POETIC DEVICES

Sylvia Plath is considered as the epithet of confessional poetry. Her poetry is called confessional and personal and is often placed in in the school of Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell. In reality she was influenced by these two poets. But she was different in manner and content from the two. The excellence of Plath’s poetry lies in the sense of language and metaphor and in her use of technique which makes her different. Plath was a brilliant poet and a good lyric poet especially in the poems of Ariel, which almost 43 years of her suicide seize the reader with their immediate power. Sexton says: “poems left behind were technique –lasting, but, actually over. We talked death and this was life for us. Lasting in spite of us, or better, because of us…”

In Sylvia Plath’s poetry there is a remarkable difference in the earlier style and latter style. As Alvarez says “throughout The Colossus she is using her art to keep the disturbance , out of which she made her verse, at a distance. It is as though she had not come to grips with her subject as an artist. She has style but not properly her own style.” Plath had an extraordinary descriptive powers; it is correctness and accurateness that combine the look of the things with their fearsome power of menace. She has the power of the visual, part of the preference for precision over rhetoric. The Colossus does not have the terrible intensity and the startling originality of the later poems. John Fredrick recommends The Colossus as a model of well served apprenticeship. He pointed out that the first book is structural and stylistic groundwork for the second but on comparing to the Ariel it has a cooler surface, a slower and more cautious approach to its themes. There is always a great art a craftsman skill ordering and shaping at work. In The Colossus the controlled style of Sylvia Plath has a persuasively rational tone.
John Fredrick praises Plath for her use of English meter for its mimicry of human heart beat and breathe rate, to write iambic pentameter. In “Kindness” she said “The blood jet is poetry / there is no stopping it.” As we know rhythm is the blood of poetry and Plath’s rhythm is like a heartbeat, fast in excitement, steady in calm - a heart rhythm. The existential heart could be technically called ‘iamb’. Rhythm in later poetry of Plath comes not from rhymes, but from other devices like alliteration, internal rhymes and emphasis on a particular word or a group of words. In Plath’s poetry there is reputation of words and phrases:

“I am, I am, I am”

The Dead bell

“The Dead bell”

“Death and Co.”

(Collected poems, 254)

Sylvia Plath’s early poems contain, the major poetic preoccupation of Plath’s literary career and are an important index to understand her poetry from her childhood she used poetry as an outlet for her inner feelings and impulses of her early work indicates the drift of her lifestyle. In Plath’s progress from early over nice and fussy pre-occupation with craft to her later freedom with poetic techniques. One would easily notice the presence of an early voice. On her chronological order Ted Hughes remarks that “her separate poems build up
into one long poem⁷. Although the themes and images remain same however she wrote with a greater flexible. This is mentioned in her own statement in a letter to her mother. “Writing sharpens life, life enriches writing”⁴. The tragic side of life is only tentatively present in her early poems because of her uncertain control over poetic form. Sylvia Plath employed vivid imagery and a reminiscent tone to convey her feelings of guilt, grief and anger. After reading her poems one gets aware about her power of imagery and personification which makes her poetry lively and fascinating. In Plath’s poems there is a mixture of comic and serious elements; it combines various types of rhymes and half rhymes in structured and free verse. Plath’s poems are graphically morbid, hallucinatory in their imagery, but full of ironic wit, tremendous emotional power, and technical brilliance. Her poetry is also known for controlled stanzas, elaborated syntax with its inversions and sub ordinate clauses and ingenious metaphors. Sylvia Plath uses symbolism, personification and metaphors to convey her themes.

“I Thought I Could Not Be Hurt” visualizes Plath’s tragic life. In this early sense of balance and symmetry is evident. The poem indicates the joyous side of Plath’s life. It is also an artistic piece and is notable for handling poetic craft. Plath had already become adept at handling the refrain- the last stanza being an effective variant of the fourth. This poem is in unrhymed cinquains, a stanza form usually in iambic tetrameter in the first four lines of each stanza. Plath’s uncertain control over meter is indicated by the clumsy splitting of “firmament”. The vocabulary of the poem seems artificial. For example phrases like the “the blue roof of/ the sky”, “spangled green and gold,” and “mirrored pool”. The use of symbol mirror is use many of her poems, beginning with “All the Dead Dears”. Her delight
for alliteration could be seen here in third stanza the “whirl-ring wings”. In her early the art of handling poetic devices is obvious from the poem.

“A Winter Sunset” another poem written by Plath at the same time is an excellent poem as it demonstrates what a future Plath poems would be like:

Over the earth’s dark rim
The day light softly fades
The sky from orange to gold
And then to copper shades
The moon hangs, a globe of iridescent light
In a frosty winter sky,
While against the western glow one sees
The bare, black Skelton of trees

Sylvia Plath in this poem portrays nature through vivid color imagery. The change of evening into dusk is seen in terms of sky changing form “orange” to “gold”. It shows Sylvia Plath was fond of imagery drawn from metallurgy. In her next poem “Gold Mouth’s Cry” we came across the terms like “gold mouths, “bronze boys” and “bright metal season”. In “Hard castle Crags” same imagery is found. It seems the metals gold and silver seems to be her favorite and they recur frequently in her poetry. In “A Winter Sunset” there is
attracting imagery like the barren trees look like “black Skelton” against the background of the “western glow”. Black Skelton “is used as a symbol of death. A major figure in her poetry. This attractive piece is a part of her mature work. Vivid touches of nature, gothic imagery and preoccupation with death shows her art of handling poetic devices. The poems written by Plath during her junior-high period demonstrate her understanding and control of basic poetic devices and rowing descriptive powers. Edward Butcher considers them “adolescent attempts to find images for the standard phenomena of nature, very few of them e exhibiting any special aptitude foe metaphor, but all of them remaining clever demonstrations of highly intelligent mind at work upon the problems of method.”

In “A Winter Sunset” there is control of basic poetic techniques and growing descriptive powers, in “Family Reunion there is the colloquial nature of Plath’s language. There is also effective use of metaphor in her poetry. These traits provide her authentic voice as are predominant in “Ariel” and “Winter Trees”. Also some dramatic monologues of twentieth century has been written by Sylvia Plath.

The “Family Reunion” has a tone of forthright contempt for relatives. In the opening there the speaker is unhappy at the racket made by the relatives on their arrival. There are various images of violence like “noon day heat/with copper claws”.

The narrator feel an atmosphere of violence as she hears the sound of “clash of people meeting.” The word “clash” symbolizes the breaking out of riot or the clashing of armies and then the sardonic introduction of the relative which is prevalent in the lines:
Fat always and out of breath,

A greasy smack on every check

From Aunt Elizabeth

There, that is the pink, pleased squeak

Of Cousin Jane, our spinster with

Faded eyes

And hands like nervous butterflies

While rough as splintered wood

Across them all

Rasps the jarring baritone of Uncle Paul;

The youngest nephew gives a fretful whine

And drools at the reception line

(‘Family Reunion’, pp.300-301)

In these verses there is an interesting use of colloquial speech rhythm; the varying line lengths combine line lengths with suited alliteration, assonance and rhyme to give this burlesque on her relatives a piquant flavor. In the last stanza we find the speaker at the top of the stairs and is looking down at the relatives who are waiting to swallow her:
A whirlpool leers at me
Absorbent as a sponge;
I cast off my identity
And made the fatal plug

(‘Family Reunion’, p.301)

In the concluding line we see duality in Plath’s nature. This dichotomy became more predominant with the passage of time. Plath “maintained her friendly mask with studies concentration and dutifully followed her mother’s guidance in mastering the social and cultural arts.”

Plath’s mental state could be clearly seen in ‘Family Reunion’: “I cast of my identity / and made the fatal plunge.” This duality is seen in her treatment of her mother. In her letters to her mother Plath is all sunshine and sweetness, but in The Bell Jar she rips her to shreds.

The poems that were written by Plath when she was studying in Smith College are filled with linguistic excellence and their craftsmanship is impressive. According to Mary Lynn Bore the poems which were written by Plath during Smith College time restate her “concern to find a balance in the elements of choice in critical opposition.” Due to this conflict of opposites we find disillusionment and tension in her works. In her diary she wrote “the worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt. And you are so obsessed by your coming necessity to be independent, to face the great huge man eating world that you are paralyzed”.

She used witting as a main source for the expression of her anger. She used the poetic
forms to express her states of mind. “The general charge against Plath’s early work is that she smothered her subjects in technique, and in these very early poems the surface polish does cover powerful fears,” says Margaret Uroff.

In order to see her poetic forms and thematic concern the following sonnet which was sent by Plath to her mother in 1959, project her interest in poetic devices. It shows Plath’s use of poetic diction and imagery which are predominant in the sonnet:

All right, let’s say you could take a skull and break
The way you would crack a clock; you’d crush the bone
Between steel palms of inclination, take it,
Observing the wreck of metal and rare stone

This was a woman: her love and stratagems
Betrayed in mute geometry of broken
Cogs and disks, inane mechanic whims
And idle coins of jargon yet unspoken.

