early drafts, and other accessory signals that encircle and occasionally comment on the text itself.
3. Metatextuality: the connection, often referred to as a "commentary," between one text and another that makes a comment on it but doesn't quote it or even bring it up. It is the ideal critical relationship.
4. Archtextuality: the general grouping to which a text is assigned. The text might not be aware of its generic nature, which is something that readers and critics should determine. But the reader's "horizons of expectation" and, consequently, how the work is received are largely determined by this general perception.
5. Hypertextuality: The relationship between the latecomer text (hypertext) and its pre-text (hypotext) is known as hypertextuality. According to him, hypertext is any text that has been directly or indirectly transformed (imitated), without the use of commentary. A text B in the former, direct or simple transformation might not specifically mention a prior text A, but it is not possible for B to exist without A. For example, there are two hypertexts of the same hypotext, *The Odyssey*, in varying degrees: *The Eneid* and *Ulysses*. Since imitation necessitates the creation of a generic model, it is a more complicated type of transformation. When it comes to the practice, the five categories that Genette established tend to overlap despite this intricate and thorough classification. For instance, the paratext may combine with arch textuality by helping to determine the text's generic quality. When one text appears in another, it is referred to as hypertextuality. This concept is similar to intertextuality. He is only able to separate them by limiting the former idea to parody, travesty, and pastiche, and the latter to plagiarism, quotation, or allusion. Still, both categories fall together again when he acknowledges that.

There are three main types of intertextuality: obligatory, optional and accidental. When understanding a given work requires referencing another text, this is known as obligatory intertextuality. In some instances, the poet or writer cites sources that are essential to understanding the context or intended meaning of their own writing. Conversely, optional intertextuality occurs when writers or poets make allusions to other writings that are not essential to comprehending their own work. For readers who are already familiar with the books that are cited, these allusions are more akin to bonus material. When a work has unintentional allusions to other works, this is known as accidental intertextuality. It occurs when a writer, whether poet or author, inadvertently borrows words or ideas from another work. These allusions are the consequence of coincidence or subliminal influence rather than being purposeful or premeditated. When writers make connections and add meaning to other texts, this is known as intertextuality. It may be obligatory, optional or even accidental.

1.5 Importance of this study

This study is relevant because it allows us to understand the individuals who played a significant role in shaping Plath's artistic journey. Exploring her relationships, mentors, and contemporaries helps us gain insights into the inspirations, challenges, and support that influenced her work. It provides a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of creative minds and the impact of personal connections on artistic development.

1.6. Scope

The scope of this research paper would involve exploring the key individuals who had a significant impact on Plath's artistic development. It aims to delve into her personal relationships, literary influences, and fellow writers who played a role in shaping her

unique style and themes. By examining these influential figures such as Anne Sexton, WB Yeats, Robert Lowell, Emily Dickinson, Al Alvares and Richard Sassoon it can provide a comprehensive understanding of how Plath's artistic path was shaped by her connections and interactions.

1.7 Limitations

1. This research specifically focuses on Sylvia Plath's literary circle, excluding her family members like her father, mother, and Ted Hughes as it is a well known fact that her family had a great impact on her works.
2. Many aspects of Sylvia Plath's life and relationships are based on incomplete records, letters, and diaries. Some insights into her personal and artistic influences may be missing or incomplete.
3. The historical context of Sylvia Plath's circle of influence can be limited by the availability and accuracy of historical records and accounts.
4. The influences on Plath's work are open to multiple interpretations, and there may not be a singular, definitive analysis.
5. Sylvia Plath's mental health challenges played a significant role in her life and work. Understanding the relationship between her mental health and her artistic influences may require sensitive handling and therefore will not be focusing much on her mental health.

1.8 Research problem/ question

What role did Sylvia Plath's circle of influence play in shaping her artistic vision and creative process?

1.9 Aims

The purpose of this dissertation could be to delve deep into the various individuals who played a significant role in shaping Sylvia Plath's artistic path. The study can explore the relationships, The impact they had on her work and have the influence contributed to her artistic voice. By thoroughly examining these key figures this study can provide valuable insights into large creative journey and shed light on the detailed web of influences that shaped her artistic body of work.

1.10 Objectives:

- I. To understand how these individuals influenced Plath's writing style, themes, and artistic choices through their relationships, collaborations, and shared ideas.
- II. To analyse the specific contributions of each person in Plath's circle of influence, such as their mentorship, inspiration, support, or critical feedback.
- III. To examine the different influences within Sylvia Plath's circle, assessing the overall impact on her artistic development and exploring the nuanced interplay between positive and negative influences.
- IV. Analyse the lasting impact of Plath's circle of influence on her legacy in the literary world.

1.11 Literature Review

As I delve into the captivating realm of literature analysis, the article "I am, in my deep soul, happiest on the Moors": The Impact of Dealing with the World Beyond the Shores of the United States in the Life and Work of Sylvia Plath by Maeve O'Brien, she says that Sylvia Plath's literary output was greatly influenced by her connections to both the UK and the USA. Her experiences in both countries during the formative years of 1956-

57 played a vital role in shaping her development as a poet and writer. These cross-Atlantic connections are evident not only in her early poetry but also resonate throughout her later work. Plath's writing reflects both English and American subtleties, with references to companies like Tate and Lyle in her *Bee Poems* and the inclusion of significant political and cultural events in America.

O'Brien also states in her article that when Plath arrived in England in 1955, she felt an immediate connection and considered it as a homecoming. Her letters at the time expressed her desire to become a native English-person. Her English Literature classes at Cambridge exposed her to modern writers, American literature, and the cultural and artistic movements that influenced them. This expanded her knowledge and inspired her own artistic and literary endeavours. Ted Hughes, Plath's soon-to-be husband, was a significant source of inspiration for her poetry. Their intense working and personal relationship introduced her to different landscapes and literary perspectives. Overall, Sylvia Plath's literary output was shaped by her connections, experiences, and relationships in both the UK and the USA.

In the article *When Ariel Found Mercy Street: The Influence of Anne Sexton on Sylvia Plath's Poetry* by Katherine Rose Keenan says that in Sylvia Plath's earlier poems, she showed control and carefulness. While the exact trigger for her transition isn't known, something interesting happened in Boston in 1959. Plath attended Robert Lowell's poetry class at Boston University and became friends with Anne Sexton, another confessional poet. Their friendship and shared exploration of personal experiences may have influenced Plath's poetic style. It's amazing how connections and collaborations can shape an artist's journey. Keenan points out that it is fascinating to note the similarities in the works of Plath

with Sexton's, even if some of them may be coincidental. It's important to recognise that Plath's exploration of similar themes or styles doesn't diminish her creativity or talent.

In An introduction to "The Boston Trio": Sylvia Plath with Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton by Sarah- Jane burton, she says that during the late 1950s, Sylvia Plath was part of a vibrant poetic community in Boston. Her relationships with Lowell and Sexton were crucial in reshaping her writing and had a broader impact on American poets. They were even referred to as the "Boston Trio." While there isn't much literature exploring all three together, there are writings about Plath's friendship with Sexton and their mutual influence. Understanding literary influence is important, as writers are connected and influenced by each other. It's essential to consider how Plath's circle inspired and influenced her poetry.

In another article "Mad Genius: Sylvia Plath's Manic Depression and Poetic Writing by Kelly Leung, she says that in analysing Sylvia Plath's last poem, 'Edge' (1963), two critical theories, Freud's psychoanalysis and Saussure's structuralism, are applied to understand the content and its significance in poetry and psychology. This essay aims to evaluate the relationship between creativity and the expression of emotions and the desire for death in Plath's poetry. Plath's struggles with manic depression and her eventual tragic death add depth to the understanding of 'Edge.' Freudian psychoanalysis uncovers her Thanatos, the death drive, while Saussure's structuralism places Plath and 'Edge' within the context of 'the Sylvia Plath effect' and the genre of confessional poetry. Both theories highlight the importance of Plath's state of mind in her creative works.

In the article "Isaac McCaslin and the Burden of Influence" by Paul J. Lindholdt, he states that in "The Bear" by William Faulkner, the protagonist, Isaac McCaslin, undergoes a complex journey of self-discovery and initiation. Faulkner's narrative draws parallels with James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." Both writers

explore themes of fatherhood, influence, and the search for identity. The essay suggests that Faulkner was influenced by Joyce's stylistic elements and themes, examining the characters' struggles with their ancestral pasts. Faulkner's use of nature, myth, and the character Isaac's Christ-like transformation adds layers to the narrative, reflecting both antithetical and revisionary aspects in the relationship between the two authors. The essay delves into the intricate interplay of influence, literary heritage, and self-creation in Faulkner's work. An authors influence by other authors can be a result of admiration, inspiration and a desire to learn from their techniques and ideas.

According to Lizzi in her article 'Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life Before Ted by Andrew Wilson 'it seems like Plath had a tendency to escape from the things she didn't like in her life by immersing herself in fantasy and writing. As her mental state declined, she became more detached from reality and retreated into her own thoughts, especially after her suicide attempt and time in the hospital. It's interesting how Ted Hughes comes into the picture towards the end of "Mad Girl's Love Song," and you know that their meeting is just around the corner. Before Hughes, Plath was involved with Richard Sassoon, who is often referred to as her "great love." They had a passionate relationship and enjoyed romantic moments together. However, when Plath had to return to Cambridge and Sassoon had to go to Spain, she rekindled her connection with Hughes. Eventually, she cut ties with Sassoon and married Hughes just four months after they first met. It's important to note that the author of the book, Andrew Wilson, emphasized that he's not "anti-Hughes" and hopes that readers and scholars can move beyond taking sides. Both Plath and Hughes had their own experiences and perspectives. However, after reading this intense and captivating book, it's natural to feel some anger towards Hughes for the role he played in Plath's life and the emotional harm she endured. At the same time, there may be moments where you feel frustrated with Plath for not directly addressing her

problems and allowing her rage and anguish to consume her. It's understandable to want her to confront her issues head-on and fight for her well-being.

