# THE CYCLE OF ETERNITY: A STUDY ON THE MYTH OF IMMORTALITY IN A SELECTION OF PLATH'S POEMS

## O CICLO DA ETERNIDADE: UM ESTUDO SOBRE O MITO DA IMORTALIDADE EM UMA SELEÇÃO DE POEMAS DE PLATH

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**ABSTRACT:** This study consists of bibliographic research of four of Plath's poems: *Ariel*, *Daddy*, *Lady Lazarus*, and *Edge* from the main work Ariel (2019). It recognized the theme and motifs of the poems proposed by Tomachevski's (1970) scope. It debated the symbolism and semiosphere conceptions based on Lotman (1990) and the mythical narrative by Meletinski (2019). It adopted the archetype studied by Jung (2014) in the development mainly of *anima* and *animus* definitions which were identified in the poems. It discussed how a postmodern author like Plath regarded death, rebirth, and survival in her literary work in a cyclical pattern by reflecting the myth structure. The analysis addressed the ancient cultural memory, the spiritual influences, the social knowledge, and the metalanguage mechanism in the creation of messages, metaphors, and text-forming in the development of what was expressed as a never-ending cycle of life movement that transcends thus, to the myth of immortality. In this way, Plath addresses the issues beyond death, as a way to keep alive endlessly.

**KEYWORDS:** Plath´s poems. Myth. Immortality.

**RESUMO**: Este estudo consiste em uma pesquisa bibliográfica de quatro poemas de Plath: *Ariel, Daddy, Lady Lazarus* e *Edge* a partir da obra principal Ariel (2019). Reconheceu-se o tema e os motivos dos poemas propostos a partir do escopo de Tomachevski (1970). Foram debatidas as concepções de simbolismo e semiosfera a partir de Lotman (1990) e da narrativa mítica de Meletinski (2019). Adotou-se o estudo do arquétipo de Jung (2014) no desenvolvimento principalmente das definições de *anima* e *animus* que foram identificadas nos poemas. Discutiu-se como uma autora pós-moderna como Plath considerava a morte, o renascimento e a sobrevivência em sua obra literária em um padrão cíclico, refletindo a estrutura do mito. A análise abordou a memória cultural ancestral, as influências espirituais, o conhecimento social e o mecanismo da metalinguagem na criação de mensagens, metáforas e formação de texto no desenvolvimento do que se expressa como um ciclo infinito de movimento vital e que transcende assim, ao mito da imortalidade. Dessa forma, Plath aborda as questões para além da morte, como forma de se manter viva para sempre.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Poemas de Plath. Mito. Imortalidade.

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Página 4

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio consiste en una búsqueda bibliográfica de cuatro poemas de Plath: *Ariel, Daddy, Lady Lazarus* y *Edge* de la obra principal Ariel (2019). El tema y los motivos de los poemas propuestos fueron reconocidos desde el alcance de Tomachevski (1970). Se discutieron las concepciones de simbolismo y semiosfera de Lotman (1990) y la narrativa mítica de Meletinski (2019). El estudio del arquetipo de Jung (2014) fue adoptado en el desarrollo principalmente de las definiciones de *anima* y *animus* que fueron identificadas en los poemas. Se discutió cómo una autora posmoderna como Plath consideró la muerte, el renacimiento y la supervivencia en su obra literaria en un patrón cíclico, reflejando la estructura del mito. El análisis abordó la memoria cultural ancestral, las influencias espirituales, el saber social y el mecanismo del metalenguaje en la creación de mensajes, metáforas y formación de textos en el desarrollo de lo que se expresa como un ciclo infinito de movimiento vital y que así trasciende el mito de la inmortalidad. De esta manera, Plath aborda temas más allá de la muerte, como una forma de mantenerse viva para siempre.

**PALABRAS LLAVE:** Poemas de Plath. Mito. Inmortalidad.

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) was an American novelist, short story writer, and mainly poetess who started to write in her childhood when she published her first poem, at eight. Plath made substantial contributions to postmodern literature, especially in poetry. The author's writing is full of psychological issues derived from her own experiences because some events in Plath´s life marked her and also her literary style formation, among which her father's premature death still in her infancy, the academic pressure while attending university, and two clinical hospitalizations for psychological treatment during her lifetime.

Plath´s style is described as a confessional genre, which is when the author uses ordinary personal life events as motivation to create literary works. Therefore, Plath converted her intense experiences as her father´s absence, depression, troubled wedding, and conflicts with motherhood into primordial productions.

The obsession with death is a relevant theme explored in Plath's works which are portrayed exhaustively as the main metaphor, but at the same time Plath explores death, she suggested the rebirth which affords a repetition cycle scheme as life-death-revival hence, an endless life. This literary structure confers a mythical pattern highlighted by a cyclical movement that intertwines archaic figures from society, culture, esoterism, astronomy, and other fields in different levels in a ritualist narrative that confers compositions with ramifications in substructures in

constant flux, and this flux, in the case of Plathian works have a predominance in the internal world of *self.*

In this way, this research proposed to analyze four of Plath´s poems in a sequence *Ariel*, *Daddy*, *Lady Lazarus*, and *Edge*, which are gathered in Ariel (2019), a collection of her main poems posthumously published by her husband. Thereby, the main objective of this work is to analyze the representation of the myth of immortality in these selected poems.

This study is bibliographic research divided into five sections, the first consist of a general discussion on the semiosphere framework by Lotman (1990) which is used to analyze the four selected poems. The second, *Ariel* focused on the identification of the theme of death as well as the motifs attached to it, according to Tomachevski's (1970) theory, also it discussed some relevant points in the construction and the definition of symbol, symbolism, myth, and mysticism based on Lotman (1990) and Meletinski (2019).

