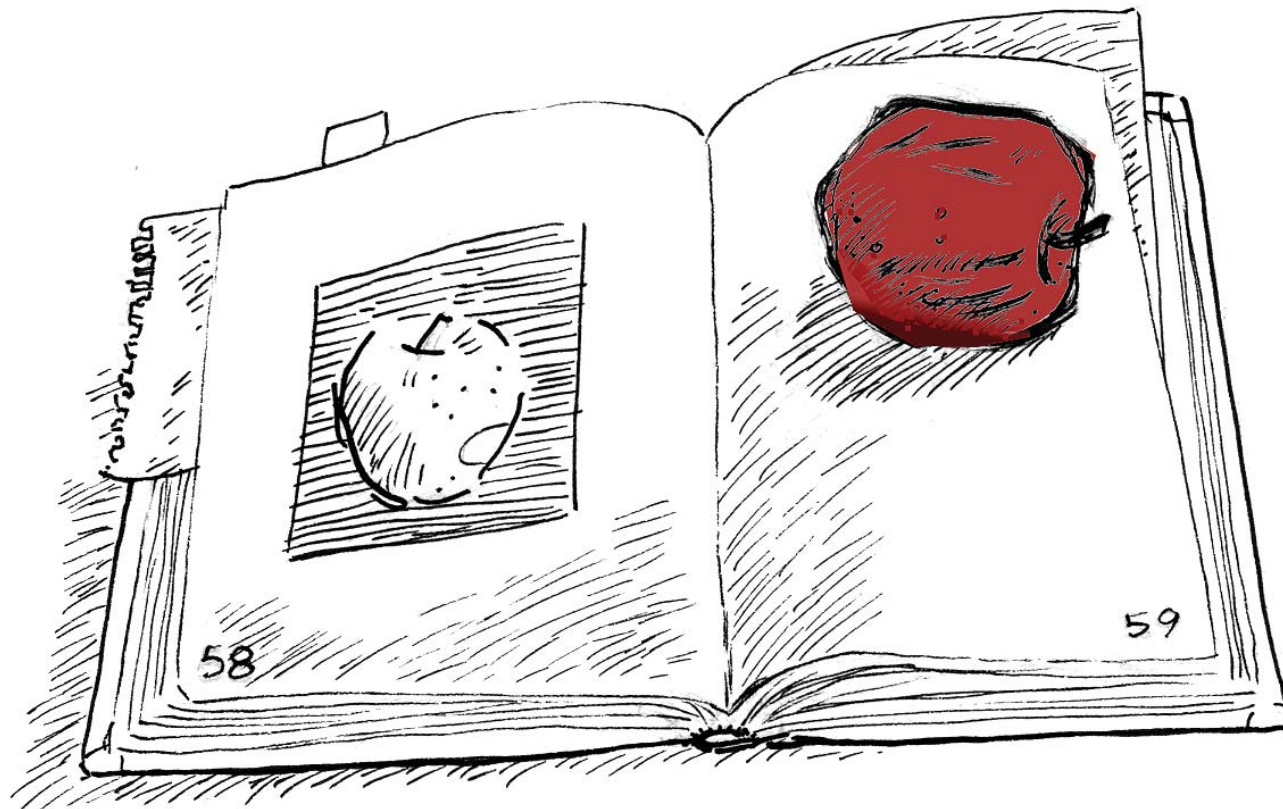


# Sylvia Plath

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# *Poet versus Persona*

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## **Plath's Similarities with T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock":**

- *psychological* sequence of thoughts opposed to *logical* sequences of information
- a monologue showing a private voice in a conversational tone with the persona speaking to herself; stream of consciousness
- the title serves as double meaning to the poem's multiple themes; what results is an heightened state of irony
- irregular rhyming patterns; free verse
- existence of multiple private associations and symbols; only the persona fully understands the significance of the representations

# *Poet versus Persona*

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## **Contrasts with T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock":**

- regularized stanzas
- allusions specific to recent history and pop culture of her time—  
whereas Eliot uses mainly allusions to cultural, classic literature
- Plath uses an *unnamed* persona, with a close tie-in to her own personal history and personal attitudes
- Plath's figure experiences an aspect of intense psychological trauma;  
Eliot's persona is a victim of modern society or his own weaknesses
- sense of triumph emerges at the closure for Plath's persona; *whereas*  
Prufrock does not seem to learn from his rambling.  
He is disconnected from himself and even from his fantasies.