Not man nor demigod could put together
The scraps of rusted reverie, the wheels
Of notched tin platitudes concerning weather,

Perfume, politics, and fixed ideals.

The idiot bird leaps up and drunken leans

To chirp the hour in lunatic thirteens

(Sonnet, pp. 82-83)

Sylvia Plath in a letter to her mother tells her that the mind was likened “to a collection of minute mechanism, trial and smooth functioning when in operation, but absurd and disjointed when taken apart. In other words mind was wastebasket of fragmentary knowledge, things to do, dates to remember, details and trifling thoughts”\textsuperscript{11}. The final couplet of the sonnet is the refrain of “Doomsday,” a villanelle for telling the destruction of the world. In “To Eva Descending the Stair” same type of clock imagery is used. A sense of doom is present in “Doomsday”, “Adomination” and in “To Eva Descending the Stair” and is the recurring feature of her early poetry. There is a conversational tune in the opening lines of the sonnet. The words like “crack”, “break “and “crush” suggest violence and such type of imagery is employed by Plath in her mature poetry. It also shows the potential violence in her nature: “I have a violence in me that is hot as death blood. I can kill myself or- I know it now – even kill another. I could kill a woman or wound a man. I think I could.”\textsuperscript{12}
“Admonition” a poem reminiscent of style of Emily Dickinson shows a bitter commitment of human love with the help of analogy in the first two stanzas:

If you dissect a bird
To diagram the tongue
You will cut the chord
Articulating song.

If you flay a beast
To marvel at the main
You’ll wreck the rest
From which the fur began.

(‘Admonition’, p.110)

The poem is well constructed and in the manner of Emily Dickinson makes use of half rhymes effectively.

“To Eva Descending the Stair” according to Plath, “another angle on the passage of time: is tried to juxtapose the eternal paradox of ephemeral mortal beauty eternal passage of time—a few puns: plot and schemes”. The villanelle as a poetic form depends on a tight structure and balance for its success and Sylvia Plath have employed it in “To Eva Descending the Stair” and in many of her poems.
In “Doom f Exiles”, first poem written after her suicide attempt and nervous breakdown, Plath talks of “returning from the vaulted domes/of our colossal sleep”, the infernal haunt of demon dangers. The concrete images of the poem presents a sense of change for the worse. According to Margaret Uroff, “Doom Of Exiles” presents the image of separation from an earlier happiness that will become dominant in her later work. The language of the poem has conversational ease and the rhythm is fluid. The use of alliteration – “seraphic songs” and “demon danger”-is however artificial.

In Plath’s early poetry clock is the chief symbol of life’s mortality, dictating mood of life’s mortality. In “Never try to trick me with a kiss,” love is rejected because life is ephemeral and subject to change brought about by time: “Each virile bachelor dreads paralysis, / the old maid in thee gable cries all day.” The bliss promised by the “save eternal serpents” is illusory as:

Sooner or later something goes amiss;

The singing birds pack up and fly away;

So never try to trick me with a kiss: the dying man

The dying man will scoff in scorn at this.

(‘Never Try to Trick me With a Kiss’, p.320)

In Plath’s world love finds no togetherness. She shows how couples become the victims of duplicity and the poems record the grief experienced. In “Jilted” the young girl she gives
an account of her thoughts at being jilted, the narrator records her guilt at having spurned her lover:

Once I wounded him with so small

Small a thorn

I never thought his flesh would burn

Or that the heat within would grow

Until he stood

Incandescent as a god;

Now there is nowhere I go

To hide from him.

(‘Jilted’, p.310)

In this poem there is a fusion of narration and description. There is an artful simplicity of expression and the language is contrived and evocative. In “Danes Macabre” Plath shows partial togetherness to the couples. The poem has Gothic mode and highlights the prevailing mood of cynicism and indifference at the core of her world. In it Plath uses Terza Rima- - a rhyme scheme which throws the thought forward until such time as the unresolved rhyme finds rest in the couplet. It shows Plath’s mastery over the poetic form. The imagery in “Dense Macabre” used by Plath is detached and grotesque, cold. The images are well employed and shows an integrated logical
development. First we have the image of the “grass-embroidered box” among the roots and rocks and then we observe the image of “fond/skeletons” lying in forgetful snow. This gives a Gothic appearance to the poem. Like Emily Dickinson Plath was constantly drawn towards death and destruction and like her she used the images of death and horror. In “The Dream” there is a dream vision in which the narrator while, “driving/down the dark in a black hearse “crashes “a light” and is straight away halted by a “raving/woman “and is asked to pay a fine for “damaging the whole unseen/lighting plant of the universe”.

