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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**HISTORICAL AWARENESS AND SOCIAL
CRITICISM IN SYLVIA PLATH'S POETRY**

A case study of three poems

by

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Jyväskylä 2001

HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
ENGLANNIN KIELEN LAITOS

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HISTORICAL AWARENESS AND SOCIAL CRITICISM IN SYLVIA
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Pro gradu –työ
Englantilainen filologia
Maaliskuu 2001

133 sivua + 3 liitettä

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on osoittaa kuinka Sylvia Plathin runoudessa esiintyy yhteiskuntakriittisiä ja historiallisen tietoisuuden osoittavia elementtejä. Tutkimus käyttää metodinaan Norman Fairclough'n kriittistä diskurssi-analyysia (critical discourse analysis), täydentäen sitä käsitteillä ja teorioilla muista diskurssi-analyttisistä malleista ja kirjallisuuskriittisistä: lähtökohtana analyysille toimivat aiemman tutkimuksen havainnot Plathin runoudessa esiintyvistä yhteiskuntakriittisistä. Fairclough'n analyysimallin mukaisesti materiaalia analysoidaan myös sosiologisia teorioita, esim. feminististä tutkimusta sekä tutkimusta Holocaustin merkityksestä ja asemasta nyky-yhteiskunnassa apunakäyttäen; tarkoituksena on tuoda ilmi Plathin runouden yhteiskunnallinen rooli sekä kielellisellä että yhteiskunnallisella tasolla. Tutkimuskysymys on: Onko aiempi tutkimus oikeassa pitäessään Plathia yhteiskuntakriittisenä kirjoittajana (eli kuinka Plath hyökkää tiettyjä arvoja ja instituutioita vastaan ja kommentoi poliittisia ja aikansa yhteiskunnallisia kysymyksiä? Tutkimus pyrkii myös antamaan myös vastauksen kysymyksiin: Kuinka keskeisiä yllämainitut asiat ovat Plathin runoissa? Millä kielellisillä keinoilla Plath tuo ne julki?

Tutkimuksen materiaalina on kolme Sylvia Plathin runoa, kaikki hänen myöhempää tuotantoaan vuodelta 1962. Analysoitavat runot valittiin aikaisemman tutkimuksen (esim. Strangeways 1998, Bassnett 1987, Aird 1973) esittämien havaintojen perusteella siksi, että jokaisen runosta on havaittu ilmaisevan sosiaalirikittäisiä mielipiteitä. Toinen valintakriteeri oli se, että jokainen runosta sisältää eri kohteisiin suuntautuvaa yhteiskuntakriittisyyttä ja kommentointia, osoittaen näin Plathin monipuolisen poliittisen tietoisuuden.

Analysoiduista runoista on havaittavissa kuinka Plath tuo esiin yhteiskunnan epäkohtia kuten naisten syrjintä miesten dominoimassa yhteiskunnassa ja kuinka hän tiedostaa runoudessaan esim. keskitysleireihin ja toiseen maailmansotaan liittyvät historialliset tosiasiat, kommentoiden puutteellista suhtautumista keskitysleirien kauhuihin. Tuomalla universaalin kärsimyksen ja henkilökohtaisen tuskan yhteen, Plath korostaa sitä, että poliittinen ajattelu ja toiminta alkaa kunkin omasta persoonasta.

Asiasanat: critical discourse analysis. discourse. Holocaust. female oppression. intertextuality.

CONTENTS

	Abstract	2
	Table of contents	3
	Abbreviations used to refer to Plath’s works in the text	6
1	Introduction	7
2	Sylvia Plath: short biography and background as a political person	10
	2.1 Plath as a political person and the sociocultural and historical context	12
	2.1.1 Plath as a ‘political person’	13
	2.1.2 Sociocultural and historical context	14
3	Review of earlier Plath criticism	15
	3.1 Biographical (confessional) approach	17
	3.2 Focus on themes and symbolism	18
	3.3 Socially and textually oriented approaches and combinations	20
	3.4 Feminist approach	25
	3.5 Psychological approach	30
	3.6 Conclusion	34
4	Theoretical framework: critical discourse analysis	35
	4.1 Fairclough’s theory of critical discourse analysis	36
	4.1.1 Discourse as social practice: social theory of discourse	36
	4.1.2 Discourse and power	39
	4.2 Reasons of choosing CDA for the present thesis	41

5	CDA in practice: tools relevant for the present study	43
	5.1 Level of text practice	45
	5.1.1 Word meaning	45
	5.1.2 Wording	46
	5.1.3 Metaphor	46
	5.1.4 Transitivity: voice	47
	5.2 Level of discourse practice	48
	5.2.1 Intertextuality and –discursivity	48
	5.2.2 Interdiscursivity / constitutive intertextuality	50
	5.2.3 Irony	51
	5.2.4 Coherence: focus on macrostructures	52
	5.3 Level of social practice	54
6	Goals of the present study	56
7	The materials and the analytic procedures	57
	7.1 The materials	57
	7.2 Steps in the analysis	58
8	‘Lady Lazarus’	60
	8.1 ‘Lady Lazarus’: concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures	61
	8.2 Analysis of textual and discursive practices and their effects	65
	8.3 Background to the Holocaust: its role in modern society and relevance in ‘Lady Lazarus’	74
	8.4 Agency in ‘Lady Lazarus’	77
	8.5 Conclusion: question of public and private	82
9	‘Purdah’	85
	9.1 ‘Purdah’: concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures	86
	9.2 Analysis of textual and discursive practices and their effects	89
	9.3 Background theory to inspecting female oppression	97

	9.4 Conclusion	100
10	‘Thalidomide’	101
	10.1 ‘Thalidomide’: concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures	102
	10.2 Analysis of textual and discursive practices and their effects	104
	10.3 The thalidomide scandal and its relevance in analysing the poem	111
	10.4 Conclusion	113
11	Conclusion	115
	Bibliography	125
	Appendix	134

Abbreviations used to refer to Plath's work in the text:

A	<i>Ariel</i>
BJ	<i>The Bell Jar</i>
CP	<i>Collected Poems</i>
C	<i>The Colossus</i>
WT	<i>Winter Trees</i>
LH	<i>Letters Home</i>
J	<i>The Journals of Sylvia Plath</i>

1 Introduction

Sylvia Plath is, without doubt, one of the most important and controversial writers in the English language of the 20th century. Her works have received praise and she is considered to be an important feminist (or rather, a proto-feminist) figure in modern poetry and prose. However, her use of, for example, the Holocaust in an extremely provocative and personal manner has produced outrage in many critics: she has, for example, been blamed of trivialising the Holocaust by using it within a personal context. As the majority of previous studies on this topic have suggested, one of the reasons why Plath draws on social and historical facts in her poetry is to emphasize the magnitude of her personal suffering and also to convey this to her public by, for example, comparing herself to the Jews who died in WW II. However, although a large part of Plath criticism is of the opinion that the use of these various metaphors is mainly self-serving, the wide range of the topics Plath deals with in her poetry, especially in the *Ariel* collection, does raise questions of how much social criticism and historical awareness can actually be found in the poems and whether they serve other means than mere description of personal pain. For example, the theme of oppression and suffering, which is often followed by death and rebirth (that is, an escape from suffering) – or merely by another kind of liberation, such as speaking the pain away, as in ‘Daddy’ (A:54-56) – is discussed within the context of Holocaust in several of *Ariel* poems, for example, in ‘Lady Lazarus’ (A:16-19).

However, several Plath critics have claimed that there exists a strong social awareness in many of Plath’s poems, often intertwining with biographical issues. The question of what can be considered personal and what socially conscious or political has been an important issue in more recent Plath criticism, which has become more and more extensive during the 1980s and 1990s, both in terms of various approaches and in terms of works of criticism. For example, feminist criticism has approached Plath’s writing as a means of bringing the personal into the political. For example, authors such as Susan Bassnett and Jacqueline Rose have discussed the issues of sexuality, family and

historical awareness in Plath's poetry, advocating for the inspection of political and social aspects. Critics such as Al Strangeways, Mark Muckleroy and Robyn Marsack have also examined Plath's position as a political person, arguing that her poetry can indeed be seen as socially critical and aware of the surrounding socio-cultural and historical context.

Therefore, the justification for examining Plath's poetry in terms of how it demonstrates socially critical observations and shows awareness of socio-cultural context and historical facts (the latter being related to issues of the Holocaust and male oppression, discussed in more detail in chapters 8 and 9) derives from earlier Plath criticism. To put it simply, the purpose of the present study is to examine the extent to which Sylvia Plath's later poetry can be seen as historically aware and critical of social and political issues. Since Plath uses different kinds of metaphors and discourses (religious, historical etc.) to construct her poems, the present study will be conducted via two critical approaches, literary criticism and critical discourse analysis (CDA). In practice, this means that as literary critics have produced a large number of studies on Plath, they can provide insights into the poems and enable the examination of biographical data in relation to the poems. Critical discourse analysis, in turn, enables the examination of the different discourses in relation to the social and historical facts they represent, and its analytical tools will be used to inspect the claims raised by various studies of Plath's poems and to elaborate on these issues. Thus, together these two approaches will provide a more thorough insight into Plath's poetry than either of them could do alone. This is due to the fact that literary criticism has been able to present a lot of relevant and interesting research. However, it does not possess entirely adequate tools for investigating texts in relation to social reality. Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, is quite a crossdisciplinary field of research, which means that it draws on analytic tools from linguistic analysis and social theory. It can also apply certain tools and theories used by traditional literary criticism in a new manner. Since it has mostly been concerned with non-literary texts, these tools will undoubtedly be useful when CDA is used on a literary text. Together, these approaches create a framework that is exactly what is needed to bring out the socially critical side of Plath's poetry.

