Tzvetan Todorov speaks of "style as coherence and style as deviation": style as coherence implies form, structure, totality, a unique and harmonious assemblage of more general categories within the particular work, and style as deviation implies "infraction" or "transgression of a norm". He believes that style is neither coherence nor deviation, "nor a tracing made of this or that social stratum". In other words, "style" defies any such simplistic definition. According to Todorov, there are three aspects in an utterance - verbal, syntactic and semantic. The verbal aspect is important as it includes everything that concerns the writer's "point of view" (or vision). At the level of syntax (including phonetics) one can study rhythm, melody and the pattern of logic. And on the semantic level words may be studied from three angles: the "representativeness" of words is fathomed through their emotive content; their "figuredness" through the history of sentences; their connotative value can also be studied. The style of a writer explores states of consciousness through external means. Words, sentences, intonation, punctuation, images and metaphors, all serve as a barometer of the writer's mind. Thus, style includes not only the language and technique of a writer but also his mind and heart: the style of the writer "accommodates" a personal response to life.
In the work of a conscious artist there is no stagnation and the style keeps on evolving. In the poems of Plath we see a marked difference in the earlier and the later style. However, the change is not sudden; underlying the four volumes of poems by Sylvia Plath is a continuity not only in the thematic patterns but also in the stylistic development. Beginning with the highly self-conscious, deliberately worded and rime poems of The Colossus, the poet gradually found a voice and medium of her own which may be seen in the most perfect form in the poems of Ariel. The transition between the earlier and later style may be studied in Crossing the Water and Winter Trees.

Ted Hughes, in his "Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems", says:

"She wrote her early poems very slowly, Thesaurus open on her knee, in her large, strange handwriting, like a mosaic, where every letter stands separate within the work, a hieroglyph to itself. If she didn't like a poem, she scrapped it entire. She rescued nothing of it. Every poem grew complete from its own root, in that laborious inching way, as if she were working out a mathematical problem, chewing her lips, putting a thick, dark ring around each word that stirred for her on the page of the Thesaurus."2

But the later poems were not written so painstakingly. She wrote "Tulips" (Ariel)

"without her usual studies over the Thesaurus, and at top speed, as one might write an urgent letter. From then on, all her poems were written in this way."3
What is obvious from Ted Hughes' observation is that for the larger part of her poetic career, Sylvia Plath's poems were written laboriously and special attention was paid to each word. Every letter spoke for itself and had an indispensable function in the finished poem. The poems written in the earlier style have often been called schoolgirlish technical exercises or mere juvenilia, not in the least foreshadowing the acclaimed later poetry. However, one may venture to establish a link running through the entire body of work by referring to Peter Davison who feels that the last poems

"would never have come into being without the long, deliberate, technical training that preceded them. We can only perform with true spontaneity what we have first learned to do by habit."

J.F. Nims feels the same when he says, "without the drudgery of The Colossus, the triumph of Ariel is unthinkable."

While studying the poetic style of Sylvia Plath, it would not be practical to divide her work into poems written in the earlier style and those written in the later style. The work may be taken as a whole and the highly individualised use of vocabulary, verse techniques, images and other devices could be studied in order to determine the manner in which the poet has endeavoured to manipulate external symbols so as to portray inner states of consciousness.
According to W.E. Baker, the twentieth century poets markedly prefer the use of fragments, usually noun phrases or clauses, not clearly related to any one sentence. He feels that poets writing in English have altered the normal pattern of sentences in one of the following ways: by elaboration - adding lengthy clauses or parallel modifiers; by dislocation - arranging the fundamental units of a sentence in unusual sequences; or by fragmentation, as in the case of modern poets. In the light of this opinion it would be interesting to study the syntactical devices employed by Sylvia Plath, even though her work falls outside the period covered by Baker.

It would be interesting to compare the opening stanzas of two poems written by Plath - "Faun" (also entitled "Metamorphosis") written in April 1956 and "Daddy" written more than six years later, in November 1962. The first stanza of "Faun" (The Colossus) runs as follows:

"Haunched like a faun, he hooed
From grove of moon-glint and fen-frost
Until all owls in the twiggled forest
Flapped black to look and brood
On the call this man made."

