

Research Article of the Poem Lady Lazarus A Study to Analyze Lady Lazarus through the Feminist Criticism Lens

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the poem Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath using a feminist critical perspective. The main focus is on how the representation of the female body, trauma, and patriarchal power relations appear in the poem. The poem portrays a woman who repeatedly "resurrects" from death, symbolizing resistance against social control and objectification. Therefore, this study seeks to reveal how the female voice is constructed as a form of resistance against male dominance. The method used is a qualitative approach with textual analysis. The data consists of the poem itself, which is examined using feminist criticism, particularly concepts related to the female body, objectification, and patriarchal power. The analysis is conducted by identifying symbols, metaphors, and diction that reflect women's experiences and their resistance to oppressive social structures. The results show that Lady Lazarus represents a woman who is aware of her oppression. The speaker refuses to remain a passive object and instead reclaims her body and identity through repeated acts of "resurrection." In conclusion, the poem not only depicts female suffering but also asserts female strength and agency in resisting patriarchal systems.

Keywords: *feminist criticism, female body, patriarchy, resistance, Sylvia Plath*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis puisi Lady Lazarus karya Sylvia Plath menggunakan perspektif kritik feminis. Fokus utamanya adalah bagaimana representasi tubuh perempuan, trauma, dan relasi kekuasaan patriarki muncul dalam puisi tersebut. Puisi ini menggambarkan seorang perempuan yang berulang kali "bangkit" dari kematian, melambangkan perlawanan terhadap kontrol sosial dan objektivasi. Oleh karena itu, studi ini berupaya mengungkap bagaimana suara perempuan dikonstruksikan sebagai bentuk perlawanan terhadap dominasi laki-laki. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis tekstual. Data terdiri dari puisi itu sendiri, yang diperiksa menggunakan kritik feminis, khususnya konsep-konsep yang berkaitan dengan tubuh perempuan, objektivasi, dan kekuasaan patriarki. Analisis dilakukan dengan mengidentifikasi simbol, metafora, dan diksi yang mencerminkan pengalaman perempuan dan perlawanan mereka terhadap struktur sosial yang menindas. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa Lady Lazarus mewakili seorang perempuan yang menyadari penindasannya. Pembicara menolak untuk tetap menjadi objek pasif dan sebaliknya merebut kembali tubuh dan identitasnya melalui tindakan "kebangkitan" yang berulang. Kesimpulannya, puisi ini tidak hanya menggambarkan penderitaan perempuan tetapi juga menegaskan kekuatan dan keberdayaan perempuan dalam melawan sistem patriarki.

Kata Kunci: Kritik feminis, tubuh perempuan, patriarki, perlawanan, Sylvia Plath

INTRODUCTION

Lady Lazarus is one of the most significant poems written by Sylvia Plath and published in her poetry collection *Ariel* in 1965. This poem is widely recognized for its intense emotional expression, dark imagery, and powerful symbolic language that portray themes of death, rebirth, suffering, and resistance. As one of Plath's most discussed confessional poems, *Lady Lazarus* presents a female speaker who repeatedly experiences symbolic death and resurrection, creating a complex representation of trauma and survival. The poem does not merely describe personal suffering, but also reflects broader issues of gender oppression, identity, and power relations within patriarchal society.

The title itself carries strong symbolic significance. The name "Lazarus" refers to the biblical figure who was raised from the dead, while the addition of the word "Lady" transforms the symbol into a specifically feminine experience. This suggests that the speaker's repeated "rebirth" is not only physical or emotional, but also ideological, representing the struggle of women to reclaim identity and autonomy after oppression. Through symbols such as ash, resurrection, phoenix-like imagery, and Holocaust references, Plath constructs a layered poetic narrative that invites deeper literary interpretation. In her poem, she expresses her contempt for the mistreatment she receives from the close male members of her family, specifically her father and her husband (Karo H. 2024).