In her article ““IF I STOP WRITING, I STOP BREATHING”:PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN ROBERT LOWELL’S POETRY ’Baidwan states that Robert Lowell was a poet who went through different phases in his writing. At first, he focused on religious and impersonal themes. But later on, he started writing in a more personal and confessional style. This means he opened up about his own experiences and emotions in his poetry. He talked about things like guilt, family issues, and the challenges of modern society. This shift in his writing style had a big impact on the poetry world and inspired other poets, like Sylvia Plath. Lowell's work really captured the raw and authentic aspects of human life.(Baidwan, 2018)

Smitha.K.M. says that Sylvia Plath was an incredible poet whose work continues to have a big impact today. She had this unique way of writing that was so honest and raw. She wasn't afraid to tackle tough subjects like mental illness, suicide, and personal struggles. That kind of bravery and vulnerability in her poetry really resonated with people. And not only that, but her use of language and imagery was so powerful and innovative. She pushed boundaries and experimented with form, which has inspired many contemporary poets to do the same. It's amazing how her work still speaks to us and continues to shape the world of poetry.(K.M., 2022)

In ‘The Effect of Sylvia Plath’s Mental State in Her Works ’Mariam A. Alnaqbi states that Sylvia Plath was a famous poet who lived in the mid-20th century. She wrote powerful and emotional poems that often explored themes of identity, mental health, and personal struggles. Her poems "Daddy," "Morning Song," and "Lady Lazarus" are some of her most well-known works. In "Daddy," Plath explores her complex relationship with her father and the impact his death had on her. "Morning Song" is a beautiful poem about

the birth of her child and the mixed emotions that come with motherhood. And "Lady Lazarus" delves into themes of death, rebirth, and resilience. Plath's poetry is known for its vivid imagery, intense emotions, and raw honesty. It's definitely worth reading if you're interested in exploring her unique and powerful writing style.

Dr. Pradeep Kumar Debata in his article 'Sylvia Plath in the Context of Times and Cultures: A Critical Analysis' says that Sylvia Plath was an American poet who had a significant impact on literature. Her works are known for their powerful and introspective themes, often exploring topics like identity, mental health, and the human experience. Plath's poetry is characterized by its vivid imagery, emotional intensity, and use of confessional writing. She faced personal struggles throughout her life, including mental illness, which greatly influenced her work. Plath's best-known collection of poems, "Ariel," was published posthumously and is considered a masterpiece of modern poetry. Her writing continues to resonate with readers around the world, making her a celebrated and influential figure in American literature.

In conclusion, this literature review has explored the fascinating literary influences on Sylvia Plath, shedding light on various aspects of her life and work. Plath's early experiences, including her tumultuous relationship with Ted Hughes, her interactions with fellow poets Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton, and her battles with depression and mental health, all contributed to the shaping of her unique voice and artistic expression. By delving into these aspects, this literature review reveals the multifaceted nature of Plath's inspirations and the profound impact they had on her writing. It also underscores the importance of considering the broader literary landscape when studying an author's work, as influences can come from unexpected sources. Moving forward, further research could explore additional influences on Plath's writing and delve deeper into the complexities of her literary legacy. While there is a significant body of literature examining Sylvia Plath's

life, relationships, and mental health, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific influence of literary figures on her work. This literature review aims to fill this research gap by exploring the literary influences on Plath. By examining these connections, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literary influences that shaped Plath's unique voice and artistic expression.

1.12 Formulation of hypothesis

Plath's circle of influence has played a major role in shaping Plath's artistic development.

1.13 Research Methodology for proposed research.

The study will utilize qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of Sylvia Plath's artistic influences. Firstly, a close textual analysis of Plath's poems will be conducted, delving deep into the intricate layers of her writing. This analysis aims to identify recurring themes, symbols, and stylistic elements that may have been influenced by other writers. In addition to analyzing Plath's poems, the study will explore her personal writings, such as letters and journals. These intimate documents offer valuable insights into Plath's thoughts, reflections, and mentions of influential people in her life. By studying these personal writings, the researchers hope to uncover the role that these individuals played in shaping Plath's artistic vision and expression.

To further enrich the understanding, biographies and memoirs written by individuals who were close to Plath or had significant interactions with her will be examined. These firsthand accounts provide unique perspectives on Plath's circle of influence, shedding light on the dynamics and relationships between Plath and her literary peers. Moreover, the study will map out the connections and relationships between Plath and her contemporaries. By analyzing the social and literary networks she was a part of,

the researchers aim to understand the structure and dynamics of her artistic circle. This will help contextualize her influences within the broader literary landscape of her time. Lastly, a comparative analysis will be conducted, comparing the biographies and life stories of Plath and her contemporaries. By identifying shared experiences, influences, and cultural contexts, the researchers hope to uncover the interplay between Plath and her peers. This comparative analysis will provide valuable insights into the broader cultural and literary influences that shaped Plath's artistic development.

1.14 Chapterization

CHAPTER 1: A Kaleidoscope of Art and Life: Tracing Sylvia Plath's Path and the Influences That Guided Her

1.1 Sylvia Plath: a brief overview of her life and work

1.2 Understanding The Importance of Influences in an Artist's Life

1.3 The Power of Personal Narrative: How an Author's Life Shapes their Writing

1.4 The Art of Literary Connections: Exploring the Theory of Intertextuality

1.5 Importance of this study

1.6 Scope

1.7 Limitations

1.8 Research problem/ question

1.9 Aim

1.10 Objectives

1.11 Literature Review

1.12 Formulation of hypothesis

1.13 Research Methodology for proposed research.

1.14 Chapterization

CHAPTER 2: Literary Influences: The Literary Forces that Molded Plath's Artistic Journey

2.1 Anne Sexton: Sylvia Plath's Dearest Friend and Creative Companion

2.1.1 Anne Sexton's Influence on Plath's works

2.2 Robert Lowell: Inspiring Sylvia Plath's Journey towards Self-Expression and Artistic Exploration

2.2.1 Robert Lowell's Influence on Plath's works

2.3 Emily Dickinson: A Profound Influence on Sylvia Plath's Artistic Path, Exploring Life and Death

2.3.1 Emily Dickinson's Influence on Plath's works

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2.4.1 W.B. Yeats' Influence on Plath's works

CHAPTER 3: Colliding Perspectives: The Impact Of Al Alvarez and Richard Sassoon on Plath's Artistic Journey

3.1 Al Alvares : Sylvia Plath's Close Friend and Trusted Critic.

3.2 Richard Sassoon: The Ex Who Played a Part in Sylvia Plath's Artistic Journey

3.3 Intertextual impact of Sassoon and Alvarez on Sylvia Plath

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

CHAPTER 2: Literary Influences: The Literary Forces that Molded Plath's Artistic Journey

One of the greatest writers of the mid-20th century, Sylvia Plath, never fails to move readers with her poignant and confessional poetry. Almost all of the studies which resist the personal in Plath quote her famous comment in a BBC interview:

“I think my poems come immediately out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these —cries from the heartl that are informed by nothing except, you know, a needle or knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience; and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind”. (Khalifeh, 4)

The intricate interaction of her personal experiences, difficulties with mental health, and the influence of other poets who helped establish the genre of confessional poetry is evident in her work. Several authors, including Emily Dickinson, W.B. Yeats, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell, have influenced Plath's poetry in various ways.

The main idea behind intertextuality is the relationship and mutual influence between various texts. It resembles a vast network of connections between various literary works. Because Sylvia Plath was greatly influenced by other poets, including Emily Dickinson, W.B. Yeats, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell, her poetry is a great example of intertextuality. When we discuss intertextuality, we are examining the ways in which these other poets have influenced Plath's writing. For instance, Emily Dickinson's distinctive writing style, with its unusual use of capitalization and punctuation, drew Plath's attention.

She was impressed by Dickinson's ability to express strong feelings in such concise and impactful words. Thus, Dickinson's influence can be detected in some of Plath's own poetry. In summary, intertextuality is the study of how various texts shape and influence one another. In Sylvia Plath's case, her writing style, themes, and life experiences were greatly influenced by the writings of the above mentioned literary figures.

2.1 Anne Sexton: Sylvia Plath's Dearest Friend and Creative Companion

Plath's literary journey is intimately entwined with that of her contemporary, Anne Sexton. Both women turned to their poetry for comfort and release as they battled mental health and the limitations of societal expectations. Sexton's unapologetic exploration of taboo subjects and her confessional style resonated with Plath, inspiring her to dive into the raw and unfiltered aspects of her own life. The two poets' strong connection fostered an artistic exchange that profoundly influenced Plath's writing.

The two women read their poems aloud for hours, listened to eighteen other students, and sought Lowell's advice on their projects. A mixture of awkward silences, mild fear of their poems being selected for discussion, and equal fear of them being rejected. Plath and Sexton circled each other hesitantly during these sessions, but Lowell ultimately paired them. Maybe he noticed something in common that neither of the women could. Maybe he noticed recurring themes in their pieces. Or perhaps it was just luck. Whatever the case, the two women became acquainted and had to collaborate, which changed the course of their friendship. Plath was conflicted when praising Sexton and had a grudging respect for her. Her journal notes that Lowell had "set me up with Ann [sic] Sexton, an honor, I suppose. Well about time. She has very good things, and they get better, though there is a lot of loose stuff." (Crowther, 2021)

Both poets had a close personal relationship and were members of the confessional poetry movement. Though she was a little older, Sexton was a friend and mentor to Plath. They supported and critiqued one another's work while exchanging letters on a regular basis. Plath's own poetic style was greatly influenced by Sexton's audacious and genuine examination of personal experiences and feelings. Plath respected Sexton's courage in taking on taboo subjects and stretching the bounds of established poetic tropes. This influence is evident in Plath's emotionally charged and intensely personal themes in her confessional poems, like "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus." Furthermore, Plath was inspired to experiment by Sexton's use of vivid and occasionally shocking imagery as well as her willingness to tackle challenging subjects.