The third, *Daddy* is considered the conflicts stance in the presence and absence of the father images, and it is debated the archetype conceptions of *anima* and *animus* in the Jungian (2014) field. The next is proposed a discussion on the *anima* representations in *Lady Lazarus*. The last poem, *Edge*, discussed external social demands imposed on women and the psyche disturbances through the three sequences of symbolic deaths. In sequence, it was proposed final considerations.

To Lotman (1977) language is connected to culture´s description in constant relation to the social space, where the sign and the non-sign receive the social value which is semiotic and hierarchical. The first coding is related to the natural languages, in Plath's case, her poem is considered as the second codification of that language, as its significance differs from the natural use (Lotman, 1990). Thus, the decoding of work has to consider the dominant and secondary codes.

The four poems suggest a deep location of *self* where the unconscious exercises a predominant stage under the conscious sphere. Therefore, the cycle of symbolic death establishes an eternal mechanism of end and resumption.

The social relevance is verified for Plath being a postmodern writer who can be analyzed under the features from the use of the cyclic scheme of myth. Thus,

Plath´s works can be regarded as a way to maintain alive the ancient structure of myth narrative constructions.

## 2. THE COMPOSITION OF THE THEORETICAL BASIS

The poetical of Sylvia Plath arises from the *self´s* experiences, hence her poetry appears from the ego-centered language features, which is known as confessional poetry. To Nelson (2013) a personal voice emerges in confessional writing through productions based on self-revelation from the poet which establishes a distinct poetical form, and it evidences that confessional poetry is identified more by its structure than its contents. Regarding the content, the confessional style does not consist of a simple autobiography work but it reflects an emergency of questioning the concept of privacy or the particular life, and its boundaries, therefore it breaks with the poetic impersonality theory.

The confessional movement exposes the social vulnerability of domestic life in the postmodern by uncovering anguish, fears, anxiety, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness. Introducing these feelings from private life to the public sphere meant an initial political process and transgression in literary works, and in the case of Plath's works, it meant a way to present women who live in a suffocating social routine confined in homes and also their experiences beyond the intra-familiar dimension.

To Tomashevski (1970), literary works preserve and reproduce a certain number of thematic units that are unchanged and undecomposed thus, it is classified as universal textual motifs because these are found in a diversity of narratives. And, in Plath's poems, the main motifs are around the death and reborn themes.

Plath's productions portray a specific context of herself, thus, this study proposes an analysis under the semiotic of culture framework that regards a binary division of codifications, that is the internal and the external space of text production also dwelling in a diversity of levels. And, this consists of the semiotic space within a semiosphere conceived in analogy with the biosphere (LOTMAN, 1977). For Lotman (1977), communication is only possible within the semiosphere, he also

distinguishes the natural language or system which is the first codification, and the artistic or literary language involving myths and religions, considered to be the second codification.

To Lotman (1977) the artistic text involves a relation of dual dimensions which are in constant interaction with each other and these embody the essence of artistic production. In Plath's case, they are the closed world depicted by a persona thus, it reflects a part of the world´s reality and the second dimension, the outside world which represents a universal perspective to which the inner world is connected. Plathian's works are centralized on herself however the meaning of her works can be considered as universal because it connects her singular discourses with the whole semiosphere wherein it is produced and conveyed.

Plath's poems are located on the periphery space because is a female voice who talks on her ordinary problems and personal sufferings thus, from a conflicting place, that is the social locality women should occupy which can be considered a secrecy and coercion zones. Nevertheless, the poems dialogue with the center all the time in a mechanism of changes and repetition. Therefore, the semiosphere theory according to Lotman (1990) is composed of dynamic and static elements disposed of in the center or peripheral locations where its boundaries and meanings are disposed of by cultural relations. Thus, the culture suggests possible translations of personal experiences to artistic productions according to the interaction process established by human experiences in time and space.

The semiosphere space is composed of a heterogeneous field with asymmetries features. The diversity of linguistic influences composes the heterogeneity which is embodied in different systems and functions, while the asymmetry regards the relation between the center and the other levels within the semiosphere such as the periphery. Thus, the center maintains constant communication with other levels which can occur across the horizontal or vertical directions as well as inside or outside movements.

To Lotman (1990) the boundaries between the levels are ambivalent because they can separate or unify distinguished spaces in which different languages are spoken, as a dynamic system, the top or bottom positions can be changed, and thus

their hierarchy in the semiosphere. The asymmetric spaces trigger the communication performed through the translation of one language to another resulting in a dynamic process observed in the poems that result from the translation of multiple languages from distinguished spaces that also evidence the personal conflicts.

Plathian poetry also involves real territories which transected the frontier from the inner world to public spaces, Lotman (1990) points the public sphere assumes the political, ideological, and cultural positions, and these locations reproduce a language system of patterns and norms of behavior to be followed, therefore a proper semiotic organization. When Plath's poetry is exposed in the public sphere it becomes an invader from the periphery configuring as a marginal female voice. Hence, her poetry provokes a geographic movement from the periphery to the center, and also ascending and descending movements in terms of spiritual and moral values. The persona visits spaces of death in greater degree, at the bottom, also called as hellish spaces as in *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus*, encountering the anti-home spaces to overcome a long journey.

Myths also considered as a secondary codification of language, are also included in the selected poems, demanding the scrutiny of myth structure in the semiosphere in question. Lotman (1990) states that the myth confers a narrative structure about the *self*. Therefore, myth can assume traces of confessional compositions. The poems' structure can be read considering the myth structure identifying the cyclical narrative sequence, which is evidenced by the repetition of terms that convey life, death, and rebirth.

From the mythical constructions emerge some dominant structures to aid to identify its traces in the poems, these structures come from the ancestral memory, and to Lotman (1990) the memory is the third function of language and it has the objective to preserve the canon texts and generates new meanings and texts and new contexts of texts production.