The poem strongly reflects feminist concerns, particularly in its portrayal of women's oppression and rebellion against patriarchal control. Feminist literary criticism focuses on how women are represented in literary texts, how patriarchal ideology shapes female identity,

and how women challenge systems of domination. According to Beauvoir (1949), women have historically been positioned as "The Other," defined through male-centered perspectives rather than their own subjectivity. Similarly, Showalter (1979) explains that feminist criticism seeks to uncover women's voices and examine how literature reflects gender inequality. In *Lady Lazarus*, the female speaker refuses silence and passivity; instead, she confronts oppression directly and transforms pain into resistance through language.

Several feminist elements are clearly presented in the poem, including patriarchy, female voice, body politics, oppression, and resistance. Patriarchy appears through the speaker's experience of domination and objectification, while body politics is reflected in how the female body becomes a site of public control and symbolic violence. The repeated exposure of the speaker's body, her suffering, and her symbolic resurrection indicate that the body is not only a victim of social oppression but also a medium of rebellion. Rather than remaining powerless, the speaker reconstructs herself and asserts authority over her own identity. This transformation from victimhood to empowerment becomes one of the strongest feminist dimensions of the poem. The aggressive tone and confrontational diction used in *Lady Lazarus* also strengthen its feminist reading. The speaker does not present herself as weak or defeated, but as someone who survives repeatedly and gains power from destruction. Expressions of irony, anger, and defiance show that the poem is not simply about despair, but about reclaiming selfhood.

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The final image of rising from ash resembles the myth of the phoenix, symbolizing regeneration and female empowerment. This suggests that death in the poem should be interpreted symbolically—as the destruction of oppression and the rebirth of feminine agency.

Cordova & Young (2024), in *Lady Lazarus: An Insight into the Suicidality of Sylvia Plath*, analyze the poem through symbolic death, psychological suffering, and rebirth. Their research focuses on emotional trauma and the recurring cycle of destruction and renewal in the speaker's identity. Meanwhile, Huang et al. (2023), in *From Lady Lazarus to the Thanatopsis of Plath*, explore death imagery and female regeneration in Plath's poetry. Their study highlights symbolic mortality and the process of self-renewal in the female speaker. These studies provide important insights into the thematic depth of the poem, especially regarding trauma, oppression, and symbolic rebirth.

Therefore, a significant research gap remains in the analysis of how symbolic language itself becomes a strategy of feminist rebellion. Limited studies examine how diction, metaphor, body imagery, and female voice work together to transform the speaker from a victim of patriarchy into an empowered subject. The concept of female voice as textual resistance is still underexplored, especially in relation to close reading of symbolic structures. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on Previous studies on *Lady Lazarus* have mostly focused on autobiographical trauma, psychological suffering, death imagery, and general patriarchal oppression. Karo & Hasan (2020) in their study *Misandry and Resistance in Sylvia Plath's Mushrooms and Lady Lazarus*, emphasize female resistance against male-dominated

society and explain how Plath expresses resentment toward patriarchal oppression through poetic voice. However, their discussion mainly focuses on social resistance rather than detailed symbolic analysis of the language used in the poem.

Similarly, Karo H. (2024), in *Patriarchy and Oppression in Sylvia Plath's Lady Lazarus*, examines how patriarchal violence shapes the speaker's suffering and social position, but the study pays greater attention to oppression as a theme rather than to how specific symbols and diction construct feminist resistance. In addition, the concept of female voice as textual resistance remains underexplored. The speaker in *Lady Lazarus* is not merely a victim of patriarchy, but an active subject who reclaims control over her own suffering and identity. Her repeated resurrection symbolizes not only survival but also empowerment.

Symbols such as "ash," "resurrection," "phoenix," and Holocaust imagery should not only be read as representations of trauma, but also as strategies of reclaiming power. This transition from oppression to self-authority deserves deeper feminist analysis through close reading and symbolic interpretation. how the symbols in *Lady Lazarus* represent not only oppression and trauma, but also women's resistance, selfreconstruction, and the reclaiming of feminine agency through feminist literary criticism.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring meanings, interpretations, and representations within literary texts. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the phenomena from a contextual and interpretative perspective rather than measuring them numerically. In this study, the qualitative approach is used to examine how

female representation and resistance are constructed in Sylvia Plath’s poem Lady Lazarus. This design allows the researcher to interpret symbolic language, metaphors, and themes in depth, particularly through the lens of feminist criticism (Creswell, 2014). By applying this approach, the research aims to reveal underlying meanings related to gender and power structures embedded in the text.