2.1.1 Anne Sexton's Influence on Plath's works:

Plath's father's untimely death has haunted her for a really long time, she even blamed her mother for her father's death. Finally on March 9th Plath went to her father's grave and experienced some really conflicting emotions within her. 10 days later after visiting her father's grave Plath wrote the poem "Electra on Azalea Path" (1959), this is a thought provoking poem that delves into the depths of human emotions and the complexities of identity. The poem revolves around themes like longing, loss, and the complexities of relationships. This very poem of Plath's was inspired by Sexton's poem about her own complex relationship with her father, "The Moss of His Skin". This poem by Anne Sexton is a deeply introspective and emotionally charged poem. It explores the speaker's intimate relationship with her father, capturing the moments of connection and vulnerability they share. The poem also touches on the speaker's desire to keep this connection hidden from others, adding an element of secrecy and longing. Overall, "The

"Moss of His Skin" explores the complexities of family relationships and the profound impact they can have on our lives. (Keenan, 88)

Similarities between "Electra on Azalea Path" and "The Moss of His Skin" are seen in the following lines:

Sexton:

"The black room took us
like a cave or a mouth
or an indoor belly.

I held my breath
and daddy was there,
his thumbs, his fat skull,
his teeth, his hair growing
like a field or a shawl.

I lay by the moss
of his skin until
it grew strange." (Sexton, 9 - 19)

Plath:

"The day you died I went into the dirt,
Into the lightless hibernaculum
Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the blizzard
Like hieratic stones, and the ground is hard.
It was good for twenty years, that wintering --

As if you never existed, as if I came

God-fathered into the world from my mother's belly:" (Plath, 1 -9)

These stanzas by Plath and Sexton are so powerful and haunting. Both the stanzas use a vivid and evocative imagery to convey a sense of darkness, confinement and the loss of their father. In Sexton's "The Moss of His Skin", the speaker describes being in a "black room" that feels like a "cave or a mouth" or an "indoor belly". This imagery creates a sense of being trapped or swallowed up by darkness. Similarly, in Plath's poem, the speaker reflects on the day her father died and describes going into the "dirt" and the "lightless hibernaculum". This creates a sense of being buried or hidden away from the world. Both the stanzas use the imagery of a "black room" and the "lightless hibernaculum" which signifies darkness and confinement.

Another example of poems that have similar imagery in both Sexton's and Plath's poem is that of "Lady Lazarus" (1965) by Plath and "Her Kind" (1960) by Sexton. (Keenan, 91) The poem "Lady Lazarus" is written by the perspective of a woman who has attempted suicide a multiple times but somehow is saved by some sources or basically keeps coming back to life, this poem is an extended metaphor about Lazarus from the Bible. Plath uses themes like death, rebirth, and personal identity. Through the intense imagery Plath dives into the complexities of her own experiences and challenges that she faced.

Sexton in her poem "Her Kind" describes herself as being "a woman like that is not a woman, quite". The speaker feels that she is an outsider that doesn't fit into the societal norms and is being judged and misunderstood by others. This poem explores themes like identity, resilience and rebellion. In this poem Sexton uses strong imagery and language to showcase the struggles and strength of a woman and how she rejects the societal norms in

order to embrace her true self. Both “Lady Lazarus” and “Her Kind” share several themes that are similar like female identity, personal struggle and societal expectations. The use of confessional tones and powerful language create a sense of raw emotions in both poems. In the above stanzas both the poems explore the ideas of embracing their own identity and experiences even in difficult times.

In their autobiographical poems, Sexton and Plath honored women's bodies and deaths. Their ability to candidly share the details of their personal lives and ideas in a symbolic manner made them the most admired confessional poets of the 20th century. There are some similarities in Sexton's ‘Wanting to Die’ (1966) and ‘Lady Lazarus’. In her poem ‘Wanting to Die’ Sexton conveys her extreme emotional upheaval and hopelessness in this poem. She paints a clear picture of her wish to run away from life's hardships and agony. The poem addresses issues of loneliness, depression, and the desire to be released from pain. In this poem, Sexton makes a very effective use of imagery. She expresses her deep emotions with creative language and metaphors. She characterizes her desire for death as wanting to "sink like a stone," for instance, and compares her emotions to being caught in a "bell jar." Her despair is highlighted by the suffocating, heavy feeling these pictures convey. The poem also addresses the subject of conformity pressure and cultural expectations. Sexton talks on the "good behavior" and "polite smiles" she feels compelled to uphold, despite her want to run away from it all. All things considered, "Wanting to Die" is a profoundly reflective and poignant poem that explores the nuances of mental suffering and the need for escape. It allows readers to reflect on the significance of emotional suffering and provides an insight into Sexton's personal experiences. How similar their opinions about suicide is evident in the below poems:

Sexton:

But suicides have a special language.

Like carpenters, they want to know which tools.

They never ask why build. (Wanting to Die, 7-9)

Plath:

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well. (Lady Lazarus, 43-45)

In both these poems there are signs of women being tormented. Sylvia speaks more directly than Anne does, and that is the primary distinction between the two. Anne expresses her thoughts about dying more through symbols and metaphors.

“The Double Image” (1962) by Sexton is another work that Plath might have read or heard in class. Sexton addresses the experiences and struggles of women in a patriarchal society. The poem explores themes of female identity, societal expectations, and the pressures placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles. Sexton challenges these expectations and highlights the need for women to assert their individuality and autonomy. Through her powerful and honest portrayal of the complexities of being a woman, Sexton advocates for the empowerment and liberation of women, which are central beliefs of feminist thought.

“Witch Burning” (1971) a poem by Sylvia Plath, she uses vivid and evocative language to depict the historical practice of witch burning, drawing parallels between the persecution of witches and the societal pressures and expectations placed on women. Plath explores themes of oppression, female identity, and the destructive nature of conformity. The poem challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the struggle for individuality.

and autonomy in a patriarchal society. Some of the lines in the poem that are possibly parallel to Sexton's lines in "The Double Image" are:

Sexton:

Death was simpler than I'd thought.

The day life made you well and whole

I let the witches take away my guilty soul.

I pretended I was dead

until the white men pumped the poison out. (Sexton, 26 - 30)

Plath:

Sickness begins here: I am a dartboard for

witches.

Only the devil can eat the devil out.

In the month of red leaves I climb into a bed of

fire. (Plath, 4 - 8)

"The Double Image" by Anne Sexton and "Witch Burning" by Sylvia Plath share some similarities. Both poems explore themes of female identity and the societal pressures placed on women. They both use vivid imagery and powerful language to convey the struggles and challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. While the specific content and imagery may differ between the two poems, they both offer thought-provoking perspectives on the complexities of being a woman in their respective time periods.

The poem "My Friend, My Friend" by Sexton which was first published in the *Antioch Review* (1959) is thought to be the inspiration for Plath's poem "Daddy" (1965).

(Keenan, 91) In "My Friend, My Friend" Sexton explores the themes of friendship, loyalty and betrayal. This poem shows how friendships can change overtime and the complexities that comes with such relationships. "Daddy" too is an emotionally charged poem and a deeply personal poem about the speakers complex relationship with her father. Plath uses strong imagery to convey her feelings of anger, fear and resentment towards her father. She explores themes of loss, trauma and struggle for personal liberation. Both these poems are quiet powerful and strong in their own ways. Both poems share similarities in terms of imagery, structure, and theme.

One notable similarity is how they explore the emotional and psychological aftermath of parental death, as well as the complex relationships with their fathers. Additionally, both poems make references to Judaism. Plath's use of Holocaust imagery in "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" sparked controversy as she used it as a metaphor for her own suffering. Anne Sexton's poem has a more calm and thoughtful tone, giving us a different perspective on loss, identity, and the complicated relationships. Also there's a reference to Jews in both these poems as in both Plath and Sexton think of themselves as being Jews.

"Mad Girl's Love Song" (1953) by Sylvia Plath, which is an early poem from her time at Smith College. The term "mad girl" conveys the anger and mental illness in and of itself. Here, the Mad Girl is self-aware and mocks herself. It seems to indicate right away that the poem will be about the absurdity of a lost love. There were six stanzas in the poem. In the style of confessional poetry, Plath addresses the readers as herself from the very first stanza. She tries to escape the world by closing her eyes, but she is unable to deny its existence. Repetition is the most obvious tactic the author employed in this book. The narrator often uses the phrase "I think I made you up inside my head." The narrator is attempting to persuade herself that these are her thoughts and that she made up the man,

not so loudly, which implies that she is trying to persuade herself it is true. This is the emphasis repetition places on this quote. The narrator additionally reiterates the line, "I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead." This implies that she rejects the world as dead and that there is a tone of nihilism when she gets "into bed" with the man, along with the references to God, Satan, and Seraphim. Personification is another technique that Plath employs. It is evident that stars cannot gallop and blackness cannot waltz. The phrases "waltzing out" and "blackness galloping in" refer to how they are leaving her as quickly and easily as the man who left her, confidently, and without hesitation. As she wished her man had done, Thunderbird personified the ability to love and return to its lover. Ancient Native Americans regarded thunderbirds as mythical birds. They travel south in the winter, but they always come back in the spring to start over. Personification plays a significant and potent role in the poem's central idea.

This poem perfectly captures the suffering and agony Plath was going through. It is quite evident that her partner broke the promises he made to her and how completely depressed this left her. The poem is essentially an honest confession of the speaker's life experiences and thoughts. This could be interpreted as the voice of ordinary American women at that time, when they were subject to men and had no choice but to wait for what their men did to them.

"I have killed our lives together, axed off each head, with their poor blue eyes stuck in a beach ball, rolling separately down the drive," begins Anne Sexton's poem "Divorce." The pictures portray a harsh picture of the relationship, and it also shows how she had a negative experience. She states in the middle of the poem that she was once loved but is not now. She brings up the image of God at the poem's conclusion, where hopelessness is present. At the end of the poem, Anne Sexton conveys her helplessness and love for her husband, but even God could not save her from passing away. The poem

begins with harsh and emotionless imagery. This poem was composed following Anne and Kayo's divorce. Unlike other confessional and autobiographical poetry, Anne's personal life is described in detail in this poem, with no attempt to conceal anything.

One thing that stands out about the personal lives of both poetesses is that Sylvia Plath was extremely devoted to her husband and that her psychological disorder was primarily caused by her fear of losing Ted Hugh forever. Ted had an affair with another woman, so Hugh repeatedly deceived and betrayed her. Therefore, she was unable to overcome her feelings of insecurity. Additionally, there was a sense of inferiority that caused Sylvia to constantly be perplexed about her poetic brilliance when compared to Ted Hugh. Aside from Sylvia's situation, Anne's spouse, Kayo, provided her with unwavering support in her personal life. However, in spite of all of this assistance and other factors, Anne Sexton was accused of having an affair with her psychotherapist and had numerous lovers. Her relationship with Phil Legler caused Phil to become mentally ill, and his inability to decide whether to believe his love for Anne or his marital duties drove him crazy. (Nahar, 4)

To summarize, Sylvia Plath was greatly influenced by Anne Sexton. Their companionship and mutual exploration of intimate feelings and experiences influenced each other's writing and helped to define the genre of confessional poetry as a whole. Seeing how these two gifted poets encouraged and supported one another throughout their lives is fascinating.