While the first stanza of "Daddy" (Ariel) is as follows:

"You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo."
There is a marked difference in the style of these two stanzas. For example, in the first example, the alliterative sounds in every line seem contrived and the many words ending in /d/, /t/ and /k/ sounds create forced pauses that tend to slow down the rhythmic tempo. So do the repetitions of the /l/ and the /m/ sounds in the fourth and the fifth line respectively. However, the stanza from "Daddy" reads like a nursery rhyme, rhythmically rising and falling, mainly because of the incidence of vowel sounds in preference to the hard sounding consonants of "Faun". The lines build up into a euphonious rhythm. Thus the rhythmic effect of the two stanzas is markedly different.

However, this is not the case with the syntactic constructions which are more or less on the same pattern. Contrary to the contention of Marjorie Perloff who feels that poets like Sylvia Plath and Roethke prefer to use fragments instead of sentences, we note that in neither of the above examples is there any "fragmentation".6 The first stanza of "Faun" could easily be read as a complete sentence by rewriting it thus:

"Haunched like a faun he hooed from grove of moon-glint and fen-frost until all owls in the twigged forest flapped black to look and brood on the call this man made."

It stands as a sentence complete in itself. Wherein lies
the fragmentation? Similarly, the address to the "black shoe" in the stanza quoted from "Daddy" would also read like a complete sentence. There is no "fragmentation", even though there is "elaboration" as Baker describes it – Sylvia Plath lengthens her sentences by adding modifying clauses.

In fact, Sylvia Plath shows a marked preference for elaboration. For example, in "Faun" the sentence that forms the base of the five lines quoted is - "He hooed until owls flapped black". To this simple sentence Sylvia Plath has added, number of lengthy clauses:

Similarly, the first stanza of "Daddy" is built
around "You do not do, black shoe" (the meaning implied is
the opposite of "How do you do?"), the "black shoe" being
symbolic of a person - namely, the poet's dead father.
The rest of the words and phrases are mere modifiers:

```
You do not do
   ↓
You do not do ← any more
       ↓
(black) → shoe ← in which I have lived
       ↓
(like a foot)
(barely daring to breathe or Achoo)
```

Numerous similar examples can be cited from the early poetry
as well as the later works.

No doubt, there are a few examples of "fragmentation"
- using noun phrases and clauses not clearly related to any
one sentence. The best example would be "You're" (Ariel),
a poem of eighteen lines:

"Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
Frost to the stars, and moon-skulled,
Gilled like a fish..................
.................................
Vague as fog and looked for like mail."
Father off than Australia.
Bent-backed Atlas, our travelling prawn.
Snug as a bud and at home
Like a sprat in a pickle jug.
A creel of eels, all ripples.
Jumpy as a Mexican bean.
Right, like a well-done sum.
A clean slate, with your own face on."

In a rare Plath poem like this one we see that instead of complete sentences, fragments have been used. The poem, addressed to an unborn child, is more of an exercise or a riddle. However, the title helps us understand the poem: "You're" added to each of the sentences will complete the sentence structures and clarify all doubts regarding the meaning. Another such example is "Ariel". The first three lines are

"Stasis in darkness.
Then the substanceless blue
Pour of tor and distances."

Noun phrases have been used instead of sentences. The meaning may elude us unless we read on further:

"God's lioness,
How one we grow,
Pivot of heels and knees! - The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to
The brown arc
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye
Berries cast dark
Hooks -

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,
Shadows."
The poem does not seem to follow any logical syntactic development. The sentences are not easily comprehended because of the seemingly random juxtapositioning of images. But once we realise that the object of the poet is to depict a horse that has run wild with the rider hanging on to its neck, it is clear that these lines convey the unrestrained speed of the horse, Ariel, and the poet is here making an attempt to describe the flashing images seen by the rider as the horse gallops along over bushes and furrows. Thus, the purpose behind the senseless conglomeration of images is made clear and the two fragmented sentences with which the poem begins also fit in accordingly. The fragmentation does not hamper our understanding of the poem. However, even though there are incidences of fragmented sentences in Plath's work, they are rare. Sylvia Plath prefers using elongated sentences.