The data collection technique used in this research is documentation and library research. Documentation involves closely reading the poem and identifying relevant textual elements such as imagery, symbols, and narrative voice. Library research is conducted by reviewing academic literature related to feminist criticism and literary analysis. This technique enables the researcher to gather comprehensive theoretical insights and previous studies that support the interpretation of the poem. Through these methods, the researcher systematically collects and organizes both primary and secondary data for further analysis (Creswell, 2010). The primary data of this study consist of words, phrases, and lines taken from the poem Lady Lazarus by Sylvia Plath, which serves as the main source of analysis. The poem is selected due to its rich thematic exploration of death, rebirth, and women’s resistance within a patriarchal context. Secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and relevant scholarly sources that discuss feminist theory and literary criticism. These include works by Tyson (2006), Barry (2009), and Showalter (1977), which provide theoretical support for analyzing gender representation in literature. Such sources help contextualize the poem within broader feminist discourse and strengthen the analytical framework.

The data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data

collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Additionally, the analysis is supported by Creswell’s (2014) steps, including organizing and preparing data, reading the entire data, coding, generating themes, presenting data, and interpreting meanings. First, relevant data from the poem are collected and reduced by selecting significant excerpts. Then, the data are coded and categorized into themes related to female representation and resistance. Finally, the findings are interpreted using feminist theory to draw conclusions and verify the results. This combined analytical framework ensures a systematic and rigorous interpretation of the literary text.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Section	Content
Introduction	The introduction presents the findings which have been derived from the poem by Sylvia Plath, Lady Lazarus. The content focuses on how female is represented in it and how the poem is against patriarchal. The findings are then organized into categories.
The Idea of Objectifying the Female Body	The poem frequently portrays the female body as an object which are met with the male gaze. This can be seen in lines, such as "The peanut-crunching crowd" to illustrate how the speaker’s value is reduced. This reflects the commodification of women within patriarchal systems.

Resistance Against the Patriarchy	The recurring motif of resurrection suggests resilience and defiance. The speaker's repeated return from death symbolizes resistance against oppression. This aligns with feminist interpretations of reclaiming agency over one's body and identity.
Discussion A	The objectification of the female body corresponds with Beauvoir's concept of women as 'the Other'. The poem critiques how women's identities are constructed through male-dominated perspectives, reinforcing systemic inequality.
Discussion B	The theme of rebirth can be read alongside feminist theories of empowerment. The speaker's voice becomes increasingly assertive, indicating a shift from victimhood to agency, which challenges traditional gender roles.
Novelty	This study highlights how 'Lady Lazarus' not only reflects personal struggle but also serves as a broader feminist critique of patriarchal control, emphasizing symbolic resistance through poetic language.

Implications	The findings contribute to feminist literary studies by offering a nuanced reading of Plath's work. They also raise awareness about ongoing issues of gender representation and power imbalance in literature and society.
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SUMMARY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore meaning, interpretation, and representation within Sylvia Plath's poem Lady Lazarus. Rather than focusing on numerical measurement, the study examines how female representation and resistance are constructed through language, symbolism, and thematic patterns. A qualitative approach allows close reading of metaphors, imagery, and voice, which are central to understanding the poem's critique of gender and power structures (Creswell, 2014). Through this approach, the study interprets how the text reflects broader issues of patriarchy and women's agency.

Data are collected through documentation and library research. The poem is examined through repeated close reading to identify key textual elements such as imagery, symbols, and narrative voice. At the same time, academic literature is reviewed to strengthen theoretical understanding. This process ensures that both textual evidence and critical perspectives are systematically gathered and organized. Literature plays a significant role in reflecting social and cultural realities, including gender inequality (Abrams, 2012; Eagleton, 1996). It provides space The primary data consist of words, phrases, and lines drawn directly from

Lady Lazarus, selected for their relevance to themes of objectification, suffering, and rebirth. The poem is chosen due to its intense exploration of identity and resistance within a patriarchal context. Secondary data include scholarly works on feminist theory and literary criticism, such as Tyson (2006), Barry (2009), and Showalter (1977), which provide the conceptual framework for analyzing gender representation. These sources support the interpretation and connect the poem to wider feminist discourse.