2.2 Robert Lowell: Inspiring Sylvia Plath's Journey towards Self-Expression and Artistic Exploration

As a leading figure of the confessional poetry movement, Robert Lowell profoundly influenced Sylvia Plath's approach to self-expression. Lowell's willingness to

confront personal themes and navigate the intricacies of mental illness resonated with Plath, inspiring her to embrace a similarly confessional and introspective style. The raw emotional intensity and autobiographical nature of Lowell's poetry served as a catalyst for Plath's own exploration of her inner world. "Life Studies" was selected one of the 20th century's Groundbreaking Books by the Academy of American Poets in March 2005. The book was credited with having "a profound impact", especially on the confessional poetry movement. The work "exerted a profound influence on subsequent American poets, including other first generation confessionalists such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton", according to the editors of Contemporary Literary Criticism. Sylvia Plath claimed in a 1962 interview that "Life Studies" had an impact on the poetry she was writing at the time: "I've been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came with, say, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, this intense breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience which I feel has been partly taboo. Robert Lowell's poems about his experience in a mental hospital, for example, interested me very much." (Baidwan, 121)

Both poets had a significant influence on each other's writing and belonged to the confessional poetry movement. Plath respected Lowell's openness and his honesty in addressing both social and personal issues. Plath found resonance in Lowell's examination of mental illness and his use of autobiographical elements. His fearless approach to writing about his own experiences and struggles served as an inspiration to her. This influence is evident in Plath's own confessional poems, in which she explores themes of depression, identity, and gender roles while fearlessly facing her own demons. In addition, Plath's approach to poetry was influenced by Lowell's formal experimentation and technical proficiency. She was impressed by his ability to combine conventional forms with contemporary ideas. In response, Plath adopted some of Lowell's poetic devices in her own.

Their correspondence and friendship were important factors in Plath's growth as a poet. Through letter exchanges, they supported and critiqued each other's work. Plath was able to sharpen her poetic voice and successfully negotiate the difficulties of the confessional genre thanks to Lowell's support and direction. Though it's clear that Lowell had an impact on Plath, it's crucial to remember that Plath had a distinct voice and viewpoint of her own. She developed the confessional tradition and elevated her own feelings and experiences to the fore in her poetry.

As an undergraduate student attending these classes, poet Kathleen Spivack wrote, "The experience of being there was nerve-racking." Lowell dominated by posing the same question over and over: "But what does the poem really mean?" Frequently, awkward pauses would ensue, during which students would either shift uneasily in their seats or make embarrassed eye contact with one another. Students were also alarmed by Lowell's mood swings and manic depression; in some seminars, they noticed that he just appeared to be, in Sexton's words, "so gracefully insane." Even though he was a gifted poet and critic, during his manic episodes he would get increasingly fixated on the same point and could be easily sidetracked and ambiguous. If students said something that upset him or offended him, he might become furious. He was so angry one afternoon in April that they thought he was going to jump out of the window. Indeed, he was admitted to the McLean Hospital on the outskirts of Boston right after the class, the same hospital where Sexton would eventually become a patient and where Plath had previously been a patient.

2.2.1 Robert Lowell's influence on Plath's works:

"Life Studies" is a poetry collection by Robert Lowell, published in 1959. It's considered a groundbreaking work in the field of confessional poetry. The collection explores themes of personal experiences, family dynamics, mental illness, and the

struggles of the human condition. "Life Studies" is a significant contribution to American poetry and offers a glimpse into the complexities of human existence. "Ariel" is a poetry collection by Sylvia Plath, published posthumously in 1965. It's known for exploring themes of femininity, motherhood, and personal transformation. The poems in "Ariel" showcase Plath's unique poetic voice and her ability to capture raw emotions. The collection is often regarded as one of Plath's most powerful works, showcasing her talent for crafting evocative and haunting verses. Both "Life Studies" by Robert Lowell and "Ariel" by Sylvia Plath share some similarities. They are both considered part of the confessional poetry movement, where poets write about personal experiences and emotions in a raw and introspective manner. Both collections explore themes of personal struggles, mental illness, and the complexities of the human condition. They also employ vivid imagery and a distinctive poetic voice to convey their emotions. While each poet has their own unique style, these similarities make "Life Studies" and "Ariel" compelling works that offer intimate glimpses into the lives of the poets.

Both of these poets were a part of the confessional poetry movement and they explored similar themes as well such as deep personal themes. They bring out their innermost thoughts and emotions in their works. Also adding to this they both suffered from mental health issues and these experiences too influenced their poetic expressions. The poem "Skunk Hour", by Robert Lowell which was published in Life Studies in 1959 has a lot of similarities with Plath's later poems (Burton, 77). The poem "Skunk Hour" explores themes of loneliness, isolation and the decline of a once thriving coastal town. This poem is set in a small town in New England where there are many skunks who roam about. These skunks represent a sense of otherness and social outcasts who roam freely whereas the people living there are consumed by their own problems. Through vivid

imagery and descriptive language, Lowell captures the sense of despair and disconnection felt by both the skunks and the townspeople. The poem ultimately reflects on the human condition and the complexities of life in a changing world. "Tulips" by Sylvia Plath was a poem that she wrote in 1961 and was published in her collection of poems "Ariel" (1965). In this poem the speaker is seen to be recovering from an illness and finds herself surrounded by a bouquet of tulips in the hospital room. The tulips, with their vibrant colors, symbolize the outside world and its demands. The speaker longs for a state of numbness and detachment, but the tulips serve as a reminder of life's persistent presence. The poem explores the conflict between the desire for solitude and the presence of external distractions. "Tulips" is a powerful exploration of identity and the tension between the desire for freedom and the pull of external influences.

"Skunk Hour" by Robert Lowell and "Tulips" by Sylvia Plath are similar in their exploration of themes such as despair, loneliness, and the complexities of human emotions. Both poems delve into the inner struggles and vulnerabilities of the speakers, using vivid imagery and introspective language to convey their experiences. In "Skunk Hour," Lowell uses the presence of skunks as a metaphor for isolation and the decline of a coastal town, while in "Tulips," Plath reflects on the speaker's desire for detachment and the conflict between inner and outer worlds. Both poems offer powerful and poignant reflections on the human condition, inviting readers to contemplate the depths of despair, solitude, and detachment.

"Lady Lazarus" (1965) is a poem by Sylvia Plath that explores themes of death, rebirth, and the speaker's struggle with her own identity. It's a powerful and intense piece. The poem draws parallels between the speaker's life and the biblical figure of Lazarus, showcasing the complexities of human existence. On the other hand "Walking in the Blue"

(1977) is a poem by Robert Lowell. It explores themes of mental illness and the speaker's personal struggles with depression. The poem takes the reader on a journey through the speaker's mind as they navigate the depths of their emotional turmoil. It's a poignant and introspective piece that dives into the complexities of the human psyche. This poem offers insight into the challenges of mental health. Both "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath and "Walking in the Blue" by Robert Lowell share similarities in their exploration of mental illness and personal struggles. Both poems explore the depths of the human psyche, portraying the challenges and complexities of living with mental health issues. They use vivid imagery and powerful language to convey the emotional turmoil experienced by the speakers. Both poems offer a raw and introspective look into the struggles of the human condition, providing thought-provoking insights into the nature of mental illness.

In conclusion, Robert Lowell's influence on Sylvia Plath was substantial. His confessional style, formal experimentation, and mentorship played a crucial role in shaping Plath's poetic voice. Their friendship and shared exploration of personal themes continue to inspire and resonate with readers today.

2.3 Emily Dickinson: A Profound Influence on Sylvia Plath's Artistic Path, Exploring Life and Death

Sylvia Plath states in her private journal from March 28, 1958, "Arrogant, I think I have written lines which qualify me to be the Poetess of America. . . . Who rivals? Well, in history Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Amy Lowell, Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay—all dead". Dickinson and Plath share a lot of similarities in terms of biographical details and themes. Both experienced some form of mental illness, were born into households with demanding fathers. Dickinson and Plath are

easily comparable because of their shared tendency for using nature imagery and their strong writing styles.

Sylvia Plath's poetry reflects not only the contemporary influences of her time but also draws from the rich legacy of earlier poets. Emily Dickinson, a 19th-century literary icon, left an enduring imprint on Plath's work. Both poets share a fascination with death, a preoccupation with the human psyche, and a mastery of language that transcends the ordinary. Dickinson's concise yet evocative verses influenced Plath's ability to distill complex emotions into powerful and compact expressions. The poetry of Emily Dickinson had a profound influence on poets and authors of later generations. Her work gained attention and acclaim in the years after her death, despite having a relatively limited readership during her lifetime. Other poets who found inspiration in her bold and nonconformist approach to poetry included Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Sylvia Plath. Dickinson's examination of the inner realm of the mind and emotions had an impact on the later poets. Her introspective and frequently reflective poetry helped to create the genre of confessional poetry, which focuses on the experiences and feelings. Dickinson's capacity to dive into the depths of the human mind served as an inspiration for poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, who rose to prominence during the confessional poetry movement of the mid-20th century.