Also, the study employed the archetype for reason that myths are used as symbolic images manifested as metaphors. To Jung (2014), the archetype gives

shape to the unconsciousness that emerges to consciousness as a mediator, a sort of *bridge,* or a charade that conveys each individual consciousness differently.

The archetype is universal and comes from the collective unconscious, thus Jung (2014) presents some important archetypes but in this work, just the *anima* and *animus*, female and masculine energies respectively, and also the father´s archetype, derived from the *animus* concept are explored.

## 3. THE INTROSPECTION IN *ARIEL*

*Ariel* is a poem with ten stanzas of three lines and one final line. The poem exhibits mystical images such as *God´s lioness* (L-4), and *Godiva* (L-20), both bringing the *anima* concept, which is the presence of female energy, but also esoteric influence. To Kripal (2006) mysticism is linked to the collective experience with esoteric manifestations thus, mysticism is something from the culture which is transmitted from the collective to individual consciousness and from generation to generation. Then the terms are identified in the second and sixth stanzas.

> **God lioness**,
> How we grow,
> Pivot of heels and knees! -The furrow
> [...]
> White
> **Godiva**, I unpeel
> Dead hands, dead stringencies.
> (PLATH, 2019, p. 28)

Spiritual symbols compose the dynamic of rituals that portray their relationship with the sacred, that is with the secret or what is unreachable. Mysticism was used by people as a way to give meaning to natural phenomena, chronological events, and human issues such as life and death that it was considered hard to explain to early human communities. Segal (2006) states the myth does not describe the world events isolated but explains human experiences with the world by revealing or concealing psychological contents. Thus, myth and its rituals have a social function, which is to harmonize human relationships with society and the world.

In this way, *God´s lioness* is established in the inner plan, that is in the psyche and it works as a metaphor that reflects a social imposition, a *mask* that is used to hide the true *self*, and later *Godiva* represents a stronger female figure which appears after the *unpeel*, under this *mask*, which is hauled from out. Also, the *unpeel* (L-20) suggests the change in the skin, as a rebirth, that brings *Godiva*, the meaning of someone who exalts a fearless self, irrational energy, from the nature of passion because it comes from the inner *self*.

Meletinski (2019) considers the harmonic stage as a cycle representation that can be introduced by the egg, the ocean, the cave, or mandala symbols, hence *Ariel* is permeated of cyclical images and also the structural pattern of the poem regards the circle dynamics. In the sequence shown the cyclical word images evidenced from the third and fourth stanzas and the last line from *Ariel* fragments:

> Splits and passes, sister to
> The **brown arc**
> Of the **neck** I cannot catch,
> [...]
> Nigger-eye
> **Berries cast dark**
> Hooks-
> [...]
> **Eye, the cauldron of morning**.
> (PLATH, 2019, p. 28-29)

These cyclical elements are disposed in this order in the poem´s presentation, thus, the *brown arc*, *neck,* and *berries cast dark* are productions from the unconscious where the lyrical "I" is positioned in the beginning, they represent the external collective obligations that were imposed on the individual to follow, but the unconscious stage absorbed these impositions and manifested these elements from the excess and from the external demand by overflowing and taking the *self* within itself for a moment of regeneration. The table below presents the possible meanings of images from *Ariel*:

Página 11

**Table 01 -** Motifs and Meanings

| Bound Motifs | Possible meanings |
|---|---|
| The brown arc (Line: 8) | An element from nature that can represent ancient knowledge passed from generation to generation. |
| Neck (Line: 9) | The place where this ancient knowledge is located is far from the individual. Hard access. |
| Berries cast dark (Line:11) | These fruits can symbolize the production of the unconscious, which is harvested in the dark. |
| Eye (last line) | A vision without illusions. |
| Cauldron of morning (last line) | Refers to the sun, the light. The end of a cycle. |

**Source:** Table elaborated by the authors (2023).

*Ariel* emerges from the introspective place, that is from the unconscious to the external space, thus we have two moments in the poem: the first and limited one is submerged in a deep state of mind, and the second from the middle to the end of the poem that portrayed an ejection from out. Even though *Ariel* has *death* as the main theme it brings some important minor motifs that complement and highlight the death´s theme. For Tomashevski (1970), the theme of a work is divided into thematic units that present the isolated elements, that is the motifs.

Death in *Ariel* is also represented by metaphors through some imagistic patterns which consider the two stages moments in the poem. Still to Tomashevski (1970), the bound motifs are the ones that cannot be taken off of work because it brings sense to the production. In *Ariel*, the bound motif in the unconscious stage is *darkness* (L-11) the local of inertia followed by the *shadow* (L-14) which means the reflection of *self*. And, the consciousness moment is exposed: the *glitter of seas* (L-23) when the *self* was not submerged anymore in a deep state of mind but is bloating, *arrow* (L-27) representing the determination of *self*, and finally, the *morning* (last line), when the darkness is over and the lights come, seen in the schema below:

**Figure 01 -** Ascending Poem Scheme.



**Source:** scheme elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Ariel*.

In *Ariel*, the stages of *darkness* do not mean the end but a way to achieve the resumption, death symbolizes a way to pass to another stage and continues the cycle. Still, the dark moment is not seen as a suffering experience contrariwise is experienced with *stasis* (L-1). Thus, a rotary motion in the poem is highlighted with the antithetical figures as *black* (L-13) and *white* (L-19) or *darkness* (L- 1) and *morning* (L-11) provoking a circular change. Lotman (1990) states the definition of the symbol is attached to another order or another language as a translation of an isolated expression included in a content level. Thus, the symbol identified always means a part of another thing as a metonymic figure.

To search for possible meanings of symbols it is necessary to dig into their ancestry to Lotman (1990), a symbol always has an ancient memory belonging to certain cultures. Grasping the symbols' meanings implies the need to follow through the tracks of the oral memory and listen to the plurality of voices and meanings throughout time and cultural existence.