The analysis follows an interactive model based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), combined with Creswell's (2014) analytical steps. Relevant excerpts are selected and reduced into focused categories, then coded and grouped into themes related to female representation and resistance. These themes are interpreted using feminist criticism to reveal how the poem constructs meaning and challenges dominant power structures. The speaker's repeated return from death symbolizes resilience, but it also exposes how her body becomes a spectacle for marginalized voices, particularly women, to express experiences that are often overlooked (Showalter, 1977). Through feminist analysis, literary texts reveal how women navigate and resist patriarchal systems (Beauvoir, 1949; Moi, 1985). In this context, Lady Lazarus, first published in Ariel, stands out as a powerful work that combines personal expression with social critique (Plath, 1965). The poem presents themes of death and rebirth through strong and often disturbing imagery, reflecting both public consumption. The image of the "peanutcrunching crowd" illustrates how individual struggle and broader cultural pressures (Bundtzen, 1983).

As the poem progresses, the speaker's voice grows more assertive, shifting from a position of suffering to one of power. This transformation reflects a movement from objectification toward agency, which challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. The poem therefore operates on two levels, as a personal narrative of pain and survival, and as a broader critique of patriarchal control. This dual function forms the central contribution of the study, showing how symbolic language in poetry can express resistance in subtle but powerful ways.

We believe that the strongest impression from this research lies in the author's courage in transforming personal emotions and traumatic experiences into a powerful narrative of resistance. This poem is not simply an outpouring of the heart, but rather an instrument for raising awareness of women's rights and equality. Given the relevance of feminist issues today, we believe that Lady Lazarus serves as a reminder to readers that the struggle for autonomy and equal opportunities is an ongoing process and must continue to be voiced through various media, including literature. The female figure is reduced to an object, consumed and observed within a patriarchal framework. This aligns with feminist arguments that women are positioned as "The Other," defined and controlled through male perspectives (Beauvoir, 1949; Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). At the same time, the poem resists this position through its tone and structure. The act of resurrection becomes a form of defiance, where the speaker reclaims control over her body and identity. By addressing questions of female representation and patriarchal critique, this study contributes to feminist literary analysis and highlights the continued relevance of gender issues in both literature and society. It also connects to

broader global concerns, particularly the pursuit of gender equality as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 5. Through this analysis, Lady Lazarus is positioned not only as a literary text but as a reflection of ongoing struggles over identity, power, and autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The study examines Sylvia Plath's poem Lady Lazarus through a feminist critical lens to reveal how female representation, trauma, and resistance are constructed within a patriarchal context. The analysis shows that the poem does not simply portray suffering, but actively challenges systems of domination through symbolic language, imagery, and voice. The female speaker, initially positioned as an object of control and public spectacle, gradually transforms into an active subject who reclaims authority over her body and identity.

The recurring motif of death and resurrection functions as a central symbol of resistance. Rather than indicating weakness, the repeated "rebirth" reflects strength, resilience, and defiance against patriarchal oppression. The speaker's body, once objectified, becomes a site of rebellion, while her voice grows increasingly assertive, rejecting silence and passivity. This shift from victimhood to empowerment highlights the poem's core feminist message. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that symbolic elements such as ash, phoenix imagery, and public exposure operate not only as representations of trauma but also as strategies of reclaiming power. By focusing on close textual analysis, this research fills a gap in previous studies that often emphasized themes of suffering without fully exploring how language itself constructs resistance.

In conclusion, Lady Lazarus emerges as both a personal narrative of survival and a broader critique of patriarchal structures. The poem affirms female agency and challenges traditional gender roles, making it a significant contribution to feminist literary discourse.

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