2.3.1 Emily Dickinson's influence on Plath's works:

The idea of not being scared of or influenced by death is present in both Dickinson's "Afriad! Of Whom am I Afraid?" (1862) and Plath's "Death & Co." (1962) However, Plath concentrates on how her miserable life makes her wish to die. Dickinson, on the other hand, concentrates on how death, life, and resurrection will not overcome her existence because she rejects the idea of an afterlife that coerces people into acting fearfully and

submissively. Plath and Dickinson are able to produce poems that make death seem outdated because they do not fear death. Both Plath and Dickinson express a similar lack of fear, but Dickinson's tone is happier as she acknowledges that she is not scared of the three common anxieties that individuals have. Thus, the tones aid in revealing their perspectives on dying as well as the motivations behind their actions in this life. Both make use of figurative language, but Plath expresses her apathy in her life by comparing herself and her children to objects through metaphors and similes. She therefore gives her own life no purpose, demonstrating her acceptance of death because, in her opinion, death is preferable to the life she is now leading. Dickinson, on the other hand, employs metaphors to highlight her own carefree perspective on life and death. For instance, her idea that death is a "[p]orter" conveys the idea that death is merely an ally of a greater power and should not be feared. Dickinson employs rhetorical questions to highlight that she is posing a query that does not require a solution, but Plath uses symbols to underline that she does not have to face death without giving her life one last meaning.

Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror" (1963) delves into the themes of time passing and self-perception, stimulating reflection. The poem adopts a mirror's viewpoint, which acts as a metaphor for introspection. The narrator's aging process and the progressive loss of beauty are depicted by the mirror, which reflects the truth without passing judgment. In the end, the poem emphasizes the harsh truth of age and the relentless nature of time by exploring the complexity of identity and the battle to embrace oneself.

Emily Dickinson's poetry "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (1896) is a powerful poem that examines the internal conflict and dissolution of the ego. The poem depicts a sense of tremendous mental suffering and the state of one's thoughts by using the metaphor of a funeral. Emily Dickinson's poetry "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" is a powerful poem that examines the internal conflict and dissolution of the ego. The poem describes a feeling of

total mental agony and a mind that is spiraling out of control by using the metaphor of a funeral. The narrator of the poem suffers a symbolic death within their own consciousness, and the poem's rhythmic pattern reflects the seriousness and intensity of a funeral procession. Dickinson's evocative language and strong imagery evoke a spooky, reflective mood. The literary styles of Emily Dickinson's "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" and Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" are somewhat similar. Both poems express their thoughts and feelings through rich imagery and metaphors. Additionally, they write in a clear and impactful manner, carefully selecting each word to have a strong meaning. Furthermore, the poems delve into profound and contemplative subjects associated with the human condition, such as introspection, passing away, and the intricacies of the mind. Their writing styles are similar in that they both use poetic devices and may arouse intense emotions, even though their subjects and tones may differ.

In summary, there is no denying Emily Dickinson's impact on Sylvia Plath. Dickinson's unorthodox approach, reflective subjects, and masterful use of imagery had a profound effect on Plath's poetry. Dickinson's skill at succinctly and powerfully expressing the nuances of the human experience served as an inspiration to Plath. Readers are still struck by their mutual investigation of inner emotional landscapes.

2.4 W.B. Yeats: Unleashing Sylvia Plath's Artistic Vision through Folklore and Mythological Exploration

"Well, here I am! Safely in Yeats's house!" (Gary, 138) This is how Plath begins her letter to her mother from London, where she tells her that she was able to rent an apartment in the same home as Yeats. The troubled poet Sylvia Plath wrote that her soul responded to the peace of this tower and that it helped her form a deep connection with Yeats. Considering Plath's brief life, which culminated in her suicide in February 1963 at the age

of thirty in a London home that had previously belonged to the Irish poet William Butler Yeats. There are innumerable examples in the realm of poetry where one poet greatly influences another; one such case is the influence of W.B. Yeats on Sylvia Plath.

Plath's approach to writing was significantly affected by Yeats's poetry style, which is marked by rich imagery, melody, and a blending of the intimate and the fantastical. Plath borrowed similar approaches from Yeats, whom she found to be a master of vivid and evocative language, for her own works. Both poets used lyrical and rhythmic elements to heighten the emotional effect of their poetry. Plath found great resonance in Yeats' examination of universal issues like love, grief, and the human condition. His use of symbolism, especially the way he incorporated myth and folklore, inspired her. Similar to Yeats, Plath aimed to explore the depths of human experience by expressing difficult feelings and concepts using metaphors and symbolism. Plath was greatly influenced by Yeats's investigation of Irish national identity and his link to Irish mythology.

2.4.1 W.B. Yeats' influence on Plath's works:

Plath was drawn to Yeats' appreciation of cultural heritage and his ability to imbue his poetry with a sense of location and history, despite the fact that she was not Irish. This effect is evident in Plath's own investigations into her cultural and personal identities, especially in poems like "The Moon and the Yew Tree" (1963).

Sylvia Plath's poetry was greatly influenced by Yeats. Yeats' use of symbolism, myth, and the investigation of universal and personal themes won Plath over. Plath was moved by Yeats's skill at fusing the legendary and the personal, and she found inspiration in his writing. Plath's own poetry was particularly influenced by Yeats's study of Irish folklore and his use of colourful and expressive language. It is said that Yeats's poem "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917) served as the inspiration for Plath's poem "The Moon and

the Yew Tree." Thus, Yeats' influence on Plath's themes and poetic voice is evident. Many people believe that Yeats had an influence on Plath's poem "The Moon and the Yew Tree." Similar themes to those found in Yeats' poetry, Plath addresses themes of death, spirituality, and time passing in this poem. Furthermore, "The Moon and the Yew Tree" alludes to Yeats's own poetic style through the use of natural imagery and the addition of mythological elements. Even though Plath found her own voice, Yeats' influence can be seen in the themes and imagery of this specific poem.

It is believed that Yeats had an influence on "The Colossus" (1960). Sylvia Plath addresses issues of identity, power, and the fight for self-expression in this poem. Similar to how Yeats did in his own poetry, Plath conveys these ideas through vivid imagery and symbolism, demonstrating Yeats' influence. Both poets were renowned for exploring the mythical and the personal and fusing the two in their writing.

Poets such as Ted Hughes, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, and W.B. Yeats served as inspiration for Sylvia Plath. She found Yeats' use of symbols and metaphors in his poetry to be quite impressive. Similar to Yeats' themes, Plath's work examines the difference between the material and the spiritual. Sylvia Plath examines the difference between the material world and a realm of revelation in her poem "The Ghost's Leavetaking." The ghost, symbolized by twisted sheets from sleep, makes a fleeting appearance on Earth before departing to return to its enigmatic home. One of the main themes in Plath's poetry is the notion of a severed connection between the material and the spiritual. She also employs symbols from W.B. Yeats' writings, such as the sun and the moon, which have comparable meanings. The sun stands for the ordinary, while the moon represents the timeless and archetypal. Plath deftly uses these symbols to give her poetry more nuance and ambiguity. For both Plath and Yeats, the sun and moon symbols are recurring structural elements; they can be found in the poetry in 'Ariel', 'Red Eye' and 'Fever 103°'.

Sylvia Plath discusses how perception affects how we perceive the world in "The Eye-mote." Untouched by human eyes, the devastation of the landscape finds balance through creative perception. This causes a shift from harmony to duality, with the lunar Eden and the solar wasteland representing contrasting states. Plath frequently looks to myths, such as Oedipus, for inspiration when examining the destiny of the poet-seer. She explores incarnation and self-sacrifice in other poems, comparing it to Christ's journey. (Gary, 146)

Sylvia Plath examines the concept of sacrifice and the comparison between a candle and a child in her poem "Candles." The candles stand for one's personal dedication to spirituality, while the child represents purity and a link to something eternal. Everything appears to be in balance at first, including the child and the candles. The candles, however, give themselves up and burn out to provide light. The resinous heart of man is the source of this sacrifice. The candles eventually burn out and resemble the bodies of saints. The poem raises questions about innocence, the fleeting nature of life, and the hidden complexities behind acts of self-sacrifice. (Gary, 147)

Later poems by Sylvia Plath center on the journey, which is marked by strong feelings and challenges. The "eating game" represents how a child's innocence is devoured by the outside world and their connection to eternity is severed. In "Morning Song," the contrast between birth and the fading of celestial beauty is symbolized by the window brightening and hiding the stars. The contrast between birth and death in "Mary's Song" forges a potent framework. In "Nick and the Candlestick," the birth of the child is commemorated, but in contrast to Bethlehem and Golgotha, the burning candle also symbolizes death. "Brasilia" examines the dove's annihilation, which can be interpreted as both a Crucifixion and a fatal annunciation, while "Winter Trees" combines images of Mary and pietas with the trees. (Gary, 149)

The allusion to a phoenix-like "comeback in broad day" in Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus" alludes to a theme of rebirth and escape. Yeats's investigation of Eastern occultism and reincarnation theories had an impact on Plath. Plath included the concept of reincarnation in her later poems, such as "Getting There" and "Totem." In "Getting There," the narrator takes the reader on a journey of purification and renewal as they pass from birth to rebirth, releasing the burdens of previous lives. But in "Totem," the wheel of reincarnation is depicted as a repetitive treadmill where the same person develops in each new life. Death is portrayed by Plath as a well-armed spider and as a web of repetition.

Plath addresses the idea of achieving transcendence and nirvana as a means of finding renewal in her later poems. Achieving transcendence entails rising above the ordinary and attaining a higher plane of existence. Enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of birth and death are known as nirvana. In "Fever 103°," the protagonist undergoes a transformation into a pure entity and ascends to paradise through a process of self-renunciation. But there's also the fear of becoming caught up in the never-ending cycle of reincarnation. (Gary, 149)

There is no denying W.B. Yeats' influence on Sylvia Plath's poetry. Yeats clearly influenced Plath's work, as evidenced by the way they explored related themes, incorporated symbolism, and had a similar poetic style. Plath developed a distinct poetic voice through his influence that combined introspection with a universal resonance. Plath's poetry demonstrates the enduring power of poetic inspiration and influence, carrying on Yeats' legacy.

CHAPTER 3: Colliding Perspectives: The Impact Of Al Alvarez and Richard Sassoon on Plath's Artistic Journey

Al Alvarez and Richard Sassoon both had a profound impact on Plath's artistic development and personal growth. Their influence can be seen in her poetry and prose, as they helped shape her unique voice and perspective. Al Alvarez, a poet and critic, played a significant role in Plath's life. He introduced her to the world of poetry and encouraged her to pursue her writing. Alvarez's guidance and support helped shape Plath's poetic style and influenced her literary aspirations. On the other hand, Richard Sassoon was Plath's therapist. He provided her with emotional support and helped her navigate through her struggles. Their therapeutic relationship allowed Plath to explore her emotions and experiences, which in turn influenced her writing.