## 4. THE DOUBLE IN *DADDY*

*Daddy* is composed of seventeen stanzas of five lines in which the central theme is the *figure of the father* and the motifs allude to death. Thus, the poem portrays the symbolic death of the father in different plans. To Frye (1957a), in literature, a symbol can be any word that can be isolated for critical appreciation and the meaning of poetics figures does not assert clearly anything in specific but simply suggests the interconnections that it does with the entire work.

In this way, the *figure of the father* is analyzed under the *archetype* concept, to Frye (1957b) dreams and rituals are the contents of the archetype which is more complex than symbols. Also, to the author, the rituals occur like the cycle of seasons that happen according to the passage of natural events. Jung (2014) states that archetypes are related to myth, and comes from the collective unconscious's structure, also manifested in the individual unconsciousness, thus, the archetype is something that comes empty to everyone as a *model,* thus, the structure that composes it is inherited, as pre-existing forms according to the individual experiences.

In *Daddy,* the father is represented as a *dual*, the father who died and therefore is absent in the physical plane, and the father who lives in the self´s mind thus, who was dislocated to the imaginary plane. However, in the poem, *the figure of the father* who lives on an imaginary level has become an annoyance as a figure that does not function anymore. To survive the father´s presence in the unconsciousness is necessary to expel him from the host, or the *self* where he lives as an illusion. To Meletinski (2019), the removal of parents contributes to detachment from the *self*, an important struggle that the *self* needs to face to conquer its individuality and identity where the process of ego will be established.

In *Daddy*, the father is characterized by dual elements of light and shadow disposed of into two antagonist dimensions that were conceived as the *good* father, the heroic, and the *bad* father, the devil. Also, *Daddy* is evoked from the conscious view where the persona reports the trajectory of the father when he was alive as a symbolic being inside her consciousness. In this case, the persona exposes the *bad*

father as the dominant force when he dwells in the unconscious stage as a sign of destruction and that had to be killed to make the *self* free. In the tenth, thirteenth, and twenty-fifth stanzas are some fragments that evidenced the image of a *bad* father:

> Not God but a **Swastika**
> So black no sky could squeak through
> [...]
> And I knew what to do.
> I made a model of you,
> A man in black with a **Meinkampf look**.
> [...]
> The **vampire** who said he was you
> And drank my blood for a year,
> Seven years, if you want to know.
> (PLATH, 2019, p. 49-50)

The sequence exposes the fragments from the second and third stanzas that confer a construction on the *good* father´s image.

> Daddy, I have had to kill you.
> You died before I had time——
> **Marble-heavy**, a bag full of God,
> **Ghastly statue** with one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal
>
> And a head in the **freakish Atlantic**
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
> I used to pray to *recover* you.
> Ach, du.
> (PLATH, 2019, p. 48)

A bound motif is introduced by a reference to the *Electra complex* as in: "Daddy, I have to kill you/ You died before I had time-" (L-6-7). It regarded the physical death that occurred before the symbolic death triggering the creation of the father´s image in the unconscious dimension. Thus, the totemic images emerge to represent the father's presence in the stanzas presented: "Marble-heavy, a bag of God/ Ghastly statue with one gray toe” (L-8-9). And in: "And a head the freakish Atlantic/Where it pours bean green and blue" (L-11-12). To Frye (1957a) the link with gods, animals, or elements from nature constructs totem symbolism and it

suggests a metamorphosis as a metaphor. The *good* father is represented by a symbolic structure created as a *phantasm* to the persona, therefore the *good* father is not real.

The persona searches for a father's presence in religious and natural environments, in this case, the presence of the water element is the manifestation of the unconscious where the self tries to *recover* (L-14) a father´s image. Also, the *father* emerges with gods' traces which means a higher position on the *self*, that is a location where something as an idol occupies. The acceptance and worship of idols demand a passive posture from the individual, who nourishes this relationship for a long time. Meantime, the idol, *the good father* is positioned in an unreachable space, where he lives as a demigod and where the image created for the persona is not enough anymore and the *self* still keeps looking for him, as in the sixth stanza: "I stuck in a barb wire snare./ Ich, ich, ich, ich/ I could hardly speak./*I thought every German was you*./ And the language obscene." (L-26-30).

The scheme below proposes two columns with the opposing father's image from *Daddy*.

**Figure 02-** Dual Father Scheme



**Source:** Scheme elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Daddy*.

The break of the idol is exposed in the tenth stanza: "Not God, but a swastika. So black no sky could squeak through" (L- 46-47). Here the *father´s figure* is worn out and lost his divine features. From there, oneself takes the only real image of the father that is preserved in memories: "You stand at the blackboard, daddy,/ In the

picture I have of you,/ A cleft in your chin instead of your foot/ But no less a devil for that, no not/ Any less the black man who." (L- 51-55). Even in the memories of the self, the *dual* father is suggested by *cleft* and the *bad* father is predominant.

To Frye (1957b) the mythical world is conceptualized as paradise and Armageddon's contents, are the first desirable and the second as disgusting, in this, the existential hell is exposed as struggles from the psyche of self. In *Daddy*, loyalty is evoked in the father´s authority and the *self* becomes a victim of tyranny, and living becomes a painful sacrifice for him. And to Meletinski (2015), myth is *dual* in essence because it intertwines the notions of the real world with fantasy, hence it is necessary to understand the elements from the macrocosm to microcosm, that is the whole and the parts, the concrete and the abstract, thus the hierarchic semantic significance. The personal level is located in the microcosm which produces the messages from the general signs for having significance.