"Ariel" would remain a bafflingly obscure poem had it not been for Ted Hughes' illuminating remark:

"Ariel was the name of the horse on which she went riding weekly. Long before, while she was a student at Cambridge (England), she went riding with an American friend out towards Grantchester. Her horse bolted, the stirrups fell off, and she came all the way home to the stables, about two miles, at full gallop, hanging around the horse's neck,"

the reader would have to keep guessing the intention of the poet. In the poem the speed of the horse is indicated
not only by the conglomeration of flashing images but also by using fragmented instead of complete sentence structures. With the help of run-on lines what the rider sees in a split second is described in nine lines — the furrow, the arc of the horse's neck, the berries, and so on.

In most of the poems the syntax is remarkably straightforward, almost prosaic. Examples from Ariel are:

"If the moon smiled, she would resemble you." ("The Rival")
"What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?" ("A Birthday Present")
"Will the hive survive, will the gladiolas succeed in banking their fires to enter another year?" ("Wintering")

"I am flushed and warm. I think I may be enormous, I am so happy, My Wellingtons squelching and squelching through the beautiful red." ("Letter in November")

In the last two examples we note that just as in "Ariel" Sylvia Plath uses run-on lines for a particular effect, similarly here, with the use of enjambment instead of caesura, she succeeds in forming simple sentences without losing any poetic depth.

Whatever obscurity there exists in the poems of Sylvia Plath arises not from complicated sentence structures but from oblique references to private history. Just as the meaning of "Ariel" is clear only after reading Ted
Hughes' explanatory note, similarly other private references which are included in the poetry have to be known before the meaning can be fully understood. This is how one would understand the "cleft in your chin instead of your foot" of "Daddy" which is a reference to Otto Plath whose leg had to be amputated. Again, we have Alvarez's note on the raison de être of "Kindness" (Ariel):

".....her husband produced a strange radio play in which the hero, driving to town, runs over a hare, sells the dead animal for five shillings and with the blood money buys his girl two roses. Sylvia pounced on this, isolating its core, interpreting and adjusting it according to her own needs. The result was the poem "Kindness"....."8

This note explains the poem with its "rabbit's cry" and its concluding line: "You hand me two children, two roses." Such tendency toward private references is common in confessional poetry and often obscures the work. However, once the reader is made aware of the background and the private implication, the veil of obscurity is automatically lifted.

The opening sentences of the poems are forceful and boldly state the subject and mood of the poem, paving the way for what follows. Take, for example, the opening sentence of "The Eye-mote" (The Colossus):

"Blameless as daylight I stood looking
At a field of horses....."
Here, the very first word, "Blameless", prepares the reader for what is to follow. The speaker, innocent, blameless, is to be involved in a happening in which he/she will be wronged (blamed) and will have to suffer. Other examples from The Colossus are:

"Flintlike, her feet struck
Such a racket of echoes from the steely street...."
("Hardcastle Crags")

Here the note of desolation is sounded by the echo of the persona's footsteps and we are mentally prepared for the "Stone-built town" and the inhospitable countryside through which the girl walks, feeling a pervading sense of doom in the air. In the title poem of the same volume, the first sentence,

"I shall never get you put together entirely"

announces the sense of failure and despair that runs through the poem. And "Aftermath" begins with

"Compelled by calamity's magnet
They loiter and stare.......

The poem speaks of the morbid interest people (the "peanut-crunching crowd" of "Lady Lazarus") take in the disasters that befall others. The calamity, in this poem a fire, draws a large crowd that edges in with a voyeur-like interest. The theme is introduced by the opening line appropriately.
Just as the opening line of a poem announces the subject boldly, similarly, the closing line winds up the theme, thus forming an organic whole. "The Eye-mote" that introduced the persona as "blameless", concludes with the undeserved suffering that she faces and her yearning for an end to the same:

"What I want back is what I was
Before the bed, before the knife,
Before the brooch-pin and the salve
Fixed me in this parenthesis;
Horses fluent in the wind,
A place, a time gone out of mind."