3.1. Al Alvares : Sylvia Plath's Close Friend and Trusted Critic.

Al Alvarez had a profound influence on Sylvia Plath's writing. He introduced her to the world of poetry and became a mentor figure in her life. Alvarez encouraged Plath to explore her own poetic voice and guided her through the process of refining her writing style. One of the ways Alvarez influenced Plath was by exposing her to a wide range of poets and poetic styles. He introduced her to poets like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, expanding her literary horizons and inspiring her own creative endeavors. Alvarez's knowledge and passion for poetry sparked Plath's curiosity and motivated her to delve deeper into the art form.

Additionally, Alvarez provided valuable feedback and critique on Plath's work. He helped her develop a keen eye for detail and encouraged her to experiment with different

poetic techniques. Through their discussions, Alvarez challenged Plath to push the boundaries of her writing, urging her to explore new themes and perspectives. Furthermore, Alvarez played a pivotal role in shaping Plath's confidence as a writer. His belief in her abilities and his encouragement gave her the courage to pursue her artistic ambitions. He provided a supportive and nurturing environment where Plath felt free to express herself and explore her emotions through her writing.

The story of A. Alvarez and Sylvia Plath's later poetry, as well as the story of how that poetry was initially told to the public, are essentially the same. Alvarez has acted as a mediator between us and the poet ever since we became aware of Plath's poetry and became intrigued by her life. A. Alvarez read Plath's poetry, offered criticism, and supported her writing before publishing it in the 'Observer.' Alvarez was the critic who argued for that later poetry the most after Plath committed suicide. In the second edition of his best-selling Penguin anthology, 'The New Poetry,' Alvarez prominently featured Plath's writings. After the publication of the memoir 'The Savage God,' which was included in Alvarez's study on suicide, the public became increasingly fascinated with Plath's life and death. Alvarez is credited with starting Plath criticism, Plath biography, and the publication of some of the poems. It has been nearly hard for those who have followed to write in-depth essays on Plath without mentioning him or his work. The couple was also friends with Alvarez, who met with Plath multiple times after her breakup with Hughes and served as the first person to read some of her later poems. From 1955 to 1965, Mr. Alvarez served as the poetry editor and critic for The Observer, a London Sunday newspaper. He made it his goal to publish the poetry of Younger poets like Mr. Hughes and Ms. Plath, who through exploring novel emotional themes in their poetry, grew to be close friends with him.

"I think I was around at a really important period in English poetry, when Ted, Sylvia, these people were really making a real difference," Mr. Alvarez told *The Daily Telegraph* in 2013

During her lifetime, Plath's fame was limited to her fellow poets. However, the posthumous publication of her 'Ariel' poems—many of which were written in a cathartic and voracious rush following the breakdown of her marriage to Hughes in 1962—helped her become more well-known throughout the 1960s. Alvarez was initially closer to Hughes, but after the couple split up, he spent more time with Plath and came to believe that she was the more talented of the two. In 2004, he told *The Guardian*, "I would pour her a drink and she would settle cross-legged on the floor in front of the stove and read me her new poems." "I can't recall how many visits she made, maybe three or four, but I heard enough to know that a good amount of the poems that made up 'Ariel' and realize that what I was hearing was fresh and exceptional. This was brought up by Alvares in 'The Observer.'

Following Alvarez's visit to Plath and Hughes in Devon in June 1962, their relationship underwent a new stage. Alvarez was informed by Plath that she was writing again and that she would like to show him some of her most recent poems. Without Hughes' knowledge, 'Event' and 'The Rabbit Catcher,' which both depict the miserable state of Plath and Hughes' marriage, were sent to Alvares on July 21. In a letter dated July 24, 1962, Alvarez praised 'The Rabbit Catcher,' even though he was unable to get it published at the time. 'Event' was released in December. Now that Alvarez was enjoying poetry, Plath's husband had not read any. Forwarding documents to Alvarez had evolved into a private act that broke down the editor's confidence in a marriage and also defied intimacy—

first in the marriage, then in the confidence. The phone would reach a riddle ship of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, if Alvarez liked it.

Alvarez did publish one poem in the *Observer*, "Crossing the Water," which debuted on September 23, 1962. "The Savage God" states that Plath first showed up at Alvarez's London apartment unannounced one afternoon soon after the publication of that poem. She read aloud a few poems, including "Berck Plage," "The Moon and the Yew Tree," and "Elm." The chronologies employed by some of Plath's biographers conflict with the implied late September dating in Alvarez's account. For example, Anne Stevenson suggests that Plath spoke with Alvarez for the first time during her visit on October 29–30. This appears to be incorrect. Plath was invited at the end of October, and a month is a long time to drop by without an appointment after the appearance of a poem. During her October visit, Plath did not limit herself to previously published poems; instead, she read "Lady Lazarus" for the British Council, a poem she had completed on the 29th. On September 25–26, Plath traveled to London to meet with her attorney; she spent the night in Hampstead with Suzette and Helder Macedo. Since Alvarez also resided in Hampstead, Plath could have easily visited him to express her gratitude for publishing her poem. Plath showed up without warning for other reasons. In Alvarez's autobiography, he writes that Ted Hughes slept at Alvarez's apartment for the first three days after leaving Plath, and that Hughes would have only recently left. The 25–26 September meeting is almost a given, given these facts and circumstances. Thus, October 1962—Plath's busiest writing month—coincides with her starting to consider Alvarez as an immediate, highly esteemed audience. (Wootten, 222)

Alvarez's subsequent encounters with Plath can also be fairly confidently dated. An incomplete list of the poems read from those included in Alvarez's text can also be compiled, as can Plath's responses to the meetings at the time as revealed in her

correspondence. On October 25, Plath wrote to her brother and his spouse, informing them that the Observer critic would be spending an afternoon with her to hear all of her new poems; with delight, Plath describes Alvarez as "the opinion-maker in poetry over here." Furthermore, Alvarez informed Plath that, since Emily Dickinson, she is the first female poet he has respected. This was the meeting that happened during Plath's visitation on October 29–30. The next meeting happened to coincide with Plath's joy upon discovering the apartment in 23 Fitzroy Road, which she had written to her mother on November 7. (Wootten, 222)

Plath read 'Lady Lazarus', 'Daddy,' 'the Bee Poems', 'The Applicant,' 'Fever 103,' and 'Ariel' at the October or November meeting. First, a rose petal-adorned 'Letter in November,' dated November 11, 1962, was sent by mail to Alvarez. Alvarez includes this poem in his list of poems read at his apartment. Thus, it had to have been read during Plath's visit to London on December 3, a date noted by Linda Wagner Martin; it's also possible that another poem, "Getting There," which was written on November 6, was read during that visit. Plath must have told Alvarez what was in the Ariel manuscript at this time because on December 14, 1962, she wrote to her mother stating that "Alvarez believed my second book, which I had just finished, should win the Pulitzer Prize." (Wootten, 223)

Regardless of any additional correspondence during this period, Alvarez's surprise at Plath's state on Christmas Eve 1962 suggests a considerable amount of time had passed since their last encounter. In his memoirs, he notes that he didn't see Plath very often at this time due to her relocation to a new residence. 'Death & Co.' was one of the poems read at that Christmas Eve gathering at Plath's apartment. Alvarez remembers a difficult farewell where he turned down Plath's plea to stay. The two never got together again. Nonetheless, following the Observer's January 13, 1963, publication of 'Winter Trees,'

Plath did correspond with Alvarez (Wootten, 223). Thus, for a total of nearly three months, Alvarez assumed the role of the first audience for the poems and the giver of insightful criticism and acclaim—a role previously held by Ted Hughes. Alvarez had recently gone through a trying divorce and had come out of a suicide attempt. These, along with their common appreciation of poetry, brought him as close to being the perfect reader as Plath was likely to find.

Actually, Alvarez made a better listener than a reader. Aside from the "Letter in November," he was first exposed to these poems orally rather than through written text at Plath's insistence. Plath believed that the arrangement had clear benefits. She was penning poems, which are rarely regular in meter when they are written down. Once their prosody is heard, however, it is more difficult to refute; Alvarez favors "ear-count" over "finger-count." Plath was able to write her poetry orally, deliver them orally, insist on the poems' orality being paramount, and still have them published in print. There was one more benefit. Without really submitting her poems, Plath was showing them off to an editor. By doing so, she could avoid the typical game of speculating which editor might be interested in which poem and find out which poems Alvarez liked. She could then decide whether or not to give him the poems he requested.

Sometimes Plath would swoon over her editor's poetry, so it's tempting to search for Plath's debts to Alvarez's own poetry. The hunch is not well supported by poetry. 'Back,' which appears to be about Alvarez's 1961 suicide attempt, may be an exception. The story's narrator returns "from the hospital," only to experience "the whole performance again... three times," a triple death scene evocative of 'Lady Lazarus's' three deaths. (Wootten, 224) It's possible that Plath was aware of the poem and took inspiration from it,

or it could just highlight some parallels between how both of their past experiences shaped who they are now.

Sylvia Plath's interviews show that while she had her own thoughts and interests, Alvarez played a significant role in shaping and refining her ideas. In an earlier interview, Plath expressed fascination with topics like big business, the military, and genetic effects of fallout, which indirectly influenced her poetry. However, she believed her poems were more like "deflections" from these subjects rather than direct expressions. In the later October interview, Plath's poems reflected a stronger connection to personal experiences and the world, indicating Alvarez's impact on her artistic development.

Emphasizing Alvarez's influence on Plath's work can lead to accusations of unjustifiable appropriation. It may seem like Plath is using historical tragedies, such as the Holocaust and Hiroshima, as a fashion statement or to impress influential people. However, some may argue that Plath's use of specific tragedies in individual poems can be valid. On the other hand, Plath's connection to Alvarez helps us understand her approach to historical tragedy. Instead of focusing on specific historical details, Plath often evokes a broader concept of overwhelming and incomprehensible suffering. "Getting There," a poem with an unclear and inconsistent past, can be seen as a masterpiece of Plath's artistic style rather than an exception. The poem captures the vast scope and horror of history, without needing to provide specific details or victims.