“Second Winter” is the finest sonnet of Plath’s early period, in this Plath compares the inconstant nature of love to the sudden emergence of frost in the early spring. Plath has depressed the gloom of early love through the image of spring and its destruction through the images of winter. The most important thing to notice in the sonnet is Plath’s way in which she handles the octave and sestet, and achieves balance and tension. The eagerness and intensity of love are expressed in the octave through some exquisite horticultural imagery, colorful and animated. In sestet betrayal is shown through various images like drab and muted. In it Plath had employed the Shakespearean scheme of sonnet. The opening and the concluding lines are colloquial in tune.

“Epitaph in Three Parts” is another poem that is devoid of faith and hope. It opens with three telegraphic messages. The word “dark love’s assailant” in the poem is at once symbolic of love’s treachery and death.

In the early poetry of Plath her approach to poetry is professional. The rhythms and cadences of living language were incorporated in her poetry. She has used her traditional forms in her early works.
Plath in her first collection ‘The Colossus’ has used poetic devices to convey her message. In her poems she has used a lot of images, symbols to convey her message before the reader. ‘The Colossus’ which is written for her deceased father is addressed to an unspecified listener, who exists as a great statue. The poem is notoriously full of abstruse and complicated imagery. The poem is known for its brilliant evocative imagery and for its remarkable mood. The title of the poem allude to the ancient Greek statue that represented a deceased person. One of the remarkable thing is that the colossus was able to speak from beyond the grave, which illustrates its mysterious paradoxical allure. Plath uses the statue of the colossus to represent her lust to reconstruct her father for whom she longed a lot. She compared the statue with her father which showed her power of talent.

A blue sky out of the Oresteia

Arches above us. O father, all by yourself

You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum.

(The Colossus: ‘The Colossus’. P.20)

The poem is remarkable for the projections of disturbs state of mind of the poet as embodied in the thematic tension implicit in the spectral symbol of ‘The Colossus’. The structure of the poem is tight and well knit. The images stand out predominantly.

‘Beekeepers daughter’ is saturated with images of sexual and aesthetic fertility. The images that are used by Sylvia Plath in the beginning of the poem are flowers, bees and birds the
word ‘mouthing’s’ in the poem has a number of meanings and implications. It is used to explain the action of ‘a garden of mouthing’s’. The poem has apiarian imagery; many of the images are sensual in appeal: “many breasted hives,” “burrows narrow as fingers”, “a hole mouth, etc. the images are dovetailed tenuously. The structure of the poem testifies to Sylvia Plath’s craftsmanship.

In “All the Dead Dears” Plath through the image of skeleton shows her obsession with death:

How they grip us through thin and thick.

Those barnacle dead

the great grandmother

Reach hag hands to haul me in,

And an image looms under the fish pond surface

Where the daft father went down

With the duck feet winnowing his hair!

This lady here’s no kin

Of mine, yet kin she is; she’ll suck

Blood and whistle my marrow clean

To prove it. As I think now of her head,
From the mercury-backed glass

Mother, grandmother and

(All the Dead Dears, L.17-29)

The images like “barnacle-dead”, “mercury- backed glass” shows Plath’s art of expressing death through various images. Plath here tries to tell about the poet’s imagination, which is pictured female in nature. The images and allusions are not dispersed they are connected with each other and they show the effect of terror and power.

In “The Disquieting Muses” Plath creates excellent imagery and emotions are created by Plath in this poem in an effective manner. In this poem the imagery of color could be seen in different forms. The changing colors from black to green to black and dark yellow creates a depressive mood and shows her craftsmanship which is a characteristic of confessional poetry. The natural beauty is created in an artistic manner and the girl’s negative response towards the nature is shown in the following manner:

When on tiptoe the school girl danced,

Blinking flashlights like fireflies

And singing the glowworm song, I could

Not lift a foot in the twinkle dress

But heavy-footed, stood aside
In the shadow cast by my dismal headed

Godmothers…


The soft corner of the poet for her mother could be seen through various images. The last stanza of the poem strongly suggests that Plath represented her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother by the three women which are in the painting.

The poem is an apt example of how:

“….a poem, by its own system of illusions, can set up a rich and apparently living world…attempt to recreate, in her own way, definite situations and landscapes. They are quite emphatically, about the things of the world.

When I say “this world”, I include, of course, such feelings as fear and despair and barrenness, as well as domestic love and delight in nature. These darker emotions may well put on the masks of quite unworldly things-such as ghosts, or trolls or antique gods.” 

“Suicide of Egg Rock” shows how a man is escaping the imperfections of the world. The poem has stanza of thirteen lines, which ironically states they are unlucky in western culture. The development of life is shown throughout the poem through various symbols and abrupt death is shown in the last line. The ugliness of life is depicted through various
images like ‘public grills’, ‘gas tanks’, and ‘factory stakes’. Plath has used symbols how society will remain after death of a man and continue with the hustle and bustle of life. She has used the realistic landscape to make the man’s suicide authentic and not poetic. This shows her art of using the poetic devices in an effective manner.

“No pit of shadow to crawl into”.

Plath alludes to how death is justifiable. “His blood beating like the old tattoo”. The alliteration of the consonant ‘B’ in the “blood beating” shows the anxiousness the man is feeling despite his resolve.

It is ironic that he repeats,” I am, I am, I am” because he will diminish to a corpse. The man consoles himself in the onomatopia “Buzzed and assailed the vaulted brain chamber” by hoping that his body could be useful in scientific research. Water is not delight for him and it is noted by the cacophony of unpleasant ‘R’ sound. Sylvia Plath plays on the irony in the end “the forgetful surf creaming on those ledges” may have been something worth living for.

‘Crossing the Water’ is marked by an intense poetic development and creativity. There is no doubt that “Plath’s technical, thematic and imaginative coming of age”, in these poems “she has learned new vernacular, slant rhyme couplets, variation on the said tercet and quatrain, idiosyncratic rhythms and cleverly cumulative image pattern” 16. Plath has used clusters of imagery. As Bacheland argues in the Introduction “Imagination and Matter”, “The imagining powers of our mind develop around two very different axes. Some get their impetus from novelty, the picturesque, the varied and the unexpected.”18
The title poem “Crossing the Water”, is filled with imagery. The imagery in the title creates an expectancy and also suggestiveness of the symbolism of water as chaos water, transition between the ethereal and solid, between life and death, dissolution, instability, knowledge and memory stored in the unconscious; on the other, to its association with the ancient tradition of ‘Crossing the Water’ as a funereal journey over water, leading to what Bachelard calls “a culture complex”.

Blake Lake, black boat, two black, cut-paper people.
Where do the black trees go that drink there?
Their shadows must cover Canada.

A little light is filtering form the water flowers.
Their leaves do not wish us to hurry:
They are round and flat and full of dark advice.

(Crossing the Water, L.1-6)

There are recurrence of images of blackness in the first stanza. The black image symbolizes prime matter, the darkness of the underworld, mourning, penitence, fermentation and putrefaction, mystery, night, death as complete annihilation will thus contaminate not only the images it precedes, but also affect the other images on the “black lake” by retaining
only their negative associations. The image of lake reconfirms the symbolism of the
material element “water” of the title.

In “Face Lift” there is an image of the self of the persona, it functions as a mirror poem.

“Plath’s mirror poems originate in her doubts about her creativity and reinforces those doubts. They almost all reveal a person who feels “sterile, empty”. Plath’s sense of selfhood depended on her feeling of imagination fulfilment. Her interaction with systems of written language was not subsequent to herself but creative of self. When her mirrors show an individual lacking in creativity, therefore, they expose a self- already disintegration”19

Same type of landscape is described in ‘Parliament Hill Fields’. About this poem on BBC radio Plath said:

“This poem is a monologue. I imagine the landscape of Parliament Hill Fields in London seen by a person over whelmed by an emotion so powerful as to color and distort the scenery. The speaker here is caught between the old and the New Year, between the grief caused by the child and the joy aroused by the knowledge of an older child safe at home. Gradually the first images of blankness and silence give away to images of convalescence and healing as the woman turns, a bit stiff and
with difficulty, from her sense of bereavement to vital and demanding part of her world which still survives.”

The pain loss and acute loneliness of the female persona are fore-grounded by powerful and negative images from nature. The hill is described as “bald”, “faceless and pale as China”, the sky is indifferent and minds its own business, the gulls are like “blown paper”, the sun is “wan”, the wind stops the breath of the persona “like a bandage”, and the trees are covered by “as ashen smudge”. But in the later poem the image of the cypresses that are described as “faithful” and “rooted in their heaped losses” it introduces a feeling of sympathy leading to images of domesticated nature in the interior of the house that finally offer comfort.