"Hardcastle Crags" which introduces a lonely persona walking through an imposing countryside, feeling overawed by its silence, ends on the same note:

........"before the weight
Of stones and hills of stones could break
Her down to mere quartz grit in that stony light
She turned back."

"The Colossus" ends on the same note of despair that was sounded in the first line. The speaker, in a resigned mood, accepts the despair, the life of shadows that she has to face with no hope of redemption:

"No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing."

And in "Aftermath" the crowd of sensation-seekers at the site of the fire moves away when there is nothing more to see of the tragedy of the woman ("Mother Medea" as she is called):
"The crowd sucks her last tear and turns away."

Thus we see that the opening and the closing lines of the poems bind them into compact units. Arthur K. Oberg discusses "organic poems" (or "all-of-a-piece" poems, in Plath's phrase) with reference to "Man in Black" (The Colossus) which is an extraordinary poem of twenty-one lines that comprise just one sentence. Oberg believes that by means of a "suspended syntax and a sure logic ("to the left", "to the right", "yet", "and you"), the main figure of "Man in Black" rises out of the landscape that anticipates him and that he is a part of." Even in the later poems we have this "suspended syntax". Though not one of the later poems is as remarkably structured as "Man in Black", the sense contained does begin with the first line, run on from line to line, culminating in the final lines. "Purdah" (Winter Trees) starts with a jade figurine of a woman, "Jade - / Stone of the side, / The agonised // Side of green Adam"... and seems to conclude on a different note with "The shriek in the bath / The cloak of holes." The unity lies in the images that naturally lead to other connotations. The poem evolves by a train of associations, moving from the passive doll, the jade figurine, and finally culminating in the violent murder of the "bridegroom".

Similarly, "Ariel" begins with and ends on a movement. In the beginning there is a suspension of all
movement, "Stasis in darkness". But this is followed by "the substanceless blue / Pour of tor and distances" and for the rest of the poem the motion is unrestrained. The direction, however, changes when the drive becomes upward, toward the sun, in the concluding lines. Instead of the horizontal movement of the preceding stanzas, there is a vertical movement, the suicidal drive of the speaker hurtling, like an arrow towards sure destruction:

"And I
Am the arrow,
The dew that flies
Suicidal at one with the drive
Into the red
Eye, the cauldron of morning."

Rhythm, in the later poetry of Sylvia Plath comes not from end rhymes but from other devices like alliteration, internal rhymes, onomatopoeia and the placing of pauses (caesurae and secondary pauses) and emphasis on a particular word or group of words. Rarely does Plath resort to end-stopped lines; her preference is for run-on lines that give the impression of fluidity and speed. In the lines cited from "Ariel" we have an example of Sylvia Plath's use of enjambment. It may also be noted that there are secondary pauses in the middle of the lines "Suicidal, at one with the drive" and "Eye, the cauldron of morning." In both cases these secondary pauses are followed by an iamb and an anapaest:
Thus, even in the absence of rhyme, there is rhythm because of the distribution of pauses and stresses.

The pattern may vary from one stanza to another. In the following stanza from "Lady Lazarus" (Ariel), there is a dactyl, two iambic feet, again a dactyl and two iambic feet:

/ / o o / "These are my hands
o / My knees.
/ o o / o / I may be skin and bone..."

while in a later stanza, iambics and anapaests occur together with a spondee:

/ o o / o o / ~ ~ / "And there is a charge, a very large charge
o o / o o / For a word or a touch
o o / o / Or a bit of blood..."

The hovering accent over "large charge" emphasises the enormity of the "charge". The rhythmic effect is not only
from the internal rhyme ("charge" - "large" - "charge") but also from the alliterative /j/ sound of these words and the /b/ sound of "bit of blood" as well as the assonance of "touch" and "blood".

Just as the word "charge" occurs four times in five consecutive lines of "Lady Lazarus", in other poems, too, there is a repetition of words and phrases for emphasis and for special rhythmic effects. For example:

"I am, I am, I am." ("Suicide Off Egg Rock")

"Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries..." ("Blackberrying")

"Black lake, black boat, two black cut-paper people." ("Crossing the Water")

"Adhering to rules, to rules, to rules." ("A Birthday Present")

"The dead bell, The dead bell." ("Death and Co.")