As Plath read the poem to him that he most liked, Alvarez singled out 'Ariel' and told her that it "was the best thing she had done." He writes that she sent him a copy of it a few days later, meticulously handwritten in her thick, rounded script and illuminated like a medieval manuscript with flowers and decorative squiggles. The fair version of the poem, housed in the British Museum's Alvarez archive, is dedicated 'for Al' and appears more like a prize school assignment meant to impress a beloved teacher than a medieval

manuscript. It is an inscription of mutual keennesses: Plath's desire to impress Alvarez and Alvarez's focus on her work. After reading it, it seems reasonable to argue that Plath chose Ariel as the title for her second volume rather than other previously suggested options because of Alvarez's enthusiasm. (Wootten, 228)

What, then, did Alvarez find unique about "Ariel"? He remarks that the poem is "curiously "substanceless" in the first piece he wrote for the BBC Third Programme and the Review. Although the reader may sense the horse, they do not see it because all of the detail is internal. The horse itself seems to be experiencing something emotional. 33 Thus, the poem explores more than just the stallion "Ariel"; rather, it explores what happens when the "stasis in darkness" breaks and the animal's potential for violence is unleashed along with the rider's violence. Plath, the poet, as an abstract expressionist; in Alvarez's hands, "Ariel" is a fairly abstract, fast-moving poem, full of violence and emotion. (Wootten, 229)

Edward Butcher objects to Alvarez's interpretation of "Ariel," pointing out that Plath's love of double entendres is evident in the poem's use of the sperm cell as a primary metaphor. Although Butcher's interpretation might have merit, it makes the poem appear more vulgar than it did when it was in Alvarez's hands. It occurs to me that, if Butcher is correctly interpreting Plath, Alvarez has misinterpreted the poet more than herself. Once more, Butcher is subtly criticizing the ways in which Alvarez's fixation on speed informs his analysis and commentary. (Wootten, 229) The poem's recklessness, hurtling style, and abstraction are all much more deserving of praise than any cod-Freudian sexual references. It was clear from Plath's desire to dedicate the poem to Alvarez that she believed he understood it.

The late poems 'Edge,' 'Contusion,' 'The Fearful,' and 'Kindness,' along with Alvarez's brief note, "A Poet's Epitaph," were published by the Observer as soon as Plath

passed away, indicating her loss to literature. Alvarez edited 'The Last Poems of Sylvia Plath,' a collection of poems that appeared in *The Review* and gained more exposure after being published in *Encounter*. The poems included 'Daddy,' 'Lady Lazarus,' 'Fever 103°,' 'Ariel,' 'Poppies in October,' 'Nick and the Candlestick,' 'Brasilia,' 'Mary's Song,' and 'Lesbos.' Such publications served primarily to publicize the poems. (Wootten, 231)

Overall, Al Alvares's influence on Sylvia Plath cannot be overstated. He introduced her to the world of poetry, provided guidance and feedback, and fostered her growth as a writer. His impact can be seen in the depth and intensity of Plath's poetry, as well as her unique voice and perspective. Alvares's mentorship was instrumental in shaping Plath's literary career and leaving a lasting legacy in the world of poetry.

3.2 Richard Sassoon: The Ex Who Played a Part in Sylvia Plath's Artistic Journey

Richard Sassoon, Plath's therapist, played a significant role in influencing her life and writing. As her therapist, Sassoon provided Plath with emotional support and helped her navigate through the challenges she faced. Sassoon created a safe space for Plath to explore her emotions and experiences. Through their therapeutic relationship, Plath was able to delve into the depths of her psyche, addressing her struggles with mental health and personal demons. This introspective journey had a profound impact on her writing.

Sassoon's influence on Plath can be seen in the themes and subject matter of her poetry. He encouraged her to confront her innermost thoughts and feelings, which she fearlessly expressed in her writing. The raw and confessional nature of Plath's poetry reflects the deep emotional work she did with Sassoon. Furthermore, Sassoon's guidance helped Plath gain a better understanding of herself and her relationships. He provided insights and perspectives that allowed her to explore her identity and the complexities of her personal life. This self-reflection and newfound clarity found its way into her writing,

adding depth and authenticity to her work. In addition to the emotional support, Sassoon's therapeutic techniques may have influenced Plath's writing style. The process of therapy often involves introspection, self-analysis, and self-expression, which are all elements present in Plath's poetry. Sassoon's guidance in navigating these processes may have shaped the way Plath approached her writing and the vulnerability she brought to her poetic voice.

Plath once wrote, "Perhaps when we find ourselves wanting everything, it is because we are dangerously close to wanting nothing," in a letter she never sent to Richard Sassoon, one of her lovers. Nobody, not even Sassoon, saw this sentence until it was eventually published in 2000 along with her unabridged journals. Plath became involved in two significant pre-Hughes relationships shortly after this time. Wilson mentions that one was with the supposedly intelligent Richard Sassoon, usually from Yale, who was able to "liberate her sexually." (Aldrich, 2015) Sassoon, a distant relative of the well-known war poet, gave Plath access to an extraordinarily rich intellectual tapestry at precisely the right time. For his part, he was drawn to her for several reasons, one of which being her intelligence. By now, in her early twenties, Plath had produced a number of extremely popular poems and short stories. Later, Sassoon and Plath had a major falling out, shortly before Plath started her literary career in England after being awarded a Fulbright Scholarship. They would go on to spend more time together, most notably in Paris after she had begun her studies at the south of France and Newnham College, Cambridge. When Sassoon and Plath arrived at the Matisse Chapel, they discovered it was unexpectedly closed, which led to a heated argument. A few months after they first met at a Cambridge party, Plath wrote to him to inform him that she was now married to Ted Hughes, ending their relationship.

The rapacious poem "Pursuit" is thought to have been written by Plath for Ted Hughes. Primarily, Plath admitted in her journals that this poem is about "the dark forces of lust." Writing that it symbolized "the terrible beauty of death" and the paradox that the more intensely one lives, the more one burns and consumes the self, she scarcely comforted her mother in a letter as well. By her own calendar, the poem was written on February 27 and 28, 1956. Plath was still at odds with Richard Sassoon, who had abandoned her in Paris, according to her diaries. (Gordon-Bramer, 63)

"Pursuit" contrasts the political climate of France at the time with Plath's thoughts about her own dark, scheming, French imperialist lover. Despite her love for Sassoon and France, she closed her "doors on that dark guilt." The poem "Pursuit" is replete with African details, as the reader will quickly notice. The panther, jungles, black marauders, greed, and devastated land all fit in well with the news of the time, which was dominated by events involving Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco's liberation from French and Spanish protectorates. To be sure, "Pursuit" opens with the epigraph by French dramatist Racine, which makes a reference to Sassoon: *Dans le fond des forêts, votre image me suit.* (Gordon-Bramer, 63)

She traveled at the end of the academic year to meet Richard Sassoon, a Yale student she had met in America the year before. In the one photo we have of him from the 1950s, he wasn't a blonde navy hunk; instead, he was dark, French, and unremarkable in appearance. He has never discussed Sylvia in public, and the only letters we have are the ones she saved as a copy. With her signature seduction, she had written to him, asking, "Do you realize that the name Sassoon is the most beautiful name in the world?" There are vast expanses of grasslands with a Persian moon all by itself in a rococo lagoon with woodwind music, where the ebony monsoon passes through. All I want is the son of man who has that name and the moon that sounds like that name. To argue about Plath's unstable

personality, some have compared the savvy voice of the letters to the voice in her journals. However, Plath sounds like her journal self in her letters to her boyfriends, and her playful writing style to Sassoon is a welcome change after pages of carefully edited advertisement prose to her mother. They separated after strolling along the Promenade des Anglais together. "Will I ever be needed by Richard again?" she pondered in her notebook. As part of my agreement, I won't say anything until he does. "Winter Landscape with Rocks," one of her first fully developed poems, was written on February 20. It read, "What solace/can be struck from rock to make heart's waste/grow green again?" Who would enter this desolate area? (Biggs, 7)

"The Eye-mote," which was written "through tears" over Richard Sassoon, was composed in Paris on March 26, 1956, as per Plath's pocket calendar, not in 1959 as stated in *The Collected Poems*. Readers of Plath's journals and letters may also recall that on March 17, 1956, during the final week of her trimester term at Cambridge, Plath sustained an eye splinter. The pain was too great to be managed and had to be surgically removed. "How Oedipus and Gloucester in King Lear got new vision through losing eyes, but I would just as soon keep my sight and get new vision, too," she wrote to her mother while the doctor performed the surgery. (Gordon-Bramer, 63)

Sylvia Plath's poem "Mad Girl's Love Song" delves into the nuanced feelings of love and desire. In the poem, the speaker describes the person they are deeply in love with as both a lover and a tormentor. The poem effectively conveys the confusion and internal conflict that can arise in romantic relationships. It explores themes of obsession, desire, and the fuzziness of the boundaries between reality and fantasy. All things considered, Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song" is a profoundly reflective and moving work that exemplifies her ability to convey the complexity of human emotions. This poem was

written by Plath about her romantic relationships with her past boyfriends, including Richard Sassoon, whom she dated prior to getting married to Ted Hughes.

She writes, "I want a nonexistent romantic hero," in one of her diaries. She projected all of these fantasies onto others, such as her desire for her partner to resemble her father, Richard Sassoon, Gordon Lameyer, and, at the end, Ted Hughes. It's clear that she recognized this to some degree because she referred to herself as an Electra figure and wrote poems like "Electra on Azalea Path," (Harrison, 2013) in which she essentially connected her eight-year-old father's death to her wish for romantic projection. The majority of her work and numerous facets of her personal life are plagued by the spirit of her father.

Overall, Richard Sassoon's influence on Sylvia Plath was significant. Through their therapeutic relationship, he provided her with the emotional support and guidance she needed to confront her innermost thoughts and feelings. This exploration of her psyche, facilitated by Sassoon, deeply influenced her writing, resulting in the raw, confessional, and introspective nature of her poetry. Sassoon's impact on Plath's personal growth and artistic development cannot be overstated.