Although Plath criticism has identified the socially and politically conscious aspects in the *Ariel* poems (see, for example, Aird 1973, Bassnett 1987), it has often been content with analysing these themes mainly from the perspective of metaphors and their purpose in constructing larger themes in Plath's poetry, such as the father-daughter relationship, death and rebirth. Many of the works aiming to examine Plath's poetry in the social context rely heavily on Plath's biographical details, which can be said to be biased to some extent: this is undoubtedly the heritage of Plath criticism in 1960s, which focused on Plath as a confessional writer¹, and rarely acknowledged her political persona. In the 1990s, a number of critics (for example, Al Strangeways and Mark Muckleroy) have partially broken away from these traditions in their attempts to study the socially critical aspects of Plath's poetry and contributed integrally on the field of newer Plath criticism. However, their investigations have not focused elaborately on the textual side of the poems. In addition, since traditional literary criticism does not possess adequate tools in combining literary 'reality' and social and political reality, their research has for this reason partly been unable to penetrate deeper into the socio-cultural and historical context.

The present study will be conducted via analysing one poem in the *Ariel* collection (first published in 1965) as well as two other poems written in the same period during which the majority of the *Ariel* poems were written. The poems will include 'Lady Lazarus', 'Purdah' (WT:17-19) and 'Thalidomide' (WT:31-32). The selection is based on earlier Plath criticism (see, for example, Bassnett 1897, Muckleroy 1998, Aird 1973), which has argued that the poems contain socially critical commentary and that they each display different elements of Plath social consciousness. The analytic methods will be selected on the basis of the task, which requires both tools for literary criticism and discourse analysis. The concepts of intertextuality and -discursivity will be essential in examining the manner in which Plath combines different discourses and in finding out their function. Further, the textual analysis of interconnectedness between various discourses and metaphors and the social and historical reality will require theories that can combine the textual and

¹ These views come out in the early Plath criticism, such as the work of Alvarez (1964, 1966, 1970), who, however, also appreciated Plath's work from the political perspective.

social realities. As stated earlier, Plath criticism has been unable to penetrate deeper into the social, political and historical context of Plath's later poetry, and even though these aspects have received quite a bit of attention in research literature on Plath, most critics have approached them from an autobiographical point of view, neglecting the causes and contemporary context behind the poems. Thus, the goal of the present thesis is to offer a more thorough analysis of the socially critical side of Plath's poetry. Furthermore, this inspection will also show how useful CDA is in analysing literary texts and in what form it can be applied into a complex text such as a poem.

2 Sylvia Plath: short biography and background as a political person'

This chapter will show how Sylvia Plath can be considered to have been a political person and, consequently, that it is both valid and essential to study her poetry in these terms. However, a short general introduction to Sylvia Plath's life will be presented first, in order to introduce the biographical outlines relevant to her later work and orientation as a political person.

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 27, 1932, to Aurelia Plath (née Schober) and Otto Plath. Her father, a professor of biology and German at Boston University, was of German descent. Otto Plath published works on insects and was personally especially interested in bees. Plath's mother, Aurelia, had met Otto while studying German at Boston University (she had attended to a class taught by him). Sylvia also had a little brother, Warren, who was born in April 27, 1935.

In 1936, after the Plaths had moved to Winthrop, Massachusetts, Otto's health began to fail, but having set his mind on that he had a lung cancer, he refused to see a doctor. Four years later, he died of diabetes. Plath was severely shocked by his father's death, partially directing her hatred towards her mother who had determined not to show her sorrow in front of the children. The

memory of the dead father haunted Plath throughout her adult life, emerging in her poems, which were longing and desperate, and later, violent, and angry (this is pointed out by several critics, for example Melander 1972 and Väisänen 1999).

In 1942, the family moved to Wellesley, Massachusetts, as Aurelia received a teaching post at Boston University. Plath began writing, and before leaving for college, she published her first story in a local magazine. Although she was perceived as a happy, talented child, even during her high school years she herself felt divided by her success and social life, as well as by the extremely high goals she set for herself. In September 1950, Sylvia Plath entered Smith College. She continued to write poems and stories and sent them to various publishers. She also kept a journal and wrote to her mother frequently (these led to the publishing of her *Journals* and *Letters Home* later). She continued to excel in her schoolwork and in her writing. In the summer of 1953, she was awarded the guest editorship for *Mademoiselle*, a magazine in New York. Barnard (1978:19) claims that her experiences in New York are evident in her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*. The journey proved out to be extremely exhausting, and after returning home, Plath tried to commit suicide by swallowing sleeping pills. However, she was rescued in time and sent to recover in a private hospital, where she was subjected to electric shock treatment, which also surfaced in *The Bell Jar* (besides Barnard, also Stevenson 1998:47-49 points this out).

After this, Plath's academic success continued. She graduated from Smith College in 1955, and received a Fulbright fellowship to Cambridge University in England. Here she met the British poet Ted Hughes in March 1956, with whom she fell in love and whom she married in the following June. Plath was eager to return to the USA, so in June, 1957, she accepted a teaching post at her old college. When the school year ended, the Hugheses returned to Boston. Sylvia had several part-time jobs to help with their incomes (since they both had decided to support themselves primarily as writers), for example, she worked as a secretary. The Hugheses moved back to England in 1959, settling in London, where their first child, Frieda was born on April 1, 1960.

Although Sylvia found the life as a housewife and mother exciting, she also experienced difficulties (due to the lack of time for writing). Although her first collection of poems, *The Colossus and Other Poems* was published in 1960, her writing was still barely acknowledged. She miscarried in early February, 1961, and later in the month, had an appendectomy. However, the spring was a better time for her, as Plath was able to write more and as she became pregnant again. In September, 1961, the Hugheses moves to Devon, and in January, 1962, their second child, Nicholas, was born. *The Colossus* was published in America and Plath's voice play, 'Three Women' was accepted for the BBC third Programme.

However, by the end of the summer 1962, Plath's marriage began to fall apart. By autumn, Ted had moved to London and Sylvia had initiated the arrangement of legal separation, to be followed by divorce. She continued to live in Devon with the children, but due to the difficulties of maintaining the house alone and bad health (she suffered from flu and high fever), she found a flat in London and moved there in December 1962. At this time, she had already finished the main corpus of the *Ariel* poems, including 'Daddy', 'Lady Lazarus', Medusa (A:45-46), 'The Jailer' (CP:226-227), etc. Plath was suffering from severe depression, although she was also starting to receive professional recognition. The winter of 1962-1963 was extremely cold, and she suffered from flu and taking care of the children was also very demanding. On the morning of February, 11, 1963, Plath gassed herself in her kitchen.

2.1 Plath as a 'political person' and the sociocultural and historical context

An excellent account of Plath as a 'political person' is found in Strangeways (1998). He claims that Plath's treatment of political concerns and historical material focuses on the issue of "cultural memory" (1998:78). He separates the issue of politics and poetry and history and myth, focusing on contemporary issues in the former and historical imagery in the latter. However, in this section they are discussed as intertwining issues, because they appear intertwined in Plath's poetry (as Strangeways himself, as well as Rose 1998

and Marsack 1992, comment) and in the poems analysed in the present paper (see, for example, 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Purdah'). As will be shown, Strangeways (1998), backed up by feminist (oriented) critics such as Rose (1998), Bassnett (1987) and Marsack (1992) present convincing arguments why it is valid to inspect Plath's poetry in terms of elements of social criticism and historical awareness. Their inspection relies on Plath's biographical facts and own statements, as well as the inspection of surrounding socio-cultural background. As Fairclough (1992) has pointed out, this background cannot and must not be separated from the inspection of the texts. As will be shown, the relevance of inspecting the precise poems selected for the present study also receives its backing in Plath criticism, in terms of their handling of social and historical issues.

2.1.1 Plath as a 'political person'

As Strangeways (1998) points out, Plath considered herself to be a 'political person' from her youth, before the time she attended Smith College. Her teachers in high school (see Wagner-Martin 1990:45) and correspondents from her pre-college period (see *ibid.*:58-64) had a huge impact on her. Strangeways (1998:77-81) describes Plath's introduction to contemporary issues such as the Korean War, American politics (the presidential elections in 1952) and McCarthyism. He argues against the view taken by many critics, which is that Plath's interest in politics was motivated by purely personal factors. For example, Wagner-Martin (1990:64) argues that much of this interest occurred when Plath was upset about her own life. Strangeways objects to this and states that Plath indeed was intellectually and emotionally interested in political issues. He points out that as early as 1950 Plath published a political piece titled *Youth's Plea for World Peace* (Plath and Norton 1950:19), and in Smith college she elected to follow a politics course. Furthermore, in *Letters Home*, Plath frequently discusses political issues, for example the presidential election of 1952 (LH:96), the election of 1960 and her participation on a protest march against nuclear warfare (LH:378) and American armament policies (LH:438).