Also, the poem´s place brings an allusion to religious symbols as in the fourth stanza: "In the German tongue, the **Polish town**. / Scraped flat by the roller/ Of wars, wars, wars. /But the name of the town is common." (L-16-19). And in the seventh stanza: "An engine, an engine/ Chuffing me off like a Jew/A Jew to **Dachau, Auschwitz**, **Belsen**." (L-31-33). These verses portrayed cities linked to the infernal geographic space symbols, to Lotman (1990) hell spaces appear connected to pagan or sinful ideas on the contrary the haven is attached to holy, thus sacred metaphors. The references *wars* and *Auschwitz* suggest a presence in a dangerous space. As a pilgrim, the *self*-visited these places in an attempt to repeat the father´s steps to grasp some clues on his possible roots. Also, it suggests the places inhabited by *Daddy* were hellish based on the negative spaces' representations. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the *self* to meet those places to be saved from them.

To the *self*, the father's ancestry is a mystery but arouses ancient notions that cannot be disrupted; however, the persona considers some ideas of her own roots such as: "With my gypsy ancestress, and my weird luck/ And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack./ I may be a bit of a Jew." (L-38-40). In the same way, that *self-admitted* the father's connection with hellish spaces, the individual assumed to live in the location on the opposite side by considering a different cultural heritage.

Finally, the *self cuts* the connection with its supposed father´s roots and definitely kills symbolically the *father's figure* as: "If I´ve Killed one man, I´ve killed two. / The vampire who said it was you." (L-71-72). It exposes how the *daddy* assumed a metaphor of a *vampire*, which portrays a disturbing relationship between the *self* and the supposing vampire that needs an end.

Thus, the *self* assumes the dual father needed an end, the persona had to face the reality, that is accept the father´s death. To Lotman (1990) the feast is attached to death with positive connotations such as liberty, illumination, and voice/interactions, which is conveyed in: "They are dancing and stamping on you." (L-78). As a final cycle, the feast suggests a victory of lights over the dark.

The poem repeats the cyclical text-image mechanism where the real father´s death is followed by his rebirth in the self´s psyche and it proceeds by a definitive father´s death, also in the unconscious, both symbolically. After the symbolic father's death, the persona overcomes the Electra complex by maintaining just the real memories of the father. In this way, death is a temporary end that works to move the self to face the disconnection with the tyrannical / vampire father to be reborn again, changing the state from life to death to life again maintaining the circle of eternity.

## 5. THE REPRESENTATION IN *LADY LAZARUS*

*Lady Lazarus* is a poem with twenty-eight stanzas of three verses in which the spiral movement of deepening its significance occurs in three different levels more exactly three times and in descending movement more evident than in *Ariel* and in *Daddy*. The main theme is the course of death considering its repetition presented the experiences in chronological order. To Lotman (1990), within the texts, we can find a metalevel structure that is defined as an interconnection, a sequence of textual elements disposed from the center to the periphery or vice versa. In *Lady Lazarus,* the reborning process is a bound motif that is triggered by a biblical story's influence, thus a rereading of a narrative about a man, *Lazarus,* who

after death is called back to life again, by Christ, as a *miracle*. Below is disposed the descendant scheme.

**Figure 03** - Spiral and Descendant Poem Scheme.
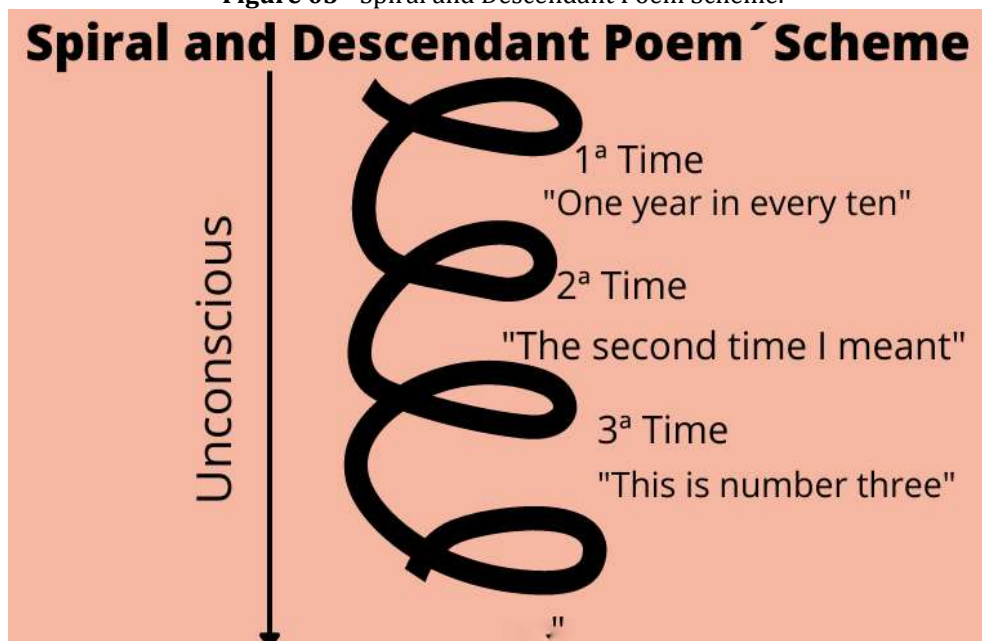


**Source:** Elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Lady Lazarus*.

Therefore, a story from the general and cultural sphere is reduced to a specific single view but also still a dependent unit that is established in the metalevel process. *Lady Lazarus* can be read as a translation of the account adopting a female persona as a central figure, keeping the rebirth process also as a *miracle*. To Segal (2006), the sacred is the bases of myths which is used to give a gnostic explanation to concrete events, constituting narratives about gods responsible for good and bad facts in human destinies.