"It can talk, talk, talk..."
"Will you marry it, marry it, marry it." ("The Applicant")

"You do not do, you do not do..."
"... the brute Brute heart of a brute like you." ("Daddy")

As we see, in each case, the words and phrases repeated serve to emphasise the sense of urgency that is felt by the poet. The repeated "blackness" and "nothingness" delineates the speaker's sense of doom and insecurity. The repetitive "I am" of the heart
denotes the stubbornness of life that can be irksome to one who wishes to end it. And "talk, talk, talk" begins to sound like the endless chatter that a person (here a woman) is capable of.

The early poems of Sylvia Plath (collected in *The Colossus*) in which the rhythm mainly emerges from the use of syllabic count, have often been called exercises in syllabics. In order to bind or unify the structure of a poem, Plath uses rhyme schemes and stanza patterns. "Lorelei" runs in tercets in linked rhyme (aba / bcb / cdc, etc.); "The Bull of Bendylaw" again has tercets though they are not linked (aaa / bbb / ccc, etc.) and there are some aberrations - in the first and the last stanzas the rhymes are irregular ("sea" - "orderly" - "Bendylaw" and "sea" - "belly" - "highway"). Often, instead of rhyme, there is consonance: the lines of the third tercet end in "feet" - "put" - "gate" and in the fourth "sun" - "again" - "run". In "The Thin People", which is written in run-on couplets, there is again an inclination to use consonance instead of more conventional forms of rhyme.

The poems of *Ariel*, though divided into stanzas (again, tercets most of the time) are in free verse but the
form is not loose or unwieldy. There is a greater flexibility of style and technique.\textsuperscript{10} Unity is imparted by the emotional content of the poem and by the choice of words that are alliterative or onomatopoeic. The rhymes are much simpler than in \textit{The Colossus} but more effective. The best example would be "Daddy" which consists of eighty lines out of which forty-one lines end on an /oo/ sound. Words like "you", "Jew", "do", "through" reverberate through the poem, making it a paradoxical piece that breathes love and hate simultaneously. The hatred that is directed towards "Daddy" is obvious: he is the "brute" Nazi, the "Panzer-man" who has to be killed. At the same time, the technique which the poet uses contradicts this fiercely expressed hatred. As Alvarez points out, the /oo/ sound in the English language is basically a cooing sound that denotes love and affection. So, in spite of the hatred it professes, "Daddy" is basically a love poem, as Alvarez says.\textsuperscript{11} The poet's use of rhyme has helped her express the ambivalent feelings of the girl with an Electra complex.\textsuperscript{12}

Just as "Daddy" invokes the spirit of the dead father, so do poems like "Lorelei", "Full Fathom Five" and the bee poems. In fact, most of the poems are addressed to someone - a child, a parent or a deity. Stuart A. Davis rightly feels that the psychic matrix of the poems of \textit{Ariel}
is "name-calling"; almost all invoke a real or imaginary being. The poet's method of sounding a first person voice speaking aloud (to another) lends emotional authenticity to the poems. Had "Daddy" been in the third person, it would have been a mere apology of what it is now. "Fever 103" gains in immediacy only after the speaker herself become the pivot of the poem with

"Darling, all night
I have been flickering, off, on, off, on.
The sheets grow heavy as a lecher's kiss."

Similarly, in "Thalidomide" (Winter Trees), after addressing the deformed baby the speaker counts her own blessings for having been protected "from that shadow". The thalidomide tragedy, when felt imaginatively on the personal level, strikes a responsive chord in the reader.