2.1.2 Sociocultural and historical context

Plath's interest in political issues can be seen to have its background in the surrounding socio-cultural context. As Strangeways (1998:83-85) points out, many of Plath's generation were affected by the "invasion of the political (both as concerns about general issues ... and contemporary and recent events) into the emotional sphere of the individual (1998:83). The 1950s in America were (and still are) viewed as a period of prosperity, but the memories of the WW II and the rapid escalation of cold war with its fears of a potential nuclear holocaust were a strong undercurrent in the environment in which Plath grew up. Bassnett (1987:28-29) gives a list of events and issues which all occurred during Plath's lifetime: World War II in 1938-45, McCarthyism in the early 1950s, Korean War 1950-53, Hungarian uprising 1956, Suez crisis in 1956, etc. Also more lasting issues in politics and society, such as the cold war and the threat of nuclear holocaust all surfaced during Plath's lifetime.

Strangeways (1998:85) claims that the political side in Plath's poetry existed both in her earlier work (both Strangeways 1998:85-85 and Väisänen 1999:8-12 discuss 'The Thin People' as an example of this) and in her later work. One of the issues which several Plath critics (see, for example, Bassnett 1987:87-89, Melander 1972:103-104 and Aird 1973:78-84) have pointed out in 'Lady Lazarus' and in Mary's Song (Strangeways 1998:85) is the Holocaust. The Holocaust as a phenomenon had affected Plath deeply and it surfaced in her life and art: Stevenson (1998:41) claims that in her poetry, Plath connected the annihilation of Jews in WW II with contemporary political events, like the case of Rosenbergs, upon which she commented also in *The Bell Jar* (BJ:14). The purpose and effect of this was undoubtedly to demonstrate the similarities (persecution, paranoia) in human behaviour, and to show that contemporary society was far from being free from it. Alvarez (1964:65) suggests that Plath's interest in the Holocaust was an expression of her general political fears: the potential for a nuclear genocide made concerns about the Holocaust immediately relevant². Also Bassnett (1987:26-30) points out how the

² Considering the arguments of Stevenson and Alvarez, this does seem to be the case. However, it must also be borne in mind that, as Strangeways (1998:77-130) points out, Plath

surfacing of the imagery of the Holocaust in Plath's poetry dates back to the same time as her letters indicate her will to "become involved, to do something to help" (1987:28). Also contemporary issues and events surface, for example, in 'Mary's Song', in which Strangeways (1998:95) identifies cold war and nuclear warfare, and in 'Thalidomide' (Stevenson 1998:276 points out the frame of the thalidomide scandal in early 1960s). Thus, although the USA in the 1950s and early 1960s seemed to be, as Plath ironically comments in 'The Thin People', "... the sunlit room: the wall study / Frieze of cabbage-roses and cornflowers pales", the reality under the surface was anything but calm (see Sylvia Plath Forum: 1998 for further discussion on the poem).

As Fairclough (1992:64) points out, language use is shaped by existing social structure and historical context. Furthermore, he argues that different types of discourse in different social domains "may come to be politically or ideologically 'invested'" (1992:67), meaning that the immediate context of text production is sociocultural and political, 'vulnerable' to the trends of the time of production. However, since the author's position is also important to consider, different trends and events which (might) have affected the author are also of importance. Thus, Strangeways' arguments for Plath's political persona and agenda can be seen to be a valid one, and thus the inspection of these issues in her poetry (as indicated also by several Plath critics mentioned above) are a valid direction for research. It must also be borne in mind that since Plath's reactions to, for example, the Holocaust differ (argued by Väisänen 1999 and Strangeways 1998) from the ones that were conventional in the society in which she grew up, these can be seen also socially critical.

3 Review of earlier Plath criticism

The amount of research literature on Sylvia Plath is quite impressive in volume, but it still mainly represents the relatively narrow field of traditional

was interested of history in general and was observant of social and historical issues. Thus, her interest can also be seen as emerging from the point of view of a 'historian', although this term implies both a different form of commentary and relation to the issues than Plath used and had.

literary criticism. Plath critics have mainly concerned themselves with issues such as the themes and symbolism in Plath's poetry (Melander 1972, Kroll 1976, etc.) and the correspondence between her poetry and personal life (Axelrod 1990, Gray 1990, etc). Plath's work has mainly been interpreted from a biographical point of view, or, at least, these details have tended to direct the interpretations to a considerable extent. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, several critics, for example, Marsack (1992) and Bassnett (1987), have argued that several of Plath's poems (especially those published in *Ariel*) are clearly autobiographical in outline. They ground this on similarities between the facts of Plath's personal life and the statements made in her poems. This is, of course, one possible basis for further interpretations, and in certain cases, quite a valid one. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the biographical details have had a tendency to direct the interpretation and even force it to adapt to the events and turns in Plath's life: Mary Kinzie (as quoted in Bassnett 1987:4) points out that "Sylvia Plath became a 'confessional' writer after her death", meaning that Plath's fate directed the interpretation of various themes and symbols in her poetry. In other words, the textual side of Plath's poetry has largely been subjected to the biographical data.

However, although the use of biographical data in the discussion of Plath's work is extensive – and, based on the comments of Plath herself (see, for example, Stevenson 1998, Plath 1966), even necessary to some extent – it is not the only available approach to Plath's work. Of course, literary criticism cannot be dependent on biographical details entirely, but, as Kroll (1976:ix) puts it, the need for 'internal' evidence besides the 'external' evidence is imminent ('internal' meaning biographical issues and 'external' meaning issues on the level of the poem). Therefore, the focus on themes and symbolism, which draws on biographical details more selectively than on the confessionalist approach, is another important aspect in the mainstream Plath criticism. It can be argued that besides a biographical approach there is an approach that focuses on themes, symbolism, etc. However, this categorisation is somewhat rigid, since these two approaches draw on each others, in terms of starting points for analyses and concepts for analysing Plath's work. However,

it can be argued to be a valid one, since the differences between the approaches can be quite notable. In addition to these two approaches, there exist other approaches which draw on the tools and starting points of these two, but aim at developing the analyses of Plath's work to a number of directions. Examples of these approaches, as well as differences between them, will be discussed below in more detail.

However, it must be borne in mind that all of these approaches are interrelated: feminist critique on Plath draws on biographical details, the psychological approach pays attention to textual and social aspects and so forth. What matters in the following classification is the main focus and orientation, (that is, the starting point from which Plath's work is investigated) of an approach, which shapes the point of view a particular takes on Plath's work. The aim of the following account is to give as rich and many-sided a picture of the existing research literature on Plath as is possible in this limited study. The works of various authors were selected for discussion and elaboration on the basis of their 'authority' (magnitude of use by other researchers), controversiality, their usefulness for the present thesis, and finally, the need to provide information of all the different approaches to Plath's work. Not all the works mentioned/referred in this thesis are discussed here, due to both lack of space and the focus on works which are seen either as controversial or seminal, in terms of general Plath research and this thesis.

3.1 Biographical (confessional) approach

Studies utilising a biographical (also called 'confessional') approach to Plath's poetry are extensive in number, and form an important constituent of virtually all of Plath criticism (that is, nearly all approaches to Plath's poetry utilise biographical information on her to some extent). Since this approach in its 'purest' forms is of little interest and use in terms of the present thesis, only a couple of the most recent studies will be discussed.

A good example of how the biographical facts have tended to become the main issue in approaching Plath's poetry can be found in Gray (1990). In his study, Gray discusses the question of poetic voice, and focuses on the confessional nature of Plath's poems, which, according to him, are poems of "intense personal meditation, conversing with the self" (1990:263). Gray compares Plath to Robert Lowell, whose *Life Studies* (1959) had been highly influential to Plath: as Axelrod (1990:12) states, Plath had considered *Life Studies* as a "breakthrough into very serious, very personal, emotional experience" (Plath 1966, as in Axelrod 1990). Gray's focus is nearly wholly on these issues.

Also Ted Hughes (1930-1998), the poet and ex-husband of Plath, has written several commentaries on the work of Sylvia Plath. In one of his most recent articles, titled *On Sylvia Plath* (Raritan 1994), he takes a primarily biographical approach to Plath's work³. Hughes discusses Plath's intense ambitions towards writing poetry and especially towards writing a novel. He uses biographical details in discussing Plath's work in *The Bell Jar* (1966), arguing, for example, that the story of the novel dramatises the elements of her adult life and that each episode in the novel's plot is a close-to-documentary account of her life (Hughes 1994). Of course, Hughes himself is a first-hand witness to the birth of the works he is referring to, so in that sense his arguments and approach is a valid one. However, the readings Hughes presents of poems such as 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' (A:47) and 'Little Fugue' (A:71-72), have very little, if any, room for non-biographical elements. Thus, his observations remain quite one-sided.

3.2 Focus on themes and symbolism

Judith Kroll's book *Chapters in a Mythology: The poetry of Sylvia Plath* (1976) offers an example of another type of Plath criticism. Kroll inspects Plath's poetry as a process of myth creation: she states that Plath's poetry is

³ This is somewhat exceptional, for Hughes' readings have often, as Muckleroy (1999:16) points out, tended to emphasise the myth-making qualities of Plath's poetry. This can be seen, for example, in his essay "Notes on the chronological order of Sylvia Plath's poems" (Hughes 1970), where he argues that Plath was making a 'myth' of herself, based on personal experience and literary influences.

“the articulation of a mythic system which integrates all aspects of her work, and into which autobiographical or confessional details are shaped ...” (1976:2). As Kroll herself states it, her focus is on the thematic meaning of Plath’s later poems, as she analyses them individually insofar as it is relevant to demonstrate the underlying deep and complex visions. Although Kroll is bent on discussing the symbolism (moon) and recurring themes (father-daughter relationship, death and rebirth, etc.), she inevitably has to acknowledge the relevance of “external confirmations“ in relation to the “internal evidence“ (Kroll 1976:ix). The argument for the mythic quality of Plath’s poetry has received backing from later Plath criticism: for example, *Strangeways* (1998) discusses the issue of transcendence and the combination of myth making and social commentary in Plath’s poetry. And indeed, Plath’s poems (especially in the *Ariel* collection) do venture into myth-making, in the sense of creating a speaker figure who is subjected to suffering but who manages to escape from her oppressors via death and rebirth. However, Kroll’s examination neglects the context of contemporary and historical issues, which emerges in Plath’s later poetry both on the surface level (language) and deeper level (themes), and which are related to the actual world often stronger than to the mythic one.

Thus, with its focus on themes, symbolism and metaphors, Kroll’s study serves as an example of another approach in ‘mainstream’ Plath criticism. Although these foci do not dwell overtly on the issue of biographical details and confessionalism, they do nonetheless use them as a background to a varying degree. The main distinction (and the main point of validity for the division) between the biographical approach and Kroll’s approach, is that whereas the biographical approach takes Plath to be a confessional writer, the approach focusing on themes, symbolism and so forth, discusses Plath’s work in other contexts (literary background, common thematics in poetry) besides the biographical one.

Another, and slightly different, example of this approach in Plath criticism can be found in Melander (1972) who argues in her study on the themes in Plath’s poetry that biographical data can be used as a complement to textual examination in cases when it can contribute to the understanding of the theme

of a poem or a group of poems. She argues that in the case of poems which discuss the father-daughter relationship, the biographical approach is suitable and “even necessary“ (1972:7). Furthermore, Melander uses biographical details in her interpretations especially in the case of the poems found in the *Ariel* collection, and claims that in these poems, the Holocaust merges together with larger themes (mainly those of death and rebirth, which bring relief from oppression). Furthermore, she claims that in the whole body of these poems, biographical data can be used as a tool to build up interpretations of metaphors and outlines of the poems.

Melander discusses the themes of nature, father-daughter relationship and death, among others, in Plath’s poetry. Since the aim of her study is to discuss the themes in terms of traditional literary criticism, her discussions are inevitably quite limited in terms of relating the poems to a larger context. In spite of this shortage, the value of Melander’s study is precisely in her readings of Plath’s poems which manage to maintain an open mind (to some extent, at least) towards other possibilities than those provided by biographical information. These readings have offered insights for a closer textual etc. study of Plath’s poems in the present study, for example, in the case of analysis of ‘Lady Lazarus’ where Melander’s view of the importance of analysis of intertextuality and agency are used as starting points to analysis.

3.3 Socially and textually oriented approaches and combinations

The orientations of the two approaches mentioned above are often combined in several other critical works on Plath. Often in these studies special attention is paid to textual and/or social aspects, too. Especially in the 1990s, a number of studies approaching Plath’s poetry from a point of view of her poetry being commentary on social and political issues besides the personal ones, were published (for example, *Strangeways* 1998). Plath’s poetry has been studied within stylistic and linguistic frameworks. These studies have focused on the formal sides of Plath’s poetry (for example, *Platzky* 1994). Unfortunately, these textual studies do not venture into any inspection of social issues. Reversibly, the studies commenting on social and political issues do not

conduct any explicit linguistic/textual analysis on the poems. These studies also draw on biographical data to a varying extent.

An example of this is how one of the elements of social criticism in Plath's poetry, the use of the Holocaust, has often been approached. Critics focusing on biographical details have tended to approach the Holocaust in Plath's poetry mainly as a metaphor for personal pain originating in various sources, for example, in childhood traumas (the death of Plath's father) and in problems in her adult years (her suicide attempt, the separation of Plath and her husband). However, many critics have felt that this is not enough: one example of this is Crofts' (1998) study. According to Crofts (1998), the focus on biographical details in approaching the Holocaust in Plath's poetry is a two-sided issue: she claims that Plath uses the Holocaust in 'The Thin People' (C:32-34) in terms of a personal response to it as well as in terms of a broader, contemporary context, commenting on the public interest and media images of concentration camps. Crofts also claims that in her later poetry (for example, in 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus'), Plath uses the Holocaust as a metaphor to open her suffering to a wider context, and by doing this she "questions the relationship between the personal and the political" (1998:7) in her later poetry. Crofts does not explore explicitly whether these later poems actually contain elements of social criticism or whether, for example, the Holocaust has been subjected to Plath's personal experiences (as Crofts' interpretations of the poems seem to be). Instead, she emphasizes the fact that Plath recognised the weight of cultural and historical facts that bound her and the surrounding human community to the Holocaust and realised that she could use it as a part of "her vocabulary" (Crofts 1998:6).

As stated above, the Holocaust in Plath's poetry has been studied quite extensively, but only rarely has it become the centre or the focal point of any particular approach. In his study, Väisänen (1999) approaches the Holocaust in Plath's poetry from a partly socially critical point of view, claiming that the Holocaust imagery undergoes a fundamental change in terms of its use in Plath's poetry. Väisänen argues that in her earlier work, in this particular case in the poem 'The Thin People', Plath discusses the Holocaust in terms of its

importance, the “everlasting memory ... and the collective guilt of humankind“ (1999:9), also relating these issues to a contemporary context (the false glory of Eisenhower’s America in the 1950s). After this (according to Väisänen), Plath’s poetry begins to gradually involve more and more personal elements combined with social and historical issues (in this case, the Holocaust). Finally, in her later poetry, Plath begins merging the Holocaust together with biographical facts. Väisänen discusses various poems, for example, ‘Little Fugue’ in relation to Plath’s father-daughter relationship (1999:13-17) and ‘Lady Lazarus’ in relation to various personal issues, for example, Plath’s suicide attempt (1999:18-22), arguing that the socially conscious side of Plath is ever present, even though it is becoming less distinguishable from the personal side.

Väisänen approaches these issues from the point of view of literary criticism, often grounding his arguments on works of different Plath critics who have a more socially and culturally oriented approach (for example, Marsack 1992, Bassnett 1987, etc.). Therefore his study pays attention to the contemporary cultural and social context as well as to biographical information (which is used when considered proper). However, the analysis does not venture very deep into the level of textual aspects nor social practices, but remains mainly on the level typical of literary criticism. The points raised by Väisänen have nonetheless been influential for the present study: the need to examine the points in more detail is precisely the goal in the present study.

Some critics have also taken a more textually oriented approach to Plath’s poetry. Dibakar Barua (1988) examines the syntactic and semantic structures in Plath’s ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’, conducting an explicit linguistic analysis on the poem. Her approach sheds light on the textual side of Plath’s poetry, but unfortunately the listing of different features reduces the analysis into mere observations, instead of venturing, for example, into interpretations of their deeper meaning or relation to surrounding socio-historical context. Another example of textually oriented approaches is Roger Platizky’s *Plath’s ‘Daddy’* (Explicator 1997). Platizky takes a more stylistic approach when discussing one of Plath’s most famous poems, ‘Daddy’. He briefly discusses

the imagery in the poem, focusing mainly on Plath's use of, for example, rhythm and enjambement to present herself as a victim and to take away some of the power of her alleged tormentors. This idea of the author of a text using textual means to present power relations within a text, indicating the existence of these relations in a larger context – or using these means to disrupt and to comment on existing power relations – is something CDA was created to investigate (Fairclough 1989, 1992). Platizky's article thus suggests several interesting ideas, even though he does not venture into a very detailed stylistic analysis. As was mentioned above, Väisänen (1999) discusses 'Daddy' mainly in relation to Plath's personal experiences and the subjection of historical facts to these experiences. Therefore the combination of these two studies should serve to give a fairly good overall impression of the poem, with most of its main aspects (textual, historical, even biographical) covered.

In combination of the points of focus in the studies discussed above, one study which provides a useful, although somewhat limited introduction to Plath's poetry and to her first and only published novel, *The Bell Jar*, is Eileen Aird's *Sylvia Plath* (1973). Aird does not discuss larger themes together as Melander (1972) does, but instead goes through all the poetry collections by Plath, commenting on their general structure (thematics, style) and on individual poems. The value of Aird's work is precisely in the fact that it provides the reader with interpretations which give a short, overall impression of the major thematic and symbolic angles of Plath's poetry, providing insights for further analysis. Aird's study occasionally touches on the question of social criticism of Plath's poetry, for example in the case of her later poems (1973:82-84). Aird mostly argues that such elements exist, but since the aim of the book is to give short characteristics and interpretations of the most important poems (according to Aird, it seems, for there is no further justification on choosing the poems for closer analysis), she does not venture any further in her analysis.

As for more socially oriented studies on Plath, Al Strangeways presents ideas valuable for the present study – and for Plath criticism and literary criticism as such – in his book *Sylvia Plath: The shaping of shadows* (1998). Strangeways discusses the treatment of political and historical issues in Plath's poetry,

pointing out that the view taken by many Plath critics, for example, by Joyce Carol Oates, Seamus Heaney and Irving Howe (for detailed information of the criticism, see Rose 1998:206) is that Plath is opportunistically taking advantage of these issues to emphasise her own experience. However, Strangeways considers this to be an extremely limiting view, which not only masks the complexity of the relationship between politics and personal issues in Plath's poetry, but also fails to examine the reasons why Plath's appropriation of, for example, the Holocaust has caused such debate among literary critics. Thus, Strangeways takes the same stand as Rose (1998) takes when she argues that instead of discussing whether Plath has the right to utilise the Holocaust in her poetry or not, the discussion should be about the effects that are created (and consequently, as argued in the present study, about whether there exists historical and social commentary in Plath's poetry or not). He proposes that the "often emblematic nature of her historic imagery is ... a response to the suprapersonal nature of recent history and tied to a wider cultural problem" (1998:77-78).

Strangeways (1998) sets out to examine Plath's literary background (showing, for example, her interest in traditional American and Romantic concerns of individualisation and mechanisation), her position as a 'product' of her own times (in cultural, literal, etc. manners) and a 'rebel', her use of social and historical issues in her poetry, her re-writing and making of myths and the importance of psychoanalytic theories in Plath's work (latter grounded to the fact that Plath herself was interested in, for example, Freud's work, as pointed out by Stevenson 1998). As mentioned above, the main interest in Strangeways' study for the goals of the present study is precisely the attention he pays to social and historical issues. Strangeways shows extensively Plath's background as "a political person" (1998:78), the cultural, political, etc. context surrounding her, and relates it to her poetry, discussing poems such as 'Mary's Song' (WT:39) and 'Getting There' (A:43-44).

The main defect in Strangeways' study is, in the same way as in literary criticism on Plath in general, that it does not aim to inspect or validate the arguments firmly on the textual level. Thus, the poems themselves remain

somewhat inadequately inspected. However, *Strangeways* presents many valuable insights into the questions of historical awareness and social criticism in Plath's poetry, as well as shows quite well the problematics of interpretation and interconnectedness of personal and social levels of commentary. He also argues convincingly about the impossibility of separating the personal and universal aspects of social criticism and awareness, which is integral in understanding how Plath operates, and is the case in any texts. As Fairclough (1992:72) argues, the process of production cannot be traced back purely on the basis of a text. Since he states that production is dependent on the context of surrounding sociocultural practices, it can be argued that these practices must have left 'traces' within a text. Therefore, *Strangeways'* claim of the influence of social and historical events on Plath is quite valid, and since this influence exists, it can be rightfully argued that Plath's poetry contains elements of social criticism and historical awareness. *Strangeways'* contributions also partly justify the need for a more thorough inspection on the social and political issues in Plath's poetry, thus helping to validate the purpose of the present thesis.

3.4 Feminist criticism

Recently, in the 1980s and 1990s, Sylvia Plath's poetry has often been studied from the point of view of feminist criticism. Feminist criticism is a cross-disciplinary approach, which, in the case of Plath criticism, is important enough to be dealt with separately. Feminist criticism is generally influenced by sociological, historical and psychoanalytic theories, and it aims at constructing, for example, the roles and history of women, inspecting the traditional roles and expectations connected with womanhood in patriarchal societies and analysing the work of women. As Patterson (1978:8) states, the main thesis ("cardinal motto" as she puts it) in feminist criticism is that all individuals are shaped by a social complex, extending from ideology and communication to institutional structures and roles. From this follows the task to analyse how women perceive themselves in relation to society. This, on the other hand, leads to the question of consciousness: in analysing consciousness,

feminism bears “a direct relationship to two dominant radical theories, Marxism and psychoanalysis“ (Patterson 1978:9).

Thus, feminist criticism on Plath combines sociological aspects and theories (among others) to literary criticism, also utilising the ideas introduced by previous approaches to Plath’s work. This side of feminist criticism is thus quite similar to the goals of the present study. However, Fairclough’s model of CDA seems more suitable in this study, due to the fact that it provides good overall models for analysing texts in their cultural and historical context. However, the work of many feminist critics (as will be seen below) on Plath has been influential in discussing the social aspects and context of production in Plath’s poetry. Thus, feminist studies on Plath are of use in the present study as a background to the analysis (to some extent).

A good account of feminist criticism on Plath is given in Patterson (1978). Patterson suggests in her study *Sylvia Plath: A study of her life and art* (1978) that the co-incidental resurgence of Sylvia Plath and the women’s movement during the late 1960’s and early 1970s demands an historical approach to Plath’s art. She criticises some of the earlier interpretations of Plath’s work, claiming that they distort Plath’s ‘consciousness’, meaning that they neglect the importance of historical and social context. She claims that Plath’s poetry and fiction explore and reflect issues subsequently analysed by the woman’s movement. Patterson claims that the focal point in her analysis is “the correspondence between the emergence of her (Plath) own voice, and a sharpened focus on themes and concerns particularly rooted in the social experiences of womanhood“ (Patterson 1978: abstract): thus, Plath’s art reflects her social and gendered existence. However, despite her initial arguments, Patterson does not venture very deep into the analysis of social and historical context, but remains on a more confessional level. Nonetheless, her study provides some interesting insights into the principles and goals of feminist criticism, and acknowledges the need for a social and historical study on Plath.

One feature that a large number of works of feminist approach on Plath share is the critique directed towards earlier Plath criticism, which is considered to be inadequate and even inappropriate. For example, Bassnett (1987), in her critique of Plath criticism, claims that the criticism on Plath's poetry has been influenced by the two "most powerfully persistent myths of western culture" (1987:1), the myth of the 'Doomed Poet' (a figure whose art eventually causes his/her death) and the myth of the 'Frustrated Female' (cause of frustration being family background, personal relationships). She argues that critics have tended to read Plath's poetry using these two myths as a background for their analysis, which has led to the need to prove the particular case(s) right, thus suffocating open discussion. Bassnett also comments on the nature of male criticism of Plath's poetry, accusing it of having a patronising attitude towards Plath (and women writers, in general). This indeed has been the case in certain branches of Plath criticism, but this is perhaps a bit exaggerated comment, given the fact that the approaches (based on biographical facts, psychoanalytic theories, etc.) taken by these 'old-school' critics do not differentiate that much from the approaches taken by feminist / feminist-influenced critics (this will be shown below in more detail).

In these terms, Bassnett discusses the older approaches to Plath's poetry and the question of interpretation and argues that literary criticism lacks tools in analysing the "complex interweaving of voices and tones in Sylvia Plath's poetry" (1987:5-6). She claims that although certain biographical facts are available and although Plath's poems and stories exist and some of the 'eye witnesses' are still alive, the two main problems still exist: first, the demand of consistency (in terms of poetic voice) is absurd due to the human mind which is capable of extreme changes in mood; and second, there is no single true reading of any work of art. However, Bassnett still uses the tools of literary criticism and does not venture into psychoanalytic or sociological theories, as feminist criticism often does. Due to this fact, Bassnett does not penetrate very deeply into the purely textual and social aspects of Plath's poetry, but remains somewhere in between, drawing sometimes quite extensively on biographical data to justify her interpretations.

Another critic, who studies Plath from a similar feminist (or feminist-influenced) point of view, is Robyn Marsack. In her study, Marsack (1992) explores Plath's use of autobiography and myth, of women's experience as daughters, wives and mothers as well as discusses Plath's "controversial personalization" (1992:back cover) of contemporary history, for example, Plath's use of the Holocaust in her later poetry. Due to the fact that Marsack's study is a part of the series *Open Guides to Literature*, the book adopts a pedagogical approach: it aims at providing "relevant biographical, historical and cultural information" as is considered necessary for the reader to approach the issues discussed in the book (topics typical of Plath criticism, such as the mother-daughter relationship, father-daughter relationship, question of division between self and poetic self, etc.).

Although Marsack does rely on biographical facts in her discussions, she also approaches the poems from a more socially and historically grounded point of view than many other Plath critics. A good example of this is how she discusses Plath's use of the Holocaust in her poetry, approaching it from the point of view of its effect on the literary community in general and on the public consciousness in a contemporary context, in the 1960s, as the Eichmann trial had brought back the issues concerning the Holocaust (1992:48-50). Marsack manages to maintain an open mind towards all the relevant aspects of the issue of the Holocaust in Plath's poetry, personal (for example, the identification with Jews, the victims of the Germans, has been seen as being based on the fact that Plath found herself victimised by her father, who was of German origin), historical and literary-critical. The latter point can be seen as a comment on an issue raised by Alvarez (1966) who claimed that post-war English poetry lacked the consciousness and the will to comment on social and historical issues (1992:49-50) such as the Holocaust. It is also connected to the debate on the Holocaust in Plath's poetry that has gone on among the literary critics ever since. Marsack points out that this debate has been concentrating on whether it is inappropriate to use the Holocaust as a metaphor, disregarding the literary and historical contexts.

The questions concerning femininity are nevertheless approached from mainly biographical point of view (1992:84-90), although the influence of feminist criticism can still be found, for example, in the manner in which Marsack acknowledges the work of feminist critics in issues concerning Plath and femininity. Of course, Marsack's aim in the first place is to provide the reader with interpretations of Plath's poetry and relatively general insights into relevant issues concerning her work and its connection to the literary community and social, historical, etc. reality, and in this she succeeds. Thus, the rudimentary background for a more explicit analysis on Plath's poetry in relation to social, historical, etc. issues, which Marsack offers, is of value.