Ritualism is premiant in the tribal cultural stage, which is located at the macrocosm level, from it originated the primary and main metaphors and their constructions of meanings thus the ritual imposes the existence of a calendar festival as a way to give meaning to the count of time, therefore the rituals become performed in ceremonial events. In the poem, the cyclical deaths suppose a sort of ritual that happens every ten years by followed a rebirth, as: "I have done it again/ One year in every ten./I manage it" (L-1-3) It regards the persona's own passage ritual and in the "And like the cat I have nine times to die."(L-21), which suggests the

Página 19

knowledge of popular or traditional communities be also linked to esoteric savvy and connected to the knowledge shared from women to women, such as the idea of witchcraft.

Also, to Jung (2014) the tribal teachings pre-date scientific knowledge and are related to myth, which in turn is connected to the esoteric foundation. The ancestral tribal knowledge is considered holy, with the objective to catch the soul's mysteries. In *Lady Lazarus*, the *anima* conception is explored, thus, the poem is embedded in female references according to Jung (2014), the *anima* is the female's energy, the motion of the human existence that englobes the good and bad parts of life, thus the *anima* is properly the *soul*.

*Anima* has its existence attached to the *animus* which is defined as masculine energy, both derive from primordial images that are formed in infancy age hence appeared in stages before. Both are opposite energy but joining has equilibrium as the main goal.

The primordial images that constitute the *anima* are inherited from the collective unconscious, Jung (2014) states the personal unconscious is constructed through experiences, which is defined by an initially conscious happening that for any reason becomes forgotten or repressed while the collective unconsciousness never stayed in the conscious stage. The collective consciousness results from the accumulation of cultural knowledge and do not have a shape, and to be understood it has to be structured as archetypes.

*Lady Lazarus* presents three narratives that are juxtaposed in the poem, firstly Plath supposes a female central voice in the adaptation of the biblical narrative where the persona conveys her view, addressing the readers and becoming the object of the reader's gaze, and this event/ ritual is depicted in: "a sort of walking miracle, my skin" (L-4).

Secondly, Plath includes the medical discourse on the evaluation of the female body and mind, certifying a woman's life. The portrayal of how medicine treats a woman´s body is conveyed especially with psychological problems, as in the tenth stanza: "Then unwrap me hand and foot/The big strip tease" (L-28-29), and in the eleventh stanza: "These are my hands/ My knees/ I may be skin and bone." (L-

31-33). The persona reveals the moment after being immobilized with the straight jacket for treatment to avoid hurting herself. The treatment is based on the complete control of the female body.

Finally, the Nazi persecution is a trace in Plath's works, being explored from the Jews' perspective, as in the third stanza: "My face a featureless, fine. / Jew linen." (L-8-9). The persona occupies the local Jews, their suffering, struggles, and journey. These three narratives are exposed in a sequence of text-images blended where the three voices echo almost simultaneously and also come from dissatisfaction, and anxiety deeply rooted in unconsciousness and the desire to give shape to these feelings: "I do it so it feels like hell. I do it so it feels real." (L- 46-47). It parodies reality, by imitating and simulating a real situation, reinforcing feelings, and thoughts.

Basing on *anima* as the central concept, the images predominating in the poem bounds the *gestation* and *rebirth* symbolism which can be introduced by hollow spaces, round, home, unwrap, and others by considering the uterus idea and birth. Some elements from the poem which confer these ideas are presented below:

**Table 02 -** Closed Spaces and Exit

| Closed Spaces | Rebirth |
|---|---|
| Grave cave (Line: 17) | Unwrap (Line: 28) |
| Home (Line: 18) | Comeback in broad day (Line: 52) |
| Rocked Shut (Line: 39) | Miracle (Lien: 55) |
| Seashell (Line: 40) | Gold baby (Line: 69) |
| A cell (Line: 49) | |

**Source**: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

In this way, the closed spaces suppose a gestation period before the rebirth and it is more related to a temporary death inside a safe, thus, the closed space as *grave cave*, *home*, *rocked shut*, *seashell*, and *a cell*, whereas the rebirth suggested by the images *unwrap*, *comeback in broad day*, *miracle*, *gold baby* are connected to a forced process, resulting from a movement of the *self* out from the closed space. As the *anima* is responsible for generating and giving birth it also is related to pregnancy allusions, such as swellings, seen in the sixth stanza: "Soon, soon the

flesh/ The grave cave ate will be/ At home on me". (L-16-18). These lines propose the action on organic plan represented by the natural decomposition of bodies absorbed by the earth as a call to internal, closed space. And in the twenty-eighth stanza: "Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air (L- 83-85) which suggests the rebirth from ashes, referring to the phoenix's tale, mixing the animal and human, mundane and sacred worlds with strong myth foundations.

To Frye (1957b) cannibalism does not resume in torture and mutilation, it supposes a body's sacrifice and the act of sharing. Thus, swallowing also suggests the return of a female body, to home, or to what is primordial. Therefore, the *anima* gestates gives birth, swallows, and gives back to nature, fulfilling a cyclical scheme. At last, the poem overlaps the process of dying with an artistic act as in the fifth stanza: "Dying/ Is an art, like everything else / I do it exceptionally well" (L43-45). It describes the importance of maintaining a ceremony ritual where death is central and thus theatrical, the base of eternal rebirth.

## 6. CROSSING THE *EDGE*

*Edge* is a poem composed of ten stanzas of three lines where its dynamics are defined by death- rebirth- revivals through descendants in a spiral model, that is the movement from the subject's inner side to the outer direction. The theme is a woman´s death; in some stanzas, the mother's image is suggested. To Lotman (1977) to understand the signs is necessary to analyze their semantic contents which will give us the possible meanings, constructed from the contexts of readings throughout time. Thus, the formation of meaning in the text works depends on their interactions, which can originate a plurality of interpretations of a single work.