Often, the speaking voice indulges in defining itself and its emotions. For example:

"I // Am a pure acetylene / Virgin" ("Fever 103")
"I am no drudge" ("Stings")
"My body is a pebble...". ("Tulips")
"And I, love, am a pathological liar" ("Lesbos")
"I am not a tree" ("I am Vertical")
"If I am alive now, then I was dead" ("Love Letter")
Sandra M. Gilbert says that the female confessional poet "Struggles with her suffering, grapples with it in bewilderment", unable to classify either herself or her problem. "To define her suffering would be to define her identity, and such self-definition is her goal, rather than her starting point." As far as Sylvia Plath is concerned, she does define her own nature and predicament but contrary to what Gilbert says, the self-definition is not "in bewilderment"; there is a self-assured control over tone and situation and a detached irony prevents the poem from sounding like the mere case history of one facing trials in life. The "poetry of self-definition" (Gilbert's phrase) defines the emotional state of the speaker of the poems but with dignity and courage that evokes admiration, not pity.

Thought and emotion are depicted through the use of words and images that are startlingly appropriate. At first the choice of words may startle us or it may appear to be incidental. But, giving due consideration to Ted Hughes' previously cited statement, "every letter stands separate within the work" and "each word that stirred for her on the page of the Thesaurus" was taken note of, we realise that words are not used without a purpose by Sylvia Plath. Not only the superficial meaning but the connotative value of the words is also taken into account. When words
begin to sound like what they mean, they impart greater force to a poem. Onomatopoeic words are used by Sylvia Plath for poetic effect. In "Lesbos" there is

"Viciousness in the kitchen!
The potatoes hiss."

The "hissing" sound of hatred is obvious in the opening lines. The best example of onomatopoeia, however, would be "Night Shift" (The Colossus) where the "boom", the "clangour", the "thudding" and "pounding" sounds along with the enjambed lines give the impression of a factory working "without stop".

Often, words, images and sounds echo through a poem, looking back at an earlier phrase or pointing a cue to the ones that follow. In "Hardcastle Crags" there is an interplay of words and images. In the first stanza

"Flintlike, her feet struck
Such a racket of echoes from the steely street,
Tacking in the moon-blued crooks from the black
Stone-built town, that she heard the quick air ignite
Its tinder and shake..."

the "flint" of the first line looks forward to words like "steel", "ignite", and "tinder" that follow. The subsequent stanzas also have words like "firework", "pinch of flame", "indifferent iron", "granite ruffs" and "the quick / of her small heat". In the first two stanzas, especially,
the impression of a flame being ignited is conveyed by the use of the /k/ sound that figures thirteen times in the first eight lines (words like "struck", "racket", "echoes") "tacking", "crooks", "black", "quick", etc. The resounding consonant also reinforces the word "echoes" which is used thrice in these lines). In fact, the whole poem is built around the images of fire and flint though in between there are references to the fields, the "dream-peopled village", the wind and the dairy herds. The hills of "humped indifferent iron" are imposing as the whole poem reflects their granite weight and serve as an effective contrast to the persona who feels vulnerable in the face of such indifference to human life.

In "Getting There" (Ariel), as in "Hardcastle Crags", there is a repetition of sound and sense. The title indicates motion and the struggle to reach a destination, and the words used in the poem (verbs in the present continuous tense) imply movement, not stasis. The very first line, "How far is it?" strikes the keynote, paving the way for the phrases that follow: "wheels move", "Revolving", "I have to get across", "I am dragging my body", "What do wheels eat", "I fly", "unending cries", "Pumped ahead by these pistons", "I rise", "the train is steaming. / Steaming and breathing", "ready to roll", "The place I am getting to", "The train is
dragging itself, it is screaming." These lines anticipate the conclusion of the poem where the speaker reaches her destination and steps out of "the black car of Lethe".

Similarly, "Fever 103°" contains images that rise upwards. It begins with the fire and smoke of hell that rises upward, speaks of a Japanese lantern that is like the moon up in the sky, and culminates on a vision of the speaker rising to paradise. The rising motion keeps pace with the "beads of hot metal", the mercury of the thermometer that indicates the speaker's rising fever. The image of the "pure acetylene / Virgin / Attended by roses" appears incongruously applied to an ailing person. At first it is difficult to see the connection between the two, the Virgin and the patient, but looking back at the first two lines of the poem which speak of purity and the fire of hell (the fever) in the same breath, we realise that the intention of the speaker is to depict a purifying fire that cleanses the person who suffers it. The poem is remarkable for its imagery: a series of disparate images somehow synthesize so that they are ultimately linked up to give force to a single theme.