One of the most recent studies in this particular field of Plath criticism is Jacqueline Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1998). Rose discusses Sylvia Plath both in terms of her work and her inheritance, commenting on also non-literary issues (the role of Ted Hughes in editing Plath's post-mortally published works and, according to Rose, even damaging them). Rose's study is truly cross-disciplinary in its approach, drawing on literary criticism, social studies and psychoanalytic theory: this, as Patterson (1978) argues, is typical of feminist criticism. Although Rose criticises, for example, David Holbrook's (1976) psychological approach, her own approach also draws on Freudian theory: however, she remains cautious in generalising and labelling Plath as a schizoid individual (as Holbrook 1976 does) on the basis of her poetry. Whereas Holbrook (as will be discussed below) considers Plath to be pathological on the basis of her poetry, analysing her work from a point of view of Plath being a 'pseudo-male', Rose rejects this and avoids drawing such conclusions of a person's state of mind. Instead, from the point of view of post-modern feminist criticism, she inspects various issues, such as the question of the body in Plath's writing, her relation to popular culture, her experiences as a woman and means of conveying them.

The main interest in Rose's work for the present study is its elaborate discussion of the Holocaust in Plath's poetry: using the imagery in 'Daddy' as an example, Rose relates the issue with the historical and literary context, pointing that the Holocaust in Plath's poetry has often been criticised harshly

for either Plath trivialising it as a metaphor, or using it to aggrandise her personal experiences. Rose's view is that in 'Daddy' the question of metaphor brings inevitably with it a "question of fantasy" (1998:207). What she seems to be saying with this is that the use of the Holocaust (for example, in characterising the "daddy" as a Nazi) in the poem serves as an outlet for emotions and a means to describe the importance of the historical event within her personal life, as intertwined in the mind with personal issues. Thus, Rose's argument seems to be that the condemning of the use of the Holocaust is the same as condemning the effect which social and historical effects have on a person. However, the main limitation in Rose's study, from the perspective of the present thesis, is that the issue of social and political context in discussing the Holocaust remains somewhat suppressed under the psychological background.

3.5 Psychological approach

Authors such as Steven Axelrod and David Holbrook have taken a psychologically dominated approach to Plath's work. This approach has received quite a lot of criticism; many critics (see below) have condemned especially David Holbrook's work. Although the psychological approach to Plath's poetry will not be applied in the present thesis, it should at least be acknowledged as a cross-disciplinary approach. Its validity is, however, another issue.

The use of psychoanalytic theory, such as Freudian theories in Plath criticism is relatively extensive. Many Plath critics, for example, Edward Butscher (see 1976) and Hugh Kenner (1979) blend literary criticism together with psychoanalytic commentary (or, as in Kenner's case, pseudo-psychological theorisation of the power of poetry). Also feminist criticism on Plath (see Rose 1998) has used psychoanalytic theories in analysing symbolism in Plath's poetry and relating it to biographical details. However, feminist criticism differs from the approach represented by Axelrod and Holbrook in that the latter apply these theories from a much more biographically oriented starting point, thus neglecting the social (and often textual) aspects of Plath's work. As

Strangeways (1998:29) points out, critics like Axelrod and Holbrook can also be termed as 'biographical' critics: however, the distinguishing factor between them and the biographical critics mentioned in chapter 3.1 is precisely the application of psychoanalytic theory in Plath's work. Although psychoanalytic interpretations on Sylvia Plath are numerous, only the work of Holbrook and Axelrod will be presented here, since the former has produced an extensive amount of debate among other critics and since the latter is one of the most recent and 'understanding'⁴ of Plath critics using psychoanalytic theory extensively.

Steven Gould Axelrod's study *Sylvia Plath: The wound and the cure of words* (1990) combines the rhetoric of psychoanalysis and the rhetoric of literary criticism in the effort to describe Plath's "struggle for voice" (1990:ix). Axelrod claims that Plath's poetry is a struggle against authorities, both male (Plath's father, her husband, male literary precursors) and female (Plath's mother, female literary influences). According to him, Plath "seized the poetic act itself as her most desired double" (1990:234), meaning that she aimed to construct a dialogue or a relationship between her two identities, the "person-in-a-poet" and the "poet-in-a-poet" (1990:234). Axelrod grounds his book on studies on Plath's "personal experiences, her cultural conditions and the institution of literature" (1990:ix). Therefore, his interpretations and arguments are based on biographical details (studied from the point of view of Freud's psychoanalytic theory), comparison and contrast between Plath and her influences (for example, tracing similarities in themes and symbolism between Plath and Emily Dickinson) as well as on close readings of Plath's work in terms of traditional literary criticism. However, the issues of literary and cultural background are often suppressed under the psychological interpretations, which dominantly hold the view that Plath's poetry displays her mental problems.

⁴ Critics such as Edward Butscher (1976) have treated Plath's poems as being the work of a schizoid mind; a definite underestimation of their multiple levels in social commentary, mythological qualities and biographical details.

This kind of approach has, as stated above, received criticism from other Plath critics: to begin with, drawing conclusions of a person's sanity on the basis of poetry and biographical details is highly questionable. Axelrod also applies psychoanalytic theory in the interpretation of poems, which is extremely dubious: firstly, as Melander (1972) points out, this kind of approach is hazardous due to the lack of knowledge of the mental depression of which Plath was suffering (see, for example, Stevenson 1998), and secondly, the use of biographical details in interpreting Plath's poems is overemphasised at the expense of textual analysis and surrounding cultural, social and historical context. Still, when the question of voice is concerned, Axelrod's work does provide some useful starting points for analysis, for example, in the question of male abuse in 'Purdah'.

In his controversial study, *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and existence* (1976), David Holbrook claims that his intention is to use interpretations from psychoanalysis and kindred disciplines, with the help of confirmation or illumination from biographical facts (Holbrook 1976), to analyse the poetry of Sylvia Plath. Holbrook's starting point, deduced from the symbolism in her poetry, is that Sylvia Plath had schizoid characteristics and that her suicide was a schizoid suicide. Holbrook also states as his goal to discuss the 'myth' of Sylvia Plath, that is, her status as one of the precursors women's liberation movement which, according to Holbrook, is (in the light of Plath's work) "grossly distorted and false" (1976:2). In addition to the psychoanalytic theories, Holbrook draws on literary criticism on Plath for insights and backing for his arguments in biographical issues.

In addition to his psychoanalytic insights, Holbrook seems to ground his study, or rather, to justify the importance of his study for the literary community, with dubious semi-philosophical ground. He states that his interpretation of "the falsities" (Holbrook 1976:2) mentioned above tries to distinguish between true and false solutions to the problem of existence, since (according to him) Plath is groping towards existential philosophy in her poetry. In other words, Holbrook is not only criticising Plath's poetry and Plath herself on the basis of psychoanalytic approaches, but he is trying to uncover Plath's 'philosophy'

with the help of these similar methods. In addition to this, Holbrook also includes an educational aspect in his critique, claiming that Plath's work presents a disturbing problem in terms of education.

If we believe that the reading of literature refines the emotions and helps to civilise us, what then do we expect to gain when we offer adolescent students works for study which seriously falsify experience? ... Yet, in the light of philosophical anthropology, such as I try to invoke here, these works may be offering falsifications or forms of moral inversion which are absurd, or even deranged, and may even do harm to the sensitive and responsive young person. For all her immense creative effort, Sylvia Plath could not save herself. What, then, do we say about the effects of her art on us? And especially on the young? (Holbrook 1976:2)⁵

The multiplicity of approaches Holbrook suggests is impressive: literary critical, psychoanalytic, philosophical and the newest addition, pedagogical. However, his analytical methodology neglects the textual side of Plath's poetry: his readings are extremely one-sided, when compared to, for example, the work of feminist critics such as Rose (1998). Holbrook condemns Plath as pathological, which is a question that cannot be derived straightly from her poetry. Nonetheless, Holbrook does this on the basis of a portion of Plath's work, and then uses this notion to characterise Plath's work as a whole.

Holbrook's theories have met with quite a lot of resistance among Plath critics. For example, Melander (1972) condemns Holbrook's approach, stating that it is "hazardous" due to the lack of knowledge about mental depressions of which Plath suffered. Crofts (1998) also criticises Holbrook's readings on Plath's poetry, claiming that they are either too literal or too strictly judgmental, without an effort to understand the context within which Plath's poems are fitted. Feminist criticism has been particularly hard on Holbrook: Bassnett (1987) claims that Holbrook's approach tries to prove the lack of femininity in Plath's work and to categorise her as a "pseudo-male" (Holbrook 1976:179; he deduces this point from Plath's poetry, claiming that Plath's writing has a masculine, psychotic notion), which, according to Bassnett is an "astonishingly

⁵ Hugh Kenner (1979:43) expresses a similar view, stating that "the death poems – say a third of *Ariel* – are bad for anyone's soul".

chauvinist statement“ (1987:2). Rose criticises Holbrook for being “ridiculous, exaggerated and excessive“ (1998:17), also stating that he, instead of describing the failure of Plath’s femininity, is actually projecting traditional fantasies of femininity on to Plath. Thus, Holbrook’s study remains rather a curiosity, at least in terms of its usefulness on the present study.

3.6 Conclusion

As seen above, Plath’s work has been often approached from various different points of view, of which some provide useful information for the present study. The use of biographical information, using it as a basis for the interpretation of Plath’s works, is typical of more or less in all of the approaches and works mentioned above. As pointed out by, for example, Fairclough (1992:71-72), the inspection of the context of production, of which information of the author’s background and such is one part, is relevant in analysing texts. Therefore the attention which these approaches pay to events in Plath’s personal life is valid to some extent. Still, they tend to neglect the detailed inspection of textual and sociocultural/historical aspects, as shown above.

However, during the 1980s and 1990s, a number of studies which aim at examining these aspects in Plath’s poetry have emerged. Since the works of, for example, Strangeways (1998), Muckleroy (1999) and Rose (1998), seek to relate Plath’s poetry into the surrounding sociocultural context and to inspect the elements of social criticism and historical awareness in the poems, they provide valuable starting points for the analyses in this thesis. Nonetheless, the inspection of textual and discursive practices is still needed in order to penetrate deeper into the ‘world’ of the poems and to discover the elements of social criticism in them in full detail. To do this, a proper analytical background is needed: in this study, CDA provided such a background. Let us now turn to inspect it in more detail, in terms of its notion of language use and in terms of its applicability in the present paper.

4 Theoretical framework: critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a multidimensional approach to language study. One of the most prominent theoreticians in this field is Norman Fairclough, whose model of critical discourse analysis, introduced and formulated in his books *Language and Power* (1989) and *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), and further developed, for example, in *Critical Discourse Analysis: The critical study of language* (1995a) and *Media Discourse* (1995b), will be used as the analytical background in the present study. CDA is meant to be used, as Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995a) argues, to analyse texts as parts of social processes and institutions, as means and signs of social changes, and to inspect institutions, practices, etc. via discourses that they use/are used when referring to them. Since CDA aims at analysing texts in their cultural and social context, it is also a valid orientation for looking at social criticism and historical and social awareness in Plath's poetry. Literary criticism has not studied these issues in detail, and in addition, it lacks a similar, multileveled approach capable of approaching a text on different levels. Fairclough's approach to CDA was chosen for the following reasons: firstly, Fairclough's approach is one of the most recent ones and it integrates tools and concepts from earlier scholars on both discourse analysis and social theory of discourse. Secondly, Fairclough's work is a more practically oriented approach (compared to earlier approaches, such as the work of Roger Fowler, see, for example, 1996), introducing relevant tools for analysing texts. Thirdly, as will be shown below, Fairclough's approach is the most useful one for the purpose of the present thesis.

The following section, which discusses the theoretical and analytical background used in the present study, will be divided into two parts. The first part, chapter 4, will focus on Fairclough's approach and notion of CDA, elaborating on his views and describing their relevance to this study. The second part, chapter 5, will introduce the theories, concepts and tools presented by Fairclough (1992), with elaborations on the concepts and theories from various relevant sources on the levels of text, discourse and social practice (for

example, Emmott 1994, Gough and Talbot 1996, etc.) that will be of importance in conducting the analysis of the poems. It will also be explained why they have been chosen and how they can be applied into the analysis of literary texts. In Chouliriaki and Fairclough (1999; see especially 40-46), Fairclough introduces a more general version of the analytical framework for CDA. However, this version is rather a research agenda, which creates a broader argument for the need of CDA analysis in modern society. The actual analytical framework is still mainly based on Fairclough's earlier work (1989, 1992, 1995a & b)

4.1 Fairclough's theory of critical discourse analysis

4.1.1 Discourse as social practice: social theory of discourse

Fairclough (see, for example, 1989 and 1999) holds the view that the relationship between language and society is internal and dialectical. What he means by this is that linguistic phenomena are social, because whenever people use language, they do it in socially determined ways, causing social effects, and social phenomena are linguistic, because the language activity which exist in a social context is not a mere reflection of social processes and practices, but a part of them. However, Fairclough (1989:23) points out that the matter is not entirely this simple: the relationship between language and society is not that of equal facets of a single whole. Not all social phenomena are linguistic, even though most of even these have an element of language in them.

Fairclough (1989) argues that the conception of language needed for CDA is that of *discourse*, language as a form of social practice (an idea originally introduced by Foucault) ⁶. As mentioned above, Fairclough sees language

⁶ 'Language' itself as a term has been used in a number of different senses, the mostly used distinction being that between *langue* (a system or a code which is prior to actual language use, common to all members of a language community and the social side of language) and *parole* (what is actually said or written, determined purely by individual), presented by de Saussure (1966). Fairclough does not accept this distinction wholly, but argues that the emphasis should be one language use conceived as socially determined; that is, discourse. Besides Foucault, the work by Pêcheux (1979 et al., 1982) and by Halliday (see Halliday 1978 and 1985) have been influential in Fairclough's approach, in terms of understanding language as a social

firstly as a part of society and secondly as a social process. He also sees language as a socially conditioned process, because it is shaped and constrained by social structures and practices.

The view of language as a form of social practice implies that discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure, and also that it is socially constitutive (idea based on Foucault's discussion of discursive formations; see 1972). It constructs social relationships between people and contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief (for examples, see Fairclough 1992:64-71). Discourse is also a mode of political and ideological practice: as a political practice, it sustains and changes power relations, and as ideological practice "it constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes" (1992:67) significations of the world from various positions in power relations (see Fairclough 1992:67, 86-91 for a more elaborate discussion). Discourse is also a place of struggle: discursive practice draws upon conventions of existing power relations and ideologies, but at the same time, these conventions themselves are a focus of struggle.

Fairclough (1992:67-69) states that there are discursive conventions which underlie discursive events and terms these as *orders of discourse* (term from Foucault 1971). The order of discourse of a social domain is the totality of its discursive practices (for example, the order of discourse of a hospital is the sum of discursive practices of doctors, nurses, patients, etc.) and the relationships between them, and the order of discourse of a society is the totality of these 'local' orders and the relationships between them; see Fairclough (1995a:132) for a more detailed example. Fairclough (1989:29-30) states that discourse and practice are constrained by these orders as well as by social orders (which construct them and are shaped and re-shaped by them), that is, social structures and settings for, for example, particular types of action. How discourses are structured in a given order of discourse, is determined by power relationships, which will be discussed under the following heading.

phenomenon. The latter has also given Fairclough actual tools for analysing discourse (see, for example, Fairclough 1992:77).

In terms of linking these social aspects of discourse into actual language use or discursive processes, Fairclough (1992:71) states that what makes discursive practice specifically discursive is the fact that it is manifested in linguistic form. Therefore, if being an instance of social (political, cultural) practice is one dimension of a discursive event, being a *text* is another. Fairclough uses the term 'text' in the same sense as Halliday (1985), meaning both written and spoken texts. According to Fairclough (1995a:96), text is a product of discursive processes. The other part of what makes discursive practice discursive is that the two dimensions (social practice and text) are mediated by a third, which focuses on discourse as a specifically discursive practice. Analysis of a particular discourse as a piece of discursive practice focuses, as Fairclough (1992:71) states, upon processes of "text production, distribution and consumption". All of these processes are social and require reference to the particular economic, political, etc. settings and conventions within which discourse is generated. Fairclough thus claims that discourse involves social conditions of production and interpretation, and that these conditions relate to three 'levels' of social organisation: the level of social situation, the level of the social institution, and the level of society in whole. Thus, when seeing language as discourse and as social practice, one must commit oneself to analysing the relationship between texts, processes and their social conditions (both situational and institutional).

To sum up the central tenets of Fairclough's view of language: his conception of discourse is three-dimensional. In Fairclough's model of CDA, discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, written or spoken, (ii) discourse practice (text production and interpretation) and (iii) sociocultural practice. Furthermore, a piece of discourse is embedded within sociocultural practice at a number of levels; in the immediate situation, at the institutional level, and at a societal level (for examples, see Fairclough 1995a:97).

In order to be able to determine the purposes and conditions of language use, Fairclough advocates a three-dimensional method to discourse analysis, as presented in Fairclough (1989 and 1992): description, which is concerned with

the analysis of formal properties of texts; interpretation, which is the analysis of discourse practices, and explanation, which is the analysis of the social practice of which discourse is a part. Fairclough (1992) grounds this argument by stating that this method enables the relation of detailed properties of texts to discursive events as instances of social practices. Furthermore, it enables the inspection of relationships between discursive and social practices.

The following figure is a diagrammatic representation of CDA's conception of discourse and its analysis.