3.3 Intertextual impact of Sassoon and Alvarez on Sylvia Plath:

The artistic journey of Sylvia Plath bears a deep and diverse influences of Al Alvarez and Richard Sassoon. Alvarez was a poet and critic who brought Plath into the poetry community and fostered her creative expression by offering advice, criticism, and support. In contrast, Sassoon was Plath's therapist, providing her with emotional support and guiding her through the intricacies of her inner world. Together, these two individuals had a significant impact on Plath's development as a writer and person. We can learn more

about how Plath's relationships, creative output, and existence are interconnected by using the intertextuality lens to their influence.

There is no denying Al Alvarez's influence on Plath's work. As a mentor, Alvarez exposed Plath to a wide variety of poets and poetic forms, broadening her perspectives on literature and stimulating her artistic pursuits. Through their conversations, Alvarez pushed Plath to write beyond her comfort zone and encourage her to explore new themes and perspective. His encouragement and faith in her skills gave Plath the strength to follow her artistic goals. Furthermore, Alvarez's critical involvement with Plath's writings both prior to and during her passing influenced how the public saw her poetry and aided in her rise to prominence after her death.

A foundation for comprehending the dynamic interplay between Plath's poetry and Alvarez's influence is provided by the theory of intertextuality. Literary scholar Julia Kristeva defines intertextuality as the ways in which works are influenced by and make reference to other texts. In Plath and Alvarez's relationship, we can observe how Alvarez's guidance and critique functioned as intertextual allusions that shaped Plath's themes, writing style, and creative growth. For example, Alvarez introduced Plath to poets like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, giving her literary inspiration and allusions for her own writing.

Furthermore, Alvarez fostered a conversation between Plath's works and the larger literary canon by serving as a go-between for the public and Plath, especially through his editorial work at *The Observer* and his support of her poetry. Plath's poetry was enhanced by this conversation, which was formed by Alvarez's advocacy and critical insights and placed it in broader literary and cultural settings. Alvarez's viewpoints are incorporated into Plath's poetry, creating a kind of intertextual conversation that can be seen as a result of his effect on her writing.

As Plath's romantic companion and therapist, Richard Sassoon also had a big influence on how she developed as an artist. Through their therapeutic alliance, Sassoon gave Plath the emotional support and secure environment she needed to explore her deepest emotions. Plath's poetry is raw, candid, and introspective because of this introspective journey that she undertook with Sassoon's help.

The thematic and emotional connections between Plath's poetry and her life experiences demonstrate Sassoon's impact on her writing from an intertextual standpoint. A lot of Plath's poems, like "Mad Girl's Love Song," "Pursuit," and "The Eye-mote," were discussed in her therapy sessions with Sassoon and reveal the subtleties of her romantic relationships and her issues.

By utilizing her interactions with Sassoon and other people, Plath converses with her own history through these poems, weaving a complex web of meaning and feeling. Moreover, intertextual borrowing and adaptation can be used to understand Sassoon's influence on Plath's writing style. In her role as a therapist, Sassoon pushed Plath to face her deepest emotions, which she bravely conveyed in her poetry. The tone, imagery, and language of Plath's poetry were impacted by this process of self-expression, which was shaped by Sassoon's therapeutic methods. This gave the poetry a feeling of genuineness and emotional depth.

In summary, Sylvia Plath's artistic journey was influenced by both Richard Sassoon and Al Alvarez in a complex and wide-ranging way. Plath's poetic voice and perspective were shaped by Alvarez and Sassoon, who also provided emotional support, criticism, and mentoring. This added to the breadth and depth of Plath's literary legacy.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

Sylvia Plath, a literary icon of the 20th century, was not solely shaped by her own experiences and innate talent; rather, her artistic path was profoundly influenced by a variety of individuals who played significant roles in her life and creative development. From family members who nurtured her love for literature to mentors who recognized her talent and contemporaries who engaged in creative exchanges, Plath's circle of influence was diverse and multifaceted. Sylvia Plath's poetry is uncommonly rich, complicated and multi-masked with regard to both its meaning and function. Her poetry represents her desire repressed in the unconscious. In the poem completed at the age about 16, Plath says: "There is voice within me / That will not be still" (Plath, Letters 35). On the other hand, Plath's poetry also functions as the most direct means to carry out the wish fulfillment. The act of letting the inner voice uttered and the wish fulfilled, either intelligibly or unintelligibly, would certainly give rise to a feeling of pleasure on the part of Plath. Plath's poetry, in this respect, functions as a dream wherein she is able to perform as well as experience what is forbidden in real life.

At the heart of this circle were Plath's parents, Otto and Aurelia Plath, who instilled in her a passion for literature and intellectual pursuits from a young age. Their influence laid the groundwork for Plath's literary ambitions and provided a supportive foundation for her creative endeavors. At the age of nine, she lost her father. Ever since, Plath has been obsessed with the attempt to reconstruct the father and to restore the happy days spent with him. In her poetry, the reconstruction and restoration are carried out in a variety of measures. Among them, the most common one would be to identify with her father. Plath achieves the identification through practicing what Otto Plath has been doing when alive, i.e. the bee-keeping. The second way of reconstruction is to instill her poetry with varied

father figures, such as colossus, king and Fascist. For Plath, the recurrent father images in disguise function as the symbolic return of Otto Plath. Finally, the last means of reconstruction appears most dramatic and drastic- Plath tries to die one year in every ten.

There's no denying Sylvia Plath's influence on modern poetry. Her exploration of challenging subjects, her innovative use of language and form, her contribution to feminist literature, and her powerful and confessional style have all had a profound effect on the evolution of modern poetry. Many modern poets have been influenced by Plath's willingness to tackle personal demons and tackle challenging subjects, and her use of unusual syntax and imagery has ushered in a new phase of experimental poetry. Additionally, a better understanding of mental illness and its effects on people as well as society has been facilitated by her legacy. All things considered, Sylvia Plath has made a substantial and continuing contribution to modern poetry. Both poets and readers are still moved by her distinct voice and vision, and her work is still powerful and relevant now, just as it was when she was alive.

We may identify a number of significant individuals who influenced Sylvia Plath's creative path and her sphere of influence. Indeed, poets like A. Alvarez, W.B. Yeats, Emily Dickinson, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, and Richard Sassoon had an influence on Plath. These people had a big impact on Plath's life and career and inspired her with their distinct themes and styles. Whether through close friendships, mentorship, or simply enjoying their poetry, Plath's interactions with them clearly had a lasting influence on her own creative development. It's interesting to observe how these influences shaped Plath's unique voice and the subjects she tackled in her poetry.

Plath's poetic forebears and influences can be seen in several of her poems. As a result, while mimicry allowed her to practice her poetic devices in a way that was beneficial

to her, Plath only gave up on the grandiose, self-conscious speaker in her later poetry. Early poems by Plath, which lack the spontaneity of creation, reflect this struggle as the poet is consumed with structuring the poem. In Plath's early poetry, there is a shift from well constructed poems with restrained emotional expression to poems with stronger emotional palettes.

Plath was close friends with fellow poet Anne Sexton. They had a close relationship and mutually inspired each other's poetry, which both explored themes of mental illness and individual struggles. Sexton and Plath both express a wish to pass away and get away from the real world. Their psychological disorder—which stems from their life of depression—is the primary cause of their death wish. Both authors have the same desire to die; however, while Plath was able to somehow control her id and had three unsuccessful attempts at suicide before finally pulling the trigger, Sexton fulfilled her desire by killing herself due to her unstable personality.

Plath was first exposed to the confessional poetry movement by her professor and mentor, Robert Lowell. Plath was greatly influenced by his candid writing style, which encouraged her to explore her own feelings and experiences in her own writing. Not only was Robert Lowell Plath's professor and mentor, but he also had a big influence on the topics and style of her poetry. Lowell's candid poetry greatly influenced Plath and gave her the confidence to write about her own feelings and experiences. Plath was moved by his honest and unvarnished approach to poetry, which encouraged her to embrace vulnerability in her writing. Plath's growth as a poet was greatly aided by Lowell's advice and encouragement, and his influence can be seen in the confessional and reflective quality of her poems. It's amazing to observe how Plath's friendship with Lowell shaped her distinct style and added to her enduring influence in the literary community. Plath was influenced

by the modernist approach to poetry adopted by poet and novelist Richard Sassoon. She was impressed by his inventive and vivid imagery.

Another important figure who influenced Plath was the well-known Irish poet W.B. Yeats. His use of symbolism and mystical style, along with his examination of supernatural themes and themes like love and loss, enthralled her. Plath was deeply moved by Yeats's skill at creating vivid imagery and his strong ties to Irish mythology. His influence is evident in the way she uses rich, evocative language and explores these themes poetically. Throughout her career, Plath drew inspiration from Yeats' works, viewing him as one of her poetic heroes. It's amazing to observe how poets like Yeats' legacy can influence and uplift the following generation of artists.

American poet Emily Dickinson, who lived in the 19th century, had a profound influence on Plath through her unusual use of language and her reflective examination of subjects like nature, death, and the human condition. Dickinson has a cyclical and inconsistent view of death and how to approach it. By closely examining Dickinson's death poems, one can see how her attitudes toward death are complex and erratic. At times, the poet seems overcome by grief, sorrow, pain, suffering, and depression; at other times, however, one gets the impression that joy and hope overwhelms her.

The British poet and critic A. Alvarez was instrumental in Plath's growth as a poet. She was encouraged to write with honesty and vulnerability by him, who was among the first to see her talent. Alvarez supported and encouraged Plath in her writing as a close friend and confidant. He assisted her in navigating the literary scene and exposed her to the world of contemporary poetry. Plath found resonance in Alvarez's poetic style, which is marked by introspection and intense emotion, and it impacted her own candid approach to poetry. Plath benefited greatly from his friendship and mentoring, and this is evident in the honest, intimate quality of her writing. It's amazing to observe how the relationships we form

throughout life can influence and stimulate our artistic endeavors. These people exposed Plath to various styles, themes, and techniques, which, along with others in her circle of influence, shaped her artistic path. The breadth and depth of Plath's poetry demonstrate their influence.

In conclusion, Sylvia Plath's circle of influence was vast and varied, encompassing family members, mentors, contemporaries, and literary predecessors. Through their guidance, support, and inspiration, Plath emerged as one of the most distinctive and influential voices of her generation, leaving behind a legacy of poetry that continues to captivate and inspire readers around the world. Her artistic path serves as a testament to the power of human connection and the profound impact that relationships can have on our creative development.

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