In the figures of speech that Sylvia Plath uses, the objects compared may not appear to have anything in common
superficially, but when they are joined in a comparison, they add depth and meaning to each other. One may not find any resemblance between a vampire and a father-surrogate, yet when Plath puts the two together in the following lines of "Daddy" -

"So daddy, I'm finally through.

************
If I've killed one man, I've killed two -
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood..."

after the initial shock has worn off, we realise that the hatred expressed by the speaker of the poem could not have been so effectively described through another metaphor. Similarly, there seems to be no connection between a child and money until Sylvia Plath, in "For a Fatherless Son" (Winter Trees) compares her child's smiles to "found money", thus expressing the joy that a mother feels in seeing her child. In "Purdah" the doll-like bride becomes a peacock when she "unlooses" herself, the peacock symbol indicative of the proud dignity of her bearing - the same pride that later makes her kill the master who holds her in thrall.

The images are not only appropriate but also evocative. A single poem may summon contradictory emotions through its imagery. In her poems about children the use of images conveys a mother's love, regret and fear for the child at the same time. The child is the "baby in the barn" but,
like Christ, he will have to live and die in a world of suffering and death. Again, the child is something that love set going "like a fat gold watch" and is adored by its parents. But the same parents will be unable to pacify the child when it cries; they will "stand around blankly as walls." Love and dread for the child are best expressed in the last lines of "Mary's Song" (Winter Trees): "O golden child the world will kill and eat." In the same way, the contradictory response evoked by the mother figure is portrayed through the placenta image of "Medusa" (Ariel). On the one hand, the placenta is the life-giving force, the mother responsible for the nourishment of the child; on the other, because it envelopes the child, it becomes a threat: not allowing its off-spring an independent life of its own, the placenta may even smother it.

In the poems of The Colossus the images indicate an outward movement: The flow of thought is from the persona to outer realities and (sometimes) back again to the persona. Just as "Hardcastle Crags" begins with the girl and moves on to the surrounding landscape, similarly, in "Suicide Off Egg Rock" the main character is portrayed against a broad perspective - "the public grills, and the ochreous salt flats, / Gas tanks, factory stacks". However,
in the later poetry of Plath, the movement is centripetal: images and symbols relate to the mind of the speaker. And the mind that is described is one that is in a state of withdrawing into itself. The moralised landscape of "Wuthering Heights" emphasises the insecurity of the persona; the blackness of "Crossing the Water" is expressive of "the spirit of blackness (that) is in us"; the sealed tin of acetic acid in "The Couriers" signifies the sourness of marriage that brings "Lies. Lies and a grief". Thus, external details serve to clarify emotional states and human relationships. In the first stanza of "Little Fugue" (Ariel)

"The yew's black fingers wag; Cold clouds pass over. So the deaf and dumb Signal the blind, and are ignored"

the yew tree and the clouds become symbols of failed human relationships, the inner alienation of man.

There are other symbols that deal with the disintegration of personality. "Lady Lazarus" speaks of

"The peanut-crunching crowd that Shoves into see Them unwrap me hand and foot - The big strip-tease."

In "Ariel"
"White
Godiva, I unpeel -
Dead hands, dead stringencies."

And in "Amnesiac", an uncollected poem, 15

"Old happenings
Peel from his skin.
Down the drain with all of it!"