In “Blackberrying” Plath takes the reader from the external world to the internal one through her poetic talent. She has used language and imagery in a controlled way leading the reader to see every word has possible double meaning and every image bring the mind something internal, some inner working of the speaker. The poem has no formal structure, a three stanza poem of irregular length. Plath’s use of devices like assonance and alliteration, or repetition of similar sounds is subtler than in any other poems by Plath.

“Blackberries/ Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes/ Ebon in the hedges…”

In this poem through the use of personification Sylvia Plath depicts the berries with human characteristic, as though “peopling” the scene with berries. They are associated with the speaker’s thumb and a lot of images have been used by the poet as in third stanza the image of the hook, in the curves of the blackberry “alley” or lane. She also introduces image of
the sea. Plath expands the setting to include the sky and other living creatures – flies and birds. They are described “in black” rather than “black” as if they are dressed in black clothes. The black color of the birds is associated with the black color of berries. There are a lot of examples were Plath has expressed her talent by representing the things with symbols and images. In filling her poem with the images of life’s abundance and deaths inevitability, Plath points to the uniqueness and the “problem” of human existence. Plath’s numerous similes and metaphors for the fruit underscore her joy at life’s abundance, and her personification of the berries shows her personal attachment to the natural world. The final image of the “Blackberrying” adds terror to the sense of awe, as the speaker describes:

That looks out on nothing but a great space
Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silver myths
Beating and beating at intractable metal.

(Blackberrying, L.23-25)

Plath’s collection “Ariel” is also a fine example of poetic art. Plath shapes simple word choices to evoke complex images. In “The Applicant, characterizations fuse with every day experiences. The images that are used by the poet are negative – a glass eye, false teeth or crutch, / a brace or a hook / rubber breasts or rubber crotch. The poem is ironic. Here woman is compared with a doll, through personification. She doesn’t have emotions and authority like doll which remains puppet in the hands of men.
In “Medusa” Plath chooses the title as metaphorical and is mythological reference to Medusa which is associated with Greek mythology and petrifying power, whose hair was transformed into writhing snakes. In Christian symbolism, Medusa represents drowning waters. It was Plath’s talent that she uses mythological references as allegories for both her personal and professional struggle with independence. Plath sharpens her poetic skills for effect.

Plath uses personification to show that the poem is about relationship. It is evident from the images that Plath is referring to her mother Aurelia. It becomes evident from the phrases like “old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable/ keeping itself it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.” Which indicate the raw strength of the ties that bind the mother / daughter relationship.

Plath’s use of “Medusa” as a metaphor for a jealous lover was a stroke of genius. The metaphor works so well and through this comparison Duffy is able to really get at the heart of feeling of a jealous person.

“Little Fugue” is Plath’s well known and successful poem. It is autobiographical in nature but is marked by her meticulous craftsmanship and adroit use of poetic devices. In the first stanza the poet employs the yew tree as a metaphor for her father. The poet presents a picture of a blind pianist playing Grosse Fugue on the black and white keys of piano. He is blind but his hearing power is very sharp and his fingers are sensitive like “the noses of weasels”, the poet cannot stop looking despite her sight. The poet remembers her childhood and her father, his “black and leafy” voice. But here the father is seen as tortured and euphemistically referred to as Christ. He suffers from dissolution and disintegration
Great silence of another order.

I was seven, I knew nothing.

The world occurred

You had one leg, and a Prussian mind.

(Ariel “Little Fugue”, p. 67)

Plath’s father died but she haunted for her, in her married life. The confessional tone of the poem is very attractive. The use of colors is also suggestive. The black color which stands for death governs the meaning of poem. There is remarkable compression in the poem, it has neat and formalized structure, having four stanzas. The yew is central image of the poem and represents the complex feelings.

In “Daddy” Plath expresses her intense emotions towards her father’s life and death and her failed relationship with her husband. There are strong metaphors used by the poet throughout the poem though shoes and feet are recurrent images in the poem; they take on different nuances of meaning as the poem proceeds. In the second line of the poem the speaker herself says to a foot that “lives” in a shoe, the shoe is her father. By analyzing this metaphor on an abstract level is much less helpful than visualizing it. The metaphor evokes various helpful associations. The image of the poem helps the reader to understand harsh side of Plath’s life. An example of this is when the devil is introduced with “a cleft in your chin instead of your foot / but no less a devil for that”. Father and husband are compared
with vampire blood sucking. In “Daddy” Sylvia Plath illustrates her feelings of anger and resentment towards her husband and father along with being oppressed for most of life through her poetic devices of vivid metaphor, imagery, rhyme tone and simile.