To Lotman (1977) the social-culture instance is central to validating and transmitting the semiotic activity in producing meaning. And also, Lotman (2010) states culture is a structure of information that is yielded and organized by a collectivity with the function of conveying knowledge and message to human descent. Hence the typology of culture aims to describe the main cultural codes by forming a set of cultural images. In this way Lotman (1990) points to the semiotic

Página 22

VALITTERA – Revista Literária dos Acadêmicos de Letras
ISSN: 2675-164X – V.2, N.7 – 2022 – Pág. 04-29.

space as attached to cultural issues, thus, the development of culture is the condition for the existence and maintenance of the semiosphere, consequently, heterogeneity is an important trace of a culture where the semiosphere has to consider the different connections in a system. Beneath, the scheme illustrates the *Edge* dynamics

**Figure 4** - The Spiral and descendant Scheme in Edge
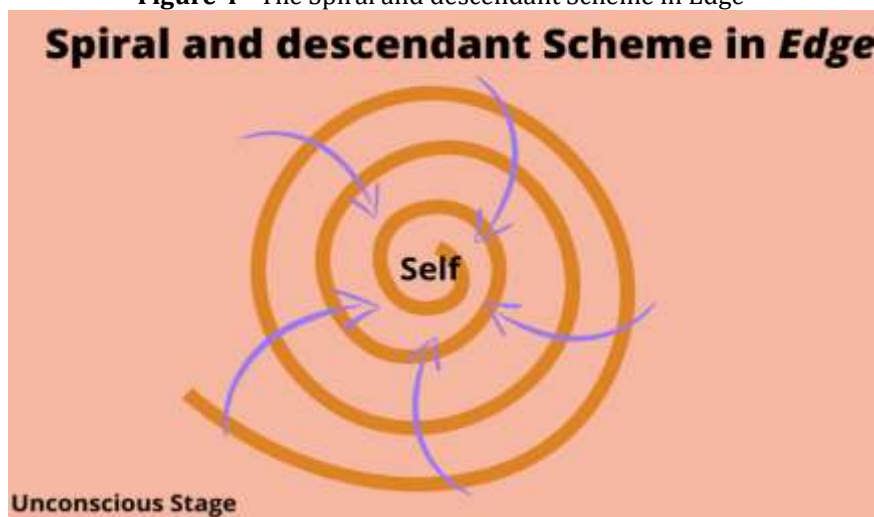


**Source:** Elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Edge*.

The poem is divided into three important phases that are juxtapositions of a sequence of three women's bodies' perceptions. The first is the dead woman´s body which is a woman who lives to present a false image of herself to others. The second is a woman that portrays an infertility image, seen as defective or imperfect, and the last, is a woman who is reborn and admits her boundaries, that is her ordinary imperfections as any to the human body. The next scheme shows these three stages where the first circle is the first death presentation followed by a second inner circle of internal death and the last one, the rebirth closer to the center, composing the self.

**Figure 05 -** The *Edge* phases scheme
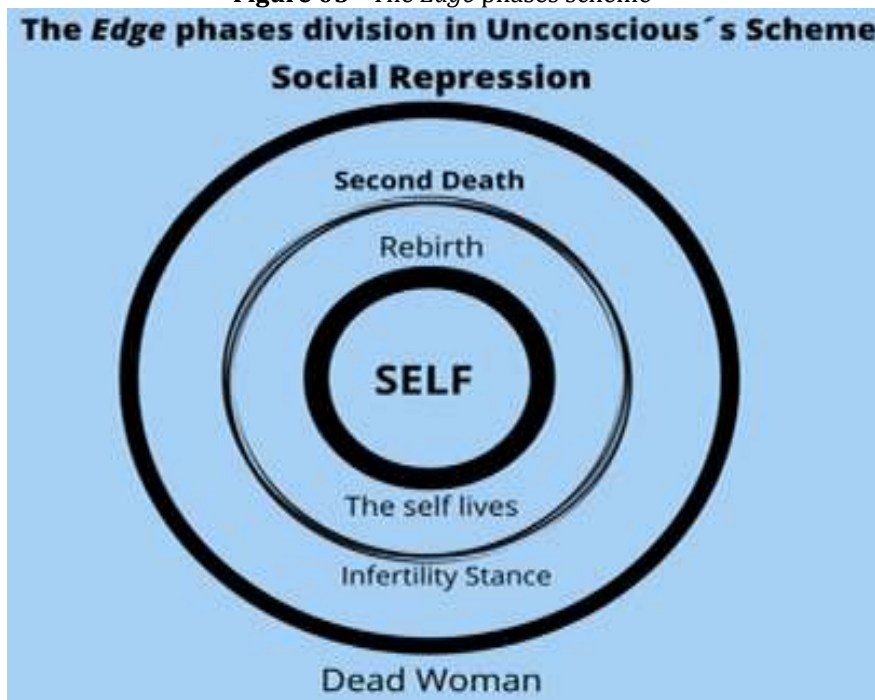


**Source:** Elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Edge.*

*Edge* is situated in a specific time and space where the woman´s image transmutes as well as her social role: "The woman is perfected. / Her dead". (L-1-2). It highlights what is the social image that the woman has to represent to the external environment, that is in the social round, thus the woman is perfect if she is dead, and it marked the first death, the death in life. In the sequence "Body wears a smile of accomplishment/The illusion of Greek necessity" (L3-4) and "Flows in the scrolls of her toga," (L-5). In this, the *smile* is part of the dramatizing that shows an acceptance of social demand though it is camouflaging the real feelings. Also, the clothing *toga* suggests coverage of the women's body which needs to be hidden or stay secret from others.