# *Poet versus Persona*

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## **Confessional Poetry**

- modern movement in poetry, begun in Fifties
- involves deeply personal themes with open, public confessions to the reader regarding the writer's inner self
- common themes include:
  - > depression
  - > sexual experimentation
  - > drugs
  - > mental illness
- taboo subjects such as suicide, abortion, menopause, and even mention of the female menstrual cycle were all common topics during this time
- subjects generally not accepted by the status quo of suburban America
- often uses pop cultural references and historical allusions

# *Poet versus Persona*

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## **Plath's Warped Version of Confessionalism promotes:**

- personality of poet blurs into persona; *yet* keep in mind, until the reader uncovers Plath's biographical information the concentration remains on the poem itself as the focal point, not the life of the poet
- psychological portrayal of a character through monologue; to define what is meant by "experience" by exposing any possible subconscious influences in a character's waking life.
- stream of consciousness: the reader is lost in the thoughts of an intense interior monologue.
- over-embellishment of personality traits, using frank, painfully honest attitudes

# Poet versus Persona

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Andreas Vesalius  
*De corporis humani fabrica libri septem*

*An anatomical ecorche print from 1555 depicting the dissection of human form. Plath utilizes a similar approach in her work, intentionally exposing herself physically and psychologically in a painful honest fashion— and in some regards using a hidden strategy.*

Image from: [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/vesalius\\_home.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/historicalanatomies/vesalius_home.html)

# *Persona versus Poet*

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Plath composed “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus” in October 1962, then recited the poems for BBC radio, months before her death in February 1963.

In her introduction for the reading she distanced herself from both works, stating that the narration should be linked to a persona—

For instance, before reading “Lady Lazarus she stated:

The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the Phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman. (294).

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*. Ted Hughes, Editor. New York: Harper & Row, 1981. Print.

# *Poet versus Persona*

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It is only after several readings, and after studying her biographical information, can one deduce that the persona in the poem is a slight mirror of Sylvia Plath's own life—she leaves many personal symbols in the work which point directly to specific events in her life.

However, what is important to remember, the persona's narrative is *not* an exact duplicate of the poet; the voice is an over-exaggerated image of Plath's own emotions and psychological make-up.

Looking at Plath's own public statement about the poem's declarations, her theme is not an open confessional, but rather a discussion of paralysis. Similar to one of Eliot's themes in "Prufrock": modern life dehumanizes and minimalizes the average individual to a point of bleak (and everlasting) existence.



# *Ted Hughes*

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In recent years, Sylvia Plath's poet-husband Ted Hughes published a collection of poetry which responds specifically to many of Plath's own work.

In 1998 the collection of work was published under the title: *Birthday Letters*; he dedicated it to his two children. In October of that same year he passed away at age of sixty-eight.

As a poet-of-worth himself, it is only natural that he would react to his former wife's actions in a similar fashion: emotional, symbolic poetry.

The collection consists of eighty-eight poems which directly address, with just two exceptions, Plath.

# *Ted Hughes*

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Until this time, Hughes never published work regarding the failed marriage nor about his estranged wife's suicide. Some critics view the book as a means of seeking redemption or as a means to avoid full blame for the dramatic incident.

In one poem in particular, simply titled "Suttee," he seems to specifically respond to the metaphors and symbols presented in Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus," utilizing extreme re-inventions of myth and dream-realities.

The title in fact relates to a Hindu belief where a widow throws herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband.