# The Art of Dying: A Look into Creativity and Suffering through an Analysis of Emily Dickinson's and Sylvia Plath's Poetry

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**Abstract**

"...We shall rather draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival."

-Winston Churchill

No truer words were ever spoken to epitomize the works of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath. Although a century stands between them, their poetry holds a common thread of harnessing creativity to use as an outlet for their suffering. This paper examines Emily Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" and Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" to show how they found inspiration and a means of survival through their suffering, amplified by their positions in a patriarchal society, using various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism, and imagery.

Emily Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" and Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" reveal parallels between the speakers of each poem. For instance, as a reflection of the patriarchal societies the poets lived within, both speakers fall into the archetypal victim role and face objectification. Moreover, they both feel like invincible and destructive forces free them from the chains of death or mental illness, as the power of their words will live on forever. Their hardships perpetuate their ability to convey their suffering, thus allowing them to survive.

Utilizing their words as a way to express their suffering, Dickinson and Plath paved the path of survival for many other women struggling with their mental health in a patriarchal society. Ergo, Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" and Plath's "Lady Lazarus" highlight an imperative perspective on how to channel depression and oppression into art that can inspire others.

Many know both Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath for their renowned works, a myriad of which are centered around themes of sadness and mortality. Enduring many losses in her life, Dickinson's grief kept her in a state of depression. Likewise, Plath struggled with her mental health throughout her life and attempted suicide twice. A woman in a man's world, Dickinson stayed independent and driven, despite the chains of orthodoxy for that period. Her father kept her from reading certain books, as he deemed them inappropriate for a proper lady, and publications rejected her writing on the basis of her gender. Similarly, Plath felt trapped in her various societal roles, saying in a letter to her mother, "I could never be a complete scholar or a complete housewife or a complete writer… I must combine a little of all, and thereby be imperfect in all" (Italie). Emily Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" and Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" depicted how they found inspiration and a means of survival through their suffering, amplified by their positions in a patriarchal society, using various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism and imagery within their poetry.

Above all, Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath's works illustrate how poetry provided inspiration and a means of survival through their struggles with mental illness. Scholars have analyzed Dickinson's personal life and struggles with her mental health through letters she sent friends and family as well as her poetry. Many have considered Dickinson to have had a mental disorder like anxiety, depression, or bipolar. A Boston doctor who examined her in 1884, just two years before her death, described her condition simply as "Nervous Prostration" because of a lack of research on mental illness during this time period. In his essay, "'I Had a Terror': Emily Dickinson's Demon," cultural historian Seth Archer examines Emily Dickinson's mental illness through her poem "I Had a Terror." Archer interprets Dickinson's poetics within the poem as a depiction of a panic attack: "The "terror" (or "palsy") of September 1861 was a panic attack and

ensuing psychic reverberations, known collectively as panic disorder." Using his own experience with a panic disorder, Archer shows clear parallels between his struggles to that of Dickinson's. He goes on to describe the effects of her mental health on her poetry, which he sees as one benefit from Dickinson's perceived mental illness: "Despite the costs exacted by mental

> illness on her life, it would seem to have traded up for something Dickinson considered quite valuable, even crucial: an existential knowledge of immortality. In the poems, Dickinson's "immortality" suggests not merely the expectant hope for the soul's eternal life but a spiritual transcendence from the day-to-day world."

Archer's look into the importance of poetry for Dickinson's battle with her demons reflects the notion that Dickinson utilized her creativity as a means of survival. Through self-expression, Dickinson found a way to outlet her emotions and deal with her mental illness struggles. Likewise, Sylvia Plath's turbulent mental health has interested scholars since the rise of her posthumous fame. In a Los Angeles Times article entitled "Sylvia Plath's Feminist Legacy Lives On…", journalist Hillel Italie gives insight on the influence of Plath's mental illness on her work. She explores the event that led to her eventual suicide, including her first suicide attempt: "She

> was hard on herself, too hard. In the summer of 1953, upset about not getting into a class at Harvard Summer School, she became deeply depressed and in August decided to kill herself. She sneaked into her basement at home and swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills, passing out in a dark crawl space."

She goes further into Plath's timeline, crediting her relationship with her authoritative father as well as her marriage to Ted Hughes, another renowned poet whose extramarital affairs caused strain to their relationship, as factors that led to Plath's mental health decline. In his article, "Suicide and Creativity: The Case of Sylvia Plath," cognitive psychologist Mark Runco explores

Plath's poetry as a reflection of her mental illness and struggles with depression. It follows the amount and quality of writing chronologically with her own timeline to draw the conclusion that in her darkest times, Plath wrote some of her best works. The times of heightened depression correlated with a previous rise of productivity and creativity depict Plath creating mass amounts of work, which meant more work to submit for publishing, with the possibility of rejection: "Plath's productivity put her in a position where she would experience an extraordinary number of rejections and critiques… This kind of rejection may be especially difficult to accept because it is unpredictable and largely outside of one's control." Runco's essay exemplifies the notion that creativity and self-expression allowed Plath to face her demons and survive as long as she did. With poetry, Plath could put words to her emotions and convey the pain she felt. While both the poets felt their mental hardships would lead to their demise, they also saw poetry as a way to allow them to survive in the meantime. Therefore, the writings of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath illustrate how poetry provided inspiration and a means of survival through their struggles with mental illness.

Furthermore, the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath reflects their perspective of being a woman in a man's world, as well as the kinds of oppression they faced as neurodivergent, intelligent, and independent women. Both poets grew up under the thumbs of their controlling, authoritative fathers, which led them both to question the domination of males in authority. Dickinson respected her father, but disagreed with his conservative religious values. He disapproved of her intellectual desires, believing she would be a better fit to stay at home, but still encouraged her education and bought her books. He selected books based on their content, keeping Dickinson from reading anything that went against his values: "He buys me many Books - but begs me not to read them-because he fears they joggle the Mind" (Pettinger). Syvlia Plath

had similar afflictions with her own strained relationship with her father and the role she should hold in society. Italie elaborates this tension in her article, “Sylvia Plath’s Feminist Legacy Lives On...”, which highlights the effects Plath’s father had on her works and views of patriarchy. She describes Plath as “...an exceptional person who came of age at a time when women, exceptional or not, were expected to stay at home. For much of her life, she was torn between working within those limitations and rebelling against them” (Italie). Both poets also faced criticism, rejection, and censorship of their writing on the basis of their sex. Dickinson avoided publishing her works during her lifetime, but the ones that had been published “...were printed anonymously and apparently without her prior consent” (Pettinger). Dickinson instructed her sister to burn all her letters after her death, and “...she came across a box of 1,700 of Emily’s poems”. Published posthumously, Dickinson had no control over the edits and cuts made to her work, much of which had been censored to depict a less radical Dickinson. In addition, Scripps College English Professor and feminist critic Cheryl Walker’s “Locating a Feminist Critical Practice: Between the Kingdom and the Glory,” examines the relationships between Emily Dickinson and her male idols who partly inspired her works. She approaches her analysis in a way to undermine Dickinson’s stance as a feminist figure, believing that “fearfulness and dependency on others late in life, her choice of conservative Judge Lord as a lover, her dismissal of most women and admiration of powerful men, [and] her mental breakdowns” indicate how Dickinson does not represent a true feminist. In an argument that almost portrays Dickinson with a sort of Freudian ‘penis envy’, Walker refers to Dickinson’s admiration for her father and other prominent men, terms she used in her letters like Master, as well as her choice in suitor during her later years as evidence that Dickinson believed in male superiority. However, due to a patriarchal system, only men could be successful writers during her lifetime. In addition, every time period has its own

conventional terms of endearment. Based on this reasoning, using her male idols and her word choice as evidence of Emily Dickinson's stance within feminism feels insufficient as support and weakens Walker's overall argument. Sylvia Plath faced similar issues with her own works, which did not rise to the level of her male contemporaries of her time. Mark Runco believes the criticisms and rejections of Plath's works due to her gender led her to believe she had no other option besides suicide: "Plath had just published a novel under a pseudonym

> which had received only lukewarm reviews and not yet found an American publisher; in addition, her new poems, which were written in a new style, were being rejected by the magazines which had formerly accepted her work."

Sylvia Plath could not escape her failures, especially when she lay next to her biggest idol and rival every night. Her husband Ted Hughes not only played the role of a mentor in Plath's life, but also as a competitor when submitting works to publishers. Imagine living with, being in love with, and being cheated on by a contender in the industry. After finding out about her husband's extramarital affairs, she spent her nights in the cold London winter caring for two sick children (Italie). Her struggles with her position in a patriarchal society reflect much of what Dickinson experienced, even when it came to an authoritative male figure and patriarchal conventions censoring their work. Her posthumous rise to fame came when her husband published her works after her death, but not after making his own edits and cuts that hindered on the true messages conveyed. He glossed over the parts that depicted his extramarital affairs and treatment of Plath (Italie). Both Dickinson and Plath grew up under the thumb of an authoritative father, only to live as poets idolizing successful male writers who win out on opportunities because of what they have between their legs. Due to their gender, which reinforced their feminist beliefs and

shaped meanings of their work, both Dickinson and Plath dealt with criticisms, rejection, and censorship of their creativity.

First, Emily Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" utilizes various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism and imagery to depict how she found inspiration and a means of survival through her suffering, amplified by her position in a patriarchal society. Dickinson's "[My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun]" has six stanzas, each made of quatrains, or groups of four lines. The lines alternate between iambic trimeter and tetrameter. In addition, Dickinson utilizes parataxis- syntax's foil- which arranges words or phrases in an intentionally informal manner to depict a simple or childlike diction with a conversational tone. This technique allows the audience to empathize with the emotions of the poem and showcases the speaker's vulnerability. The rhyme scheme of each stanza also alternates between ABCB or ABCD. For example, the poem's first stanza has a perfect rhyme on the lines two and four:

"My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun-

In Corners - till a Day

The Owner passed - identified -

And carried Me away-" (Dickinson pg#1).

In addition, line one includes a parataxis variation where Dickinson removes the transitional word connecting two phrases- "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun-" to help develop the conversational tone of the poem. Furthermore, the placement of the two phrases indicates that the clause of "a Loaded Gun" describes the life of the poem's speaker; ergo, the reader can interpret the loaded gun as a metaphor for the speaker's life. This exemplifies an extended metaphor that symbolizes the speaker's potential for explosive and violent anger throughout the entire poem. Also, the first line also serves as an example of caesura- or a break within a line in between the

phrases- which helps the reader slow down and recognize the emotional weight the line holds, as well as reinforces the set rhythm of the poem. The second line ends with an enjambment, defined as a break in lines with a continuation of meaning from one to the other, which connects it to the last two lines of the stanza without punctuation: “In Corners - till a Day/ The Owner passed—identified—/ And carried Me away—” (Dickinson pg #1). Utilizing capitalization, the poem reflects the significance of certain words; line two’s “Corners” could represent a strong feeling of isolation, “Day” could exhibit the importance the speaker holds of the day she met the gun’s “Owner,” who carried the speaker away, the capitalized “Me,” to indicate the objectification and a reduction of the speaker to the likes of a gun or tool. Previously, the speaker separated herself from her "Life," referring to it as an entity on its own. Now, the speaker and her "Life" join back together as “Me”. Her “Life” had stood as a “Loaded Gun” in “Corners” until the “Owner” passed her and carried her away. The structure of this stanza makes the notion that the speaker felt her life had no meaning until a man claimed her as his own and took her away. On the other hand, the stanza could reflect a connection between a woman and her words. Dickinson believes a woman’s truest power lies in their words, but society tells them that women have no voice unless men give them one. As the speaker continues to the second stanza, the poem breaks away from the perfect rhyme scheme of the first stanza to reflect a significant change in the poem’s narrative. The second stanza follows what happens after the owner claims the speaker as his own and carries her away as a personified gun:

> “And now We roam in Sovreign Woods-
>
> And now We hunt the Doe -
>
> And every time I speak for Him
>
> The Mountains straight reply -” (Dickinson pg#).

Dickinson utilizes anaphora, or repetition of the beginning phrase, in the first three lines of the stanza to emphasize the change within the speaker. The speaker refers to herself and the owner as "We". Using capitalization, "We" refers to the gun's dependency on its owner who does as he wants when he wishes to. They "roam in Sovreign Woods—" and "hunt the Doe—." The poem uses the capitalized word "Sovreign" to represent men, who hold the most power and authority in society. Likewise, the capitalized word "Woods" symbolizes the "man's world". Dickinson specifically chose "Doe," instead of "deer" or "buck," when the speaker and her owner "roam in Sovreign Woods" to "hunt the Doe-," or kill the power of females. The enjambment of the stanza's third line, "And every time I speak for Him" refers to the speaker firing a gunshot and "The Mountains straight reply—" reflects the sound of the gunshot echoing from the mountains. Dickinson utilizes this metaphor to demonstrate the notion that when a woman takes on challenges in a man's world, she faces blockages as tall as mountains or receives instant criticism. The third stanza returns to a similar rhyme scheme of the first stanza; however, the second and fourth lines of the stanza now exemplify a slant rhyme, rather than a perfect one.

"And do I smile, such cordial light
Opon the Valley glow -
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let it's pleasure through-" (Dickinson pg#).

The stanza's first line describes the "light" of the speaker's smile "Upon the Valley glow—" to indicate the spark and flash of a gunshot as it goes off. The "smile" and "cordial light" could be a reference to the standard for a woman in a man's world. In the stanza's third line, our speaker alludes to a volcano that erupted in 79 A.D. in northern Italy, called Vesuvius. The first two lines connect to the last two through an enjambment, which reflects a comparison between the flash of

a gunshot and Vesuvius's explosive nature to the speaker's smile. The phrase "Vesuvian face" juxtaposes the notion of a smile as a sign of happiness as a metaphor for the speaker's smile that helps the reader comprehend the depth of the speaker's anger and shows how much destruction this anger could produce. The "Vesuvian face" letting "its pleasure through-" refers to a woman's passion exploding when she can utilize her voice to express herself. The fourth stanza has a similar rhyme scheme of the first and third stanzas, using a slant rhyme like the third stanza:

"And when at Night - Our good Day done -
I guard My Master's Head -
'Tis better than the Eider Duck's
Deep Pillow - to have shared-" (Dickinson Pg#).

The fourth stanza begins with an echo of the anaphora used in stanza two as an indication that it continues the gun's action as the day comes to an end. Moreover, Dickinson uses alliteration like "Day done," "My Master's," and "Duck's Deep" to match the sound and rhythm of a lullaby as the "Day" turns into "Night" in the first line. Furthermore, "I guard my Master's Head—/ 'Tis better than the Eider Duck's/ Deep Pillow—to have shared—" refers to the gun's placement at night, next to its master's head, instead of sharing his pillow. An "Eider Duck" plucks its own feathers to make a nest. The poem compares this kind of duck's nest to the Master's "Deep Pillow", as feathers filled pillows during this period. The self-destructive nature of the Eider duck to go through the pain of plucking its own feathers symbolizes the lengths the speaker would go to protect and comfort her master. The fifth stanza follows the rhyme scheme of the second stanza:

"To foe of His - I'm deadly foe -
None stir the second time -

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye -

Or an emphatic Thumb -" (Dickinson )

The first line of this stanza, "To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—," rhymes with the word "Doe" of the second line in the second stanza and this stanza's third line, "On whom I lay a Yellow Eye," rhymes with the word "reply" in the last line of the second stanza. This homage to the second stanza reflects the notion that a change occurs in the speaker within the stanza. When the speaker protects its owner from his foes as a gun, no one gets up a "second time" because the speaker uses her "Yellow Eye," or the spark as the gun fires. The speaker also uses "an emphatic Thumb" to describe the finger that pulls the trigger of a gun. The ambiguous meaning of the stanza also depicts the woman identifying herself as a "...foe of His," who everyone else sees as a "...deadly foe" (17). When a woman utilizes the lethal power of her words used as a weapon, "None stir the second time". The sixth and final stanza, though of a different tone than the rest of the piece, continues the perfect rhyme scheme of the first stanza, creating a full circle effect:

"Though I than He - may longer live

He longer must - than I -

For I have but the power to kill,

Without - the power to die-" (Dickinson).

Dickinson uses alliteration as the speaker says she "may longer live" than her owner and wishes that her owner live "...longer must—than I". Essentially, the speaker says she needs the owner to outlive her, because with him she has "...the power to kill, without- the power to die-." In the final two lines, the speaker says that as she loses her purpose as a gun, she loses her sense of existence outside of her owner's desires. This symbolizes how society reduces the speaker and other women to the likes of tools with no identity besides their value to their owner. Only living

things have the power to die thus continuing the extended metaphor since the speaker refers to herself as a gun. Also, her words have the power to fight or kill another's argument. Her words live on once she puts them out there, creating an immortality that finds it necessary for men to live longer than she has, so that her words continue to influence the world around her. Speaking through the voice of a gun, the speaker presents herself as the opposite of feminine, as someone who kills, not someone who nurtures (Miller). Poet and feminist critic, Adrienne Rich analyzes this theme in her book *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence : Selected Prose, 1966-1978*: "It is a poem about possession by the daemon, about the dangers and risks of such possession if you are a

> woman, about the knowledge that power in a woman can seem destructive, and that you cannot live without the daemon once it has possessed you… it is a central poem in understanding Emily Dickinson, and ourselves, and the condition of the woman artist, particularly in the nineteenth century… felt the medium of poetry as dangerous… Poetry is too much rooted in the unconscious; it presses too close against the barriers of repression; and the nineteenth-century woman had much to repress."

With her use of anaphora, enjambment, metaphor, and symbolism as well as rhyme scheme, Dickinson succeeds in illustrating a speaker who overcomes her own struggles with mental health and oppression on the basis of gender. Therefore, Emily Dickinson utilizes various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism and imagery to depict how she found inspiration and immortality through her suffering, influenced by her position in a patriarchal society.

Likewise, Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" depicted how she found inspiration and a means of survival through her suffering, amplified by her position in a patriarchal society, using various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism and imagery within her poetry. The poem has 28 stanzas, made up of three short lines each, with 84 lines in total. The shorter lines and the

irregular rhythms force the reader to slow down. Although Plath wrote the poem as a free verse poem without a consistent rhyme scheme, the poem does include irregular perfect and slant rhymes that contribute to the overall flow of the poem's rhythm.The poem's title serves as an allusion to the biblical story of Lazarus, a man whom Jesus resurrected, and indicates the speaker's ability to be reborn after death. The first stanza begins with an end-stopped line, or a line that continues its meaning to the next with the use of punctuation:

"I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it——" (Plath).

The reader can understand that the speaker has done something once every ten years, and plans to again. The stanza introduces a conversational tone between the speaker and the reader throughout the speaker's monologue, continuing into the second and third stanzas-

"A sort of walking miracle, my skin

Bright as a Nazi lampshade,

My right foot

A paperweight,

My face a featureless, fine

Jew linen" (Plath).

The speaker uses hyperboles, calling herself a "walking miracle." She also describes herself using imagery of the oppression jews faced during the holocaust, a frequent theme throughout Plath's poems that reflect her feelings towards her authortarian German father. The fourth and fifth stanzas show her desire to scare off the reader as they watch her die again:

"Peel off the napkin

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?——

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be

At home on me" (Plath).

The haunting depiction of her decaying face and sour breath illustrates how the speaker appears as she dies. The next stanza shows what the speaker does once every ten years:

"And I a smiling woman.

I am only thirty.

And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.

What a trash

To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.

The peanut-crunching crowd

Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot——

The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies” (Plath)

In this poem, Plath refers to the speaker’s vulnerability as "The big strip tease." This show of vulnerability takes away the power and fear a person holds over another. She offers herself to "the peanut-crunching crowd" in a way to please their desires, not her own. The speaker almost breaks the fourth wall in a way to reverse the gaze of the readers to show their objectification of her. The next stanzas show how the speaker has died and come back before:

“These are my hands

My knees.

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.

The first time it happened I was ten.

It was an accident.

The second time I meant

To last it out and not come back at all.

I rocked shut

As a seashell.

They had to call and call

And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call" (Plath)

When the speaker says that she remains "the same, identical woman" after almost reaching death, it shows she still has the desire to die. She finds it to be the easiest trick in the book:

"It's easy enough to do it in a cell.

It's easy enough to do it and stay put.

It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day

To the same place, the same face, the same brute

Amused shout:

'A miracle!'

That knocks me out.

There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge

For the hearing of my heart——

It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

Do not think I underestimate your great concern

Ash, ash—

You poke and stir.

Flesh, bone, there is nothing there——

A cake of soap,

A wedding ring,

A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware" (Plath).

These stanzas depict four sets of imagery to help convey the speaker's identity. At the beginning of the poem, she refers to herself as a fragile material like a lampshade, linen, napkins; towards the middle, she only makes references to her body like her knees, skin and bone, hair; towards the end, the speaker objectifies herself as gold, ash, a cake of soap; finally, the speaker resurrects.

Each image directly correlates with her intended audience: first, to her "enemy", then the "gentlemen and ladies", next the Herr Doktor, and finally, Herr God and Herr Lucifer. Lady Lazarus becomes a different person to match the desires of her audiences. She becomes Jew to be burned for the Nazi doctor, a stripper for the "peanut-crunching crowd," as well as a medical and religious miracle who comes back to life at her own will. The last stanza shows her resurrection:

> “Out of the ash
>
> I rise with my red hair
>
> And I eat men like air” (Plath)

The speaker brags how she will rise from the ashes and eat men like they are nothing.
She projects her oppression and self-destruction to those who take advantage of her. In the end, the speaker reclaims her power over her own mental struggles and oppression she faces on the basis of her gender. Therefore, using various poetic devices like form, rhyme scheme, symbolism and imagery within her poetry, Sylvia Plath’s “Lady Lazarus” depicts how she found inspiration and a means of survival through her suffering, amplified by her position in a patriarchal society.

Emily Dickinson’s “[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]” and Sylvia Plath’s “Lady Lazarus” both succeed at showing their inspiration and means of survival through poetry. They both endured struggles with their mental illness and oppression. An analysis of the poems reveals parallels between the speakers of each poem, as well as the poets. For instance, as a reflection of the patriarchal societies the poets lived within, both speakers fall into the archetypal victim role and face objectification. Moreover, they both feel like invincible and destructive forces free them from the chains of death or mental illness, as the power of their words will live on forever. Their hardships perpetuate their ability to convey their suffering, thus allowing them to survive. Utilizing their words as a way to express their suffering, Dickinson and Plath paved the path of

survival for many other women struggling with their mental health in a patriarchal society. Ergo, Dickinson's "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]" and Plath's "Lady Lazarus" highlight an imperative perspective on how to channel depression and oppression into art that can inspire others. As Winston Churchill once said, their poems represent "...a victory won not only for ourselves, but for all; a victory won not only for our own time, but for the long and better days that are to come."

Annotated Bibliography

Archer, Seth. "'I Had a Terror': Emily Dickinson's Demon." Southwest Review, vol. 94, no. 2, Mar. 2009, pp. 255–273. EBSCOhost.

In this essay, Archer examines Emily Dickinson's mental illness through her poetry. He also uses his own experience with mental illness to draw comparisons. Using Dickinson's poem "I Had a Terror", Archer interprets Dickinson's poetics as a depiction of a panic attack.

This essay will support my thesis of Dickinson utilizing her creativity as a means of survival. Through self-expression, Dickinson found a way to outlet her emotions and deal with her mental illness struggles.

Booth, Alison and Kelly J. Mays, eds. The Norton Introduction to Literature. 12th ed. New York: Norton, 2016. Print.

Dickinson, Emily. "[Because I could not stop for Death]". Booth and Mays. 1890. Print.

Donne, John. "[Death, be not proud]". Booth and Mays. 1633. Print.

Churchill, Winston."Every Man to His Post." 1940. National Churchill Museum, 2019. Online.

In his 1940 speech, "Every Man to His Post", Winston Churchill broadcast to the citizens of London that German forces had turned their focus from military controlled areas of the Royal Air Force to civilian cities in Great Britain. He addresses the British population to convey his appreciation to those fighting on the front lines as well as those standing as pillars in their communities and supporting the military. He implores them to keep standing tall and to find

strength in their suffering to be victorious over the Germans in order to win the battle for those who have died and for those to come.

This quote helps to convey the essay's thesis that creative outlets like poetry give people struggling with mental illness, like Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, the strength to continue fighting their demons. It serves as an extended metaphor to aid the reader in understanding the impact of Dickinson's and Plath's legacies on future generations of women.

Gilbert, Sandra M, and Susan Gubar. Shakespeare's Sisters : Feminist Essays on Women Poets. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979.

Shakespeare's Sisters : Feminist Essays on Women Poets includes Albert Gelpi's article "Emily Dickinson and the Deerslayer: The Dilemma of the Woman Poet in America." Gelpi explores the form and structure in which Dickinson writes "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]."

This article specific analyzes the structure of the last quatrain and how it relates to Dickinson's overall message. In this paper, I intend to utilize this analysis as further support of my thesis.

Italie, Hillel. "Sylvia Plath's Feminist Legacy Lives On..." *Latimes.Com*, Los Angeles Times, 2018, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-02-08-ca-1305-story.html.

Hillel Italie's profile on Sylvia Plath, "Sylvia Plath's Feminist Legacy Lives On…", Italie explores Plath's posthumous fame as well as the events and people in her life that influenced her and led to her unique voice. She gives insight on the influence of her mental illness on her work.

This profile provides further support for Plath's place as a feminist icon, as well as depicting life events that influenced her work, to reflect the patriarchal force that shaped her poetry. It also shows the struggles Plath had with her mental illness.

Miller, Cristanne. Emily Dickinson : A Poet's Grammar. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard Univ. Press, 1995.

Cristanne Miller examines Dickinson's unusual style, focusing on the grammar and structure of her poetry. She also highlights Dickinson's reflections of writing as a woman in a patriarchal society where only men became successful poets.

This text's approach to Dickinson's poetry shows the various forms of structure Dickinson used in "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]". In addition to form, it also explores rhyme scheme within the poem to show how the thesis of this paper applies in the structure of the poem.

Narbeshuber, Lisa. "The Poetics of Torture: The Spectacle of Sylvia Plath's Poetry." Canadian Review of American Studies, vol. 34, no. 2, Mar. 2004, pp. 185–203. EBSCOhost.

In this essay, Narbeshuber criticizes various analyses of Sylvia Plath's poetry. She argues that Plath's poetry stands for female identity in a patriarchal system. In comparison, Narbeshuber believes that most critics reduce Sylvia Plath's poetry as simply autobiographical rather than representative of an entire generation of women and their experiences.

This essay's approach to Plath's poetry gives insight to the effects of Plath's poetry and represents her stance within feminism. It also explores the events within Plath's life, like her

suicide attempts and relationships with the men in her life, depicted through her poetry, that reflects why she can be considered a feminist figure.

Rich, Adrienne. On Lies, Secrets, and Silence : Selected Prose, 1966-1978. New York, W.W. Norton, 1995.

In this text, Adrienne Rich analyzes Emily Dickinson's poetry. She draws from her own experience as a female poet to look at the themes of patriarchal oppression. She examines the symbolism and imagery in "[My Life had stood- a Loaded Gun]".

This text gives support to the themes reflected within the symbolism of this poem. It also explores understanding Emily Dickinson and the condition of the woman artist in the nineteenth century.

Runco, Mark A. "Suicide and Creativity: The Case of Sylvia Plath." Death Studies, vol. 22, no. 7, Oct. 1998, pp. 637–654. EBSCOhost.

Mark Runco's essay explores Sylvia Plath's poetry as a reflection of her mental illness and struggles with depression. It follows the amount and quality of writing chronologically with her own timeline to draw the conclusion that in her darkest times, Plath wrote some of her best works.

This essay will aid in supporting my thesis. It exemplifies the notion that creativity and self-expression allowed Plath to face her demons and survive as long as she did. With poetry, Plath could put words to her emotions and convey the pain she felt.

Pettinger, Tejvan. “Biography of Emily Dickinson”, Oxford, UK. Biography Online. June 2006.

In this profile, Pettinger utilizes various sources to give a detailed and thorough biography that covers Emily Dickinson’s early life, education, religious influences, relationships, and posthumous rise to fame. He ties in primary and secondary sources to show who really is the mysterious and elusive ‘Woman in White’.

This profile on Emily Dickinson plays an integral role of highlighting Dickinson’s relationship with the influential men in her life. Specifically, its insight into the relationship with her father helps to portray the kind of patriarchal oppression she faced growing up.

Walker, Cheryl. “Locating a Feminist Critical Practice: Between the Kingdom and the Glory.” Women’s Studies, vol. 16, no. 1–2, Sept. 1989, pp. 9–19, Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

As a feminist critic, Cheryl Walker’s critical essay examines how Emily Dickinson’s poetry and the role that the relationships between Emily Dickinson and her male idols who partly inspired her plays into her current stance as a feminist icon. Walker argues that the role the men played in Dickinson’s life and her admiration for the power they held in society indicates that she did not follow feminism, but more likely conventional values and quite possibly a sort of “penis-envy”.

This essay provides a counterpoint to my argument that I will refute. Due to a patriarchal system, society considered men as most of the successful writers of the time making use of her male idols as evidence of Emily Dickinson’s stance within feminism ineffective as an argument