“Two Lovers and a Beachcomber by the Real Sea”, is a significant poem because it suggests the tone of disenchantment. It suggests Plath’s vision of sorrow and death”, it is also the most controlled early poem. Edward Butscher tells it “an object of art an intellectual exercise dense with conceits….21. The poem deplores the failure of love and loss of imagination and a thematic concern of her poetry. The language of the poem is spare, controlled, and unobtrusive and the verse has natural flow. Mary Lynn commented on this poem, “Elements of this poem contrast with the obtrusive verse texture and stock metaphors of previous work.”22

The poems opens with a note of irrevocability-“cold and final”. The decline of imagination is shown through “fabled summer house” closing up at the end of the summer. The loss of imagination and failure of love are seen against the passage of time. Thoughts that were once exotic and beautiful “found a maze of mermaid hair/ Tangling in the tide’s green fall” seem to have lost their creative power, and instead of mediating on the vast expenses before them ,they “fold their wings like bats and disappear/ into the attic of skull.” Here we see the metaphor of the “summer house” of imagination is transformed into “the attic of the skull” in this stanza. The last two lines give the picture of death and decay. In the opening lines the conceits are partly metaphysical and partly gothic, anticipating the kind of imagery that Plath employed in her poetry. The reality of the external world is presented through the figure of a lone beachcomber who is busy “probing fractured Venus with a
stick”. There is image of loneliness, rootlessness and poverty and of an abortive attempt to find love. The poem ends with a grim of reality. Plath noted in her diary:

What I fear most, I think, is the death of imagination. When the sky outside is pink, and the roof tops merely black: that photographic mind which paradoxically tells the truth, but the worthless truth about the world. It is synthesizing spirit, that “shaping” force, which prolifically sprouts and makes up its own worlds with more inventiveness than God which I desire”.

Sylvia Plath during her whole life time tried to resolve the conflict between the worthless truth of the “photographic mind” and the “synthesizing spirit” of imagination and this poem is an attempt to express the endeavor. Plath’s effort is like that of an alone beachcomber (a symbol of the “worthless truth” of reality) “probing fractured Venus”. The poem is about Plath’s authentic voice/style in the final line: “And that is that, is that, is that.” This kind of repetition is common in Plath’s poems.

“On the Difficulty of Conjuring up a Dryad” demonstrates the independence of external reality. The poet employs a tone of self-parody. She is of the opinion that she lives in a world “where no glory descends”, and hence she must settle for the less than ideal. The poem display verbal deftness, but its voice is uneven. Metrical and, but there is uneven. Margaret Uroff comments that “On the Difficulty of Conjuring up a Dryad” combines Stevens and Hughes, and such literary influences give the poem such a rich literary allusiveness, and renders them occasionally awkward as the personal voice is seen at a
disadvantage. Plath has used a number of phrases to express her inner conflicts as “Blind Sense” is a key phrase in the poem which suggests her desire to starve her senses, insinuates how blind her sensibilities are to her own limitations. This phrase also suggests the futility of the mind to impose its order on nature. Thus we see that Path was master in expressing the mental state through various images and metaphors. Plath’s early poems show her immaturity with the art of writing poetry but the poems like “Black Rook in Rainy Weather”, “Snake charmer”, “Ouija”, “Still Born” etc show her improvement in the craft.

“Black Rook in Rainy Weather” is widely acclaimed for its choice of words and its halting rhythm, and gives impression of a person who is guarded in her statements. The poem’s progression is in from waiting, observation and reflection to expectancy. In the opening of the poem Plath gives description of the black rook “Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain”. It is an ordinary incident and Plath does not expect any miracle or accident or through this image she tries to explain the normalcy of life. But there she uses a contrasting phrase “To set the sight on fire/ in my eyes” which shows a change of the state of mind. There she wants an expectancy from hopelessness/ Plath’s such use of devices differentiates her from rest of her contemporaries. The poem has been carefully crafted, “It uses the same stanza from ‘Vanity Fair’ to organize with considerable suppleness its rather prosaic utterance…”24. This poem has a new perception; a poem that provides hope and confidence in herself as a poet. In terms of Edward Butscher “‘Black Rook in Rainy Weather’ shows matureness of Plath’s art after marriage.

In “The Glutton” Sylvia Plath shows her anger towards male society through various images. Men are characterized as fierce and savage creatures whose very savagery is appealing to women. The marauding nature of man is presented in the “Queen’s
Complaint” which talks of a giant,” who “after solacing a queen, quit her at cock’s crowing”, the queen is thus abandoned, finds no man his equal and is doomed to trick. Through this image Plath showed how she was tricked by Hughes after their first encounter. She says how she admired him after their first encounter. Hughes is visualized as one whom all nature adores and obeys:

For his least lest look, scant acres yield:

Each finger-furrowed field

Heaves forth stalk, leaf, fruit-nabbed emerald:

Bright grain sprung so rarely

He hauls to his will early;

At his hands staunch host, birds build.

(Ode for Ted)

Through such an imagery Hughes is described as god of spring at whose arrival there is a burgeoning of new life in nature. The poem takes a subjective note when Sylvia Plath exclaims, “how but most glad / could be this Adam’s woman / when all earth his words do summon”. Here we get a vision of a second Adam living in harmony with the creatures of the earth in a new paradise with Plath and she herself is playing the role of Eve. Such moments of ecstasy are rare in Plath’s poetry. In most of the Plath’s poems love is never quite fully realized, nor experienced in a quite manner. In the company of Hughes she
enjoyed nature. She sent Hughes “Ode to Ted” and “Song” to Hugh’s mother with the following remarks “I cannot stop writing poems! They come better and better. They come from vocabulary of woods and animals. I learn new words and use them in poems. My god. Listen: here are two lyrics; they are meant to be said aloud they are from my joy discovering a world I never knew: all nature”. 25

“Ode to Ted” has a rasping rhythm, regular without being smooth. This is due to the preponderance of monosyllabic words. She uses alliteration for sound effect. The use of phrases like “shrewd stoat” and “shirr songs” seems forced. Philip Gardner comments on this poem, “the energetic crowding of words tending to elbow aside, almost despise, rhythmic smoothness is a noticeable characteristic of Plath’s poetry.”26

In “Wreath for a Bridal” there is celebration of two lovers. As a poet she owes her allegiance to Apollo, the sun god and father of muses in the same manner just like in Spencer’s Epithalamion. She tells the sun to be the witness of their reunion: “let sun surplice in brightness / stand stock still to laud these mated ones / whose stark act all coming double luck joins.” The use of assonance and half rhymes shows the effect of Dylan Thomas. The poem which was sent by Plath to Ted’s mother exemplifies the currents of negativism and disaster flowing furiously beneath the surface of joy. In “Song” Plath seem to enjoy the life as is depicted through various natural images that are prevalent in the first stanza. Plath is almost in a kind of fervent ecstasy:

Sheen of the noon sun striking

Took my heart as if
It were green-tipped leaf
Kindled by such rare seizing
Into an ardent blazing.

(Song for a Summer’s Day, L.11-15)

In the next stanza there Plath uses the symbol of spiders nest and willows which indicates the disturbed state of mind. Here the idyllic world, painted hitherto, is shattered:

No thought was there of tricking
Yet the artful spider spun
A web for my one man
Till at day’s flawed closing
No call could work his rising

(Letters Home, 239)

The image of spider web suggests an evil force. The rich, bright, colourful, imagery is replaced by one of gloom in the final stanza. The poem shows Plath as a mature artist. The poem has homogeneous trinity of three parts. Plath is professional in catching the essential
colour and tone of nature. Later the “Song” was modified into “Song for a Summer’s Day” and the last three stanzas are replaced by:

And so, together, talking,

Through Sunday’s honey air

We walked (and still walk there- out of sun’s bruising)

Till the night mists came rising.

(Song for a Summers Day, 15-18)

The earliest version demonstrates the terrifying nature of Plath’s poetry. In a male-dominated society Plath always feel threatened both physically and mentally. She suffered a lot and this sense of threat is depicted in her poetry by her talent and craftsmanship. She uses symbols images, incidents to convey her inner feelings to the readers. Same type of picture could be seen in her poem “A Life” in which Plath shows that life is meaningful but darker. The poem is highly imagistic filled with natural, environmental and medical imagery. In the first half of the poem there are happier pictures than the second part. In the first half of the poem there are images like “palm –spear lily”, “light as cork”, “parade ground horses”, “Victorian cushions” and “good China”. “Parade horse means life bounded by rules and regulations. Victorian age is known for its order and palm tree is symbol of victory. But the images in the second half of the poem are devoid of hope. The sea is a major symbol that Plath has used throughout the poem the sea represents both good and
bad side of life as in the third stanza the symbol of sea is used to show good side of life as “the sea waves bow in single life”. And at the end of the poem life is not good “the sea flattened to a picture “and the comparison completes the paradox between two ways of life as portrayed in “A Life”. Plath also uses medical imagery in the poem.
REFERENCES

12. Ibid. p.236.
13. Ibid. p.74.

17. Ibid.


22. Broe, Marry Lynn. op. cit.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.