To Meletinski (2019), the fertile uterus is represented by water, lights, earth, a cave, and images that are related to the presence of a child in the maternal place, in the uterus. Also, the author considers the mother as an element from the eternal unconscious, and accountable to the lifecycle. In the fifth stanza: "Each dead child coiled, a white serpent. / One at each little" (L-9-10). It is introducing a uterus that did not proceed with life´s sequence and the *white serpent´*s image considers the life

mystery, the instinctive wisdom but also to Jung (2014), the serpent is an analogy that remits to the *anima* and portrays the binarism in life with good and bad destinies and as a nefarious symbol, the serpent can signify death mainly when appears curled.

To Jung (2019), the mother's archetype is linked to maternal features such as protection, kindness, attention, and spiritual elevation besides it is regarded as a universal archetype that can change some aspects according to the cultural field and individual experiences. Thus, in "Picher of milk, now empty/ She has folded." (L-11-12). Is suggested the local of nourishment is empty if considering the *milk´s* image as a metaphor to breastfeed or feed and the *pitcher* as a space/ uterus that keeps life before birth, depicting hence the second death that occurs in the inner side of the body and to the *self*. Beneath, the scheme presented the divisions of three stages identified in the poem *Edge*.

**Figure 06** - The division of Edge´s poem.



**Source:** Elaborated by the authors (2023) based on the poem *Edge.*

The inner death suggests that the *self* can no longer continue being passive anymore and triggers the symbolic death of the woman´s image. To Meletinsky (2019), substitution is a relevant motif of identification that brings character recognition. Thereby the woman assumes her real body and its limitations after being reborn in the same body but with a renovation of her personality.

To Jung (2014) rebirth is invisible to our eyes because occurs in the psychic realm, thus this rebirth is defined as a rebirth of individual life that occurs on the self´s modifications without changing its essence, just the traces of personality functions necessary to meet the goal of cure or improvement. The rebirth in this case is depicted in: " She has folded /Them back into her body as petals/ Of a rose close when the garden/ Stiffens and odors bleed/ From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower. " (L-12-16). Is presented as the initiation of a new life cycle, that can be reflected in the external life even is a rebirth still from the internal psyche in descending to the center of the *self*.

The *rose* and the *garden* metaphors suggest a ripening of a body that overcomes a difficult stage and is preparing for a new life; hence the *garden* considers the earth´s image to be fertilized as in agriculture when starts the planting cycle, thus the body is again fertile. Meletinsky (2019) points out that initiation is attached to the transition moment that happens after the death occasion, therefore the renovation comes as a rebirth after the trials and sufferings are triumphed by the subject.

In the: "From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower. / The moon has nothing to be sad about." (L-16-17). *Deep throats* image means a sort of passage to the profound inner psyche and mainly it indicates a portal to the body as a boundary between the internal and external side, also the mind and the body. The *moon* highlights the location of *self* which is an unconsciousness stage and also gives a reflection that confirms the cycle as a natural process.

To Kripal (2006), in mysticism, the body appears to be linked to sexual fluids figures, biological factors as well as the representation of historical and cultural practices, constituting the gendered body, thus the dissatisfaction of the female

gender resulted from social and cultural repressions, which can be manifested as in the mythical language.

In *Edge*, the cycle of death happens completely in the *self´s* mind, and it portrays three sequences of death, an external death of a woman from society, followed by an internal death inside her body, and finally a death within her psyche, but all of them are symbolic. These deaths caused a transmutation to the individual, triggering a necessary development in the unconscious stage. The transgression of *self* is identified fully in *Edge* mainly by the sequence of images as *white*, milk, *moon*, and *bone* that suggest a spiritual and psyche elevation to the subject.

## 7. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The poems *Ariel*, *Daddy*, *Lady Lazarus*, and *Edge* were chosen to be analyzed because they project a mythical design marked by a cultural ancient memory associated with life and death symbolism. Each one of the poems was considered within its polysemic language with the whole structure, including style, theme, and motifs distributed on its microcosm and macrocosm.

In this way, *Ariel* starts with dark elements from the unconsciousness and slowly progresses to the light stage in a vertical ascendant scheme, from bottom to up. *Ariel* presents a female self who walks fearlessly in the gloom by overcoming the trials. The pitch is given by verbal-visual figures such as arc, neck, eye, and other images that confer a ring or circular features. The goal of *Ariel* is to come down to the persona's mind to search for her real self, appearing to society her true personality.

*Daddy* treats the relationship between the subject as an *anima* and the other, the daddy as an *animus*, by tracing a journey to the search for equilibrium. Gods, totems, idols, devils, and good and bad places are allusions composed in this work to associate the conflict lived by the *self*. Thus, the self survives and reports its experience with the symbols, thoughts, and feelings created to cover up the father´s absence.

*Lady Lazarus* explores the places of death and rebirth exhaustively in the juxtaposition of different narratives which is triggered by female energy that insists on the existence of the *self* in spaces that cannot be inhabited by her. In this way, the *self* exposes its non-existence, that is in the man´s world by invoking peculiar and relevant scenes where she embodied and dramatized the transience of life intending to reaffirm her presence.

The poem *Edge* regards the sequences of three deaths and one rebirth of a modern woman who suffers social pressures and puts out all her disturbances. But, first, the persona dies externally, and slowly internally until the psychic dimension gives an end to it and she is reborn again. As Jung (2014) states all life has to go by many deaths. Just, after understanding her boundaries she is prepared to go back to her external social life. It is a hard journey that caused her soul to become injured however, it witnesses her growth.

The myth of immortality consists of the resumption provoked by the transgressions of one persona, energy, personality, or just the return of *self* which for any reason had to die temporarily or gives an interruption to life before coming back again. Thus, the four poems have circles of eternity inside them, but also the four together reflect a major literary work circle that confers an infinite cyclic movement between them. In this way, it is supposed that Plath does not work the death´s metaphors isolated but intended to suggest eternal life as a theme, by proposing trajectories to continue life even after successive deaths.

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Página 28

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