These images of flaking away, peeling off, dissolving and disintegrating always relate to the state of mind of the speaker who is threatened in some way. A. Alvarez, relating such images to the mind of Sylvia Plath, says, "the more desperate she is, the more image thickens into image, dividing and multiplying like fertilized cells. 16 However, even when the poem is about an extremely disturbed person, the images are orderly and flow naturally. One only has to study the imagery of "Fever 103°" and it will be apparent that the disorder (here physical) of the persona is manipulated and controlled through the vivid imagery contained in the poem. Peter Davison feels that the images of Sylvia Plath depict her inner alienation: her images "connect the eye that sees but cannot understand with the heart that beats and cannot feel." 17 The disciplined orderliness of the images that represent the turbulent mind is in itself symbolic of the spiritual and emotional alienation that Sylvia Plath
Objects of nature, too, become symbols of the loneliness that man faces in an indifferent universe. Important symbols from the world of nature are the sun, the stars and the moon. "Sleep in Mojave Desert" (Crossing the Water) speaks of a countryside parched by the hostile sun (the sun that strikes the water "like a damnation" in "Suicide Off Egg Rock"). "Stars Over the Dordogne" deals with the theme of estrangement: loneliness and bewilderment is caused by the abundance of stars in the sky that look down on the speaker and make her realize that she has failed to adjust to a reality that is alien. In "All the Dead Dears" (The Colossus) we have "Stars grinding, crumb by crumb, / Our own grist down to its bony face." As for the moon, in "Moon and Yew Tree", along with the yew, it stands as a symbol of death. In "Three Women" it is responsible for the sufferings of women, causing miscarriages and barrenness. Whatever the context may be, the sun, the stars and the moon do not show any sympathy for the lot of human beings. They are aloof and detached, even contemptuous of human fate.

Just as the sun, the moon and the stars serve as contrasts to the lot of man, similarly there are polarities
in almost all the poems of Plath. Contrasting images impart depth to the theme of a poem. "Three Women", through contrasting images, establishes a basic opposition between the forces of fertility and infertility that bring joy or sorrow, respectively, to the three female characters of the play. This method of contrast is best employed in "In Plaster" (Crossing the Water) which explores the dualities that exist within a person, the "old yellow" and the new, white person, the sinner and the saint. In "Tulips", the central tension between the loud flowers and the quiet hospital brings out the difference between the healthy, blooming world of nature on the one hand and sickness and the mood of self-effacement of the patient on the other. The bright red colour of the tulips symbolising life and vitality, contrasts with the white of the hospital that stands for loss of vitality and death.

The colours used by Sylvia Plath are also extensions of the mind of the beholder. If in "Tulips" red is symbolic of life and vitality, elsewhere it may stand for destruction and loss of life. White is used not only for death, disease and sterility but also for purity. And black, again, symbolises death or the threat of an unknown doom. The colours used in "Three Women" are representative of the fate of the woman they relate to. In case of the Secretary (Second Voice) the colours red, white and black portend the death of her
unborn child. The Girl (Third Voice) sees the black colour in the eye of the swan as an evil omen and the black colour of her gown (after she has abandoned her illegitimate daughter) as symbolic of mourning. The colour white associated with the wife (First Voice) stands for the agony of labour that she goes through, the pain that makes her feel like "a shell echoing on (a) white beach". This pain is later associated with death and "blackness" when it become excruciating.

These three colours - red, white and black - are an effective tool through which the theme of death and birth, joy and sorrow, fertility and sterility is brought into full play.

The colours, images, rhythms, sounds and tone used by Sylvia Plath are directly related to the themes she deals with and so their symbolic values often undergo subtle changes. While studying their significance it is essential to do so in the light of the intention of the poet. Confessional poetry, being essentially subjective, internalises all external objects and events, making them mirrors of the mind. Even the seemingly casual devices used by the poet lend to the overall impact of the poem and help in driving home the meaning of the poet. The varied technical and stylistic devices used by Sylvia Plath are no exception; they, too, are inextricably linked with the thematic patterns of the poems and reflect the poet's response to life.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR


3. Ibid., p. 193.


5. Ibid., p. 194.


8. Caroline King Barnard, in Sylvia Plath (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 59-60, says regarding the comparatively free style of Plath's later poems:

"The movement towards flexibility and brevity can be dramatized also by simply cataloging different
stanza lengths in Plath's early, transitional, and late work. The Colossus contains one poem written in two-line units with irregular end-rhyme: Crossing the Water has none; Ariel has nine .... After experimentation in long stanzas, then, Plath generally returns in her late work to shorter, more economical, and more flexible stanza forms."

11. In "Sylvia Plath," The Art of Sylvia Plath, p. 66

12. Sylvia Plath, in an introduction prepared for the BBC but never broadcast, says about "Daddy":

The poem is" spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyse each other - she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it."