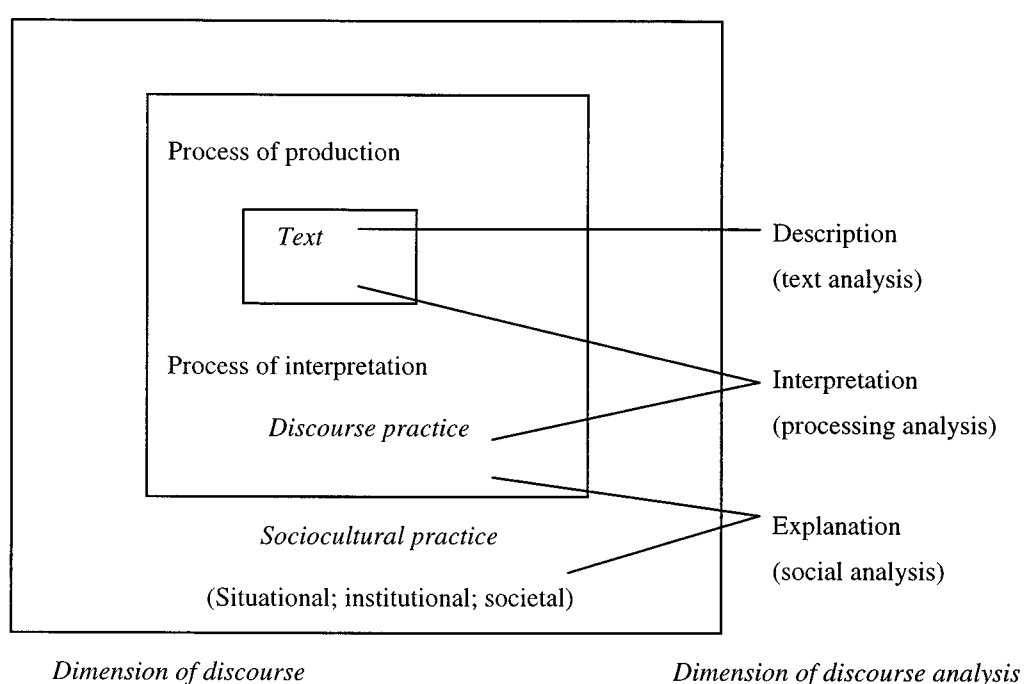


Figure 1. Fairclough's notion of discourse and method for discourse analysis (as shown in Fairclough 1995a:98)

4.1.2 Discourse and power

As mentioned above, Fairclough (1989, 1992) relies on Foucault's idea of the discursive nature of power and power struggle in discourse. He inspects two major aspects in these: power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse. Firstly, Fairclough (1989) sees discourse as a 'place' where power is exercised and enacted. Power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and

constraining the contributions of the non-powerful participants: the constraints can be on contents, relations (social) and subject positions. There also exists hidden power in discourse: especially in media discourse, the power relations are often unclear. Secondly, Fairclough argues that the idea of power behind discourse is that “the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power“ (1989:55). An important aspect of this is access to discourse: for example, Fairclough considers ‘free speech’ to be just a myth that is “amazingly powerful“ (1989:63).

Fairclough acknowledges Foucault’s theories on social struggle in discourse, and points out that power in or behind discourse is by no means permanent or even stable: it is won/lost/exercised in the course of social struggle. For example, the issue of overt marking of power relationships – Fairclough (1989:70-71) gives the well-known example of “T“ and “V“ pronoun forms – is often a sign of social struggle. As Fairclough argues, as discourse is part of social practice, contributing to the reproduction of social structures, the relations between constraints to power and their structurals are of importance in CDA (as he presents it, contents correspond to knowledge and beliefs, relations to social relationships and subjects to social identities).

For inspecting discourse and power, Fairclough (1989 and 1992) utilises Gramsci’s (see 1971) theory of *hegemony* and Althusser’s (see 1971) theory of *ideology*⁷. To sum these up briefly, the concept of hegemony means “a domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society” (Fairclough 1992:92), i.e. power over society, as exercised by one of the fundamental economically-defined classes in alliance with other social forces. According to Fairclough (1992:95), the theory of hegemony provides a

⁷ Further, Fairclough (1989:75) states that Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative action has also provided him with fundamental ideas about language and power. However, together with the work by Foucault and Bourdieu (see 1977, 1982), Habermas’ work has influenced Fairclough more on theoretical level (for example, in terms of the emphasis it has given to language as a social phenomena) than on practical level. In *Discourse and Social Change*, Fairclough puts more emphasis on Gramsci and Althusser for theoretical and practical background for the analysis of the social level of discourse. And, as will be shown, their work is more relevant for the present study.

way of analysing the social practice within which discourse belongs in terms of power relations, and also a way of analysing discourse practice itself as a mode of hegemonic struggle. Ideology, which according to Fairclough (1992:86-91), is a signification/construction of reality (physical worlds, social relations and identities) which are built of various discursive practices and which contribute to the (re)production and transformation of relations of domination, fits into the framework of hegemony. This is because Fairclough (1992:89) sees that ideology can be invested in the levels of text and discourse, for example, in terms of word meanings ('comrade' is an explicitly ideological word) and turn-taking systems, which may imply particular ideological assumptions about social identities of the participants. Therefore, ideology is used to re(articulate) and (re)structure power relations in society.

4.2 Reasons for choosing CDA for the present thesis

The usefulness of CDA in approaching the topic of the present study is that it provides tools for a close textual analysis of the texts, including features typical of traditional literary criticism, for example, diction and metaphor (see, for example, Atkin et al. 1995 and Leech 1969), as well as tools used in critical linguistics, for example, transitivity (see Halliday 1985). Furthermore, it provides tools for analysing the level of intertextual links and interdiscursive practices which are frequent in Plath's poetry (according to many Plath critics, who use more traditionally literary critical terms to refer to the issues such as for example, mixing of discourse types, reconstructing set frames, etc.) Finally, it argues for relating the aforementioned to the historical, social, political, etc. context which Plath was both aware of and which she explored in the poems (as has been argued by several Plath critics, for example, Aird 1973, Strangeways 1998 and Marsack 1992) analysed in the present study. Fairclough's work on CDA, and his theories and tools for doing CDA are one of the most recent ones, including tools, concepts, etc. from other scholars on both discourse analysis and social theory of discourse. Although Fairclough's work is often highly theoretical, it is still the most practically oriented of all of these approaches, introducing relevant tools for analysing texts.

However, Fairclough's approach to CDA has its limitations and not all of his theorisations are relevant to the present study. These limitations can be seen when CDA is applied to the analysis of literary texts. Firstly, Fairclough's work was developed and still focuses mainly on media texts, political texts, samples on spoken discourse, advertisements, etc. (see, for example, Fairclough 1992:149-150, 212-213), i.e. on non-literary texts, inspecting the power relations behind them as well as the signs of possible social change in them. Although the tradition of inspecting literary texts exists in critical language study (for example, Fowler and other critical linguists have analysed literary texts with linguistic tools, as was mentioned above) which has influenced Fairclough's work, Fairclough himself has not been concerned with literary texts. Although recently ideas and models introduced by Fairclough have been applied to the analysis of literature – for example, the work by Stephens (1992), Talbot (1998) and Väisänen and Väättäinen (1999) – this research has tended to focus on certain theories and concepts only. For example, Väisänen and Väättäinen focus on intertextuality. Overall inspections of a literary text, in a manner similar to the way in which Fairclough (1989:169-196) does in inspecting the discourse of Thatcherism, are still somewhat lacking. This shortage in existing research reveals the fact that Fairclough's model has not yet established itself firmly into the analysis of literature, which (in the context of the present thesis) means that literary applications of CDA are grounded mainly in theory, and to considerable lesser extent in practice.

Secondly, however, as will be seen in the analytic section of the present study, the overall approach of CDA analysis cannot be directly applied to the analysis of literary texts, at least not without damaging the literary wholeness of the text (meaning, for example, the interrelatedness of structures outside the narrative order, development of themes throughout the text). This issue is therefore two-sided: on the one hand, the existing research cannot provide examples of applying CDA into literature on all the three levels (see above), and on the other hand, this three-levelled approach itself cannot be directly applied to analysing literary texts. The shortage of existing research itself is not an insuperable problem, but it does cause the present study to be somewhat

experimental in nature. Another thing to consider is that although recently some applications of CDA to various types of texts have emerged, the work by Fairclough himself remains mainly theoretical. In several studies (1989, 1992, 1995a & b), he introduces his background and goals quite extensively, but despite the extensiveness of his approach – including tools and concepts from various approaches – his practical examples tend to be quite one-sided, in terms of focusing only on media texts (see, for example, Fairclough 1992:149-150, 212-213). And in any case, as mentioned several times above, there is a considerable shortage of many-sided (including detailed textual, discursive and social analysis) applications of Fairclough's model of CDA to the analysis of literary texts. Furthermore, CDA has also been criticised for its application of Marxist sociological theory: this will be further elaborated in section 5.3.

Nonetheless, CDA provides tools and background for inspecting the elements of social criticism and historical awareness in Plath's poetry on three intertwined levels (textual, discursive and social), all of which are needed to penetrate deeper into the complex nature of Plath's poetry. As has been argued by several Plath critics, for example, Aird (1973), *Strangeways* (1998) and Marsack (1992), relating Plath's poems to the social and political context, of which (according to the aforementioned critics) Plath was both aware and which she explored in her poems, is needed to understand the nature of her poems in the surrounding context.

5 CDA in practice: tools relevant for the present study

As Fairclough (1992:73) points out, there exists an overlap between text analysis and analysis of discourse, due to the fact that features of text cannot be discussed without some reference to text production and/or interpretation. Thus the division between topics of text analysis and topics of discourse analysis are based on the salientness of the formal features. Furthermore, some of the categories in the framework for text analysis appear to be oriented towards the field of syntax and others to semantics: Fairclough himself points out that the

apparent distinction is misleading, because in analysing texts “one is always simultaneously addressing questions of form and questions of meaning“ (1992:74). Fairclough (1992) introduces a broad and general analytic framework for doing CDA, which cannot be (due to lack of space) discussed in detail here. Instead, the tools useful for the present study will be presented. As Fairclough (1992:232-233) claims, in any particular analysis “some of the categories are likely to be more relevant and useful than others“: the tools are selected on the basis of this.

However, since Fairclough’s analytic framework of CDA was developed for the purpose of analysing mainly media texts and since it is based on social theory of discourse, it needs additional concepts and tools for the purpose of analysing literary texts. Also, the actual analytic procedure, compared to the manner in which Fairclough himself has conducted CDA (for examples of this, see Fairclough 1992:138-152, 1995a:168-178), will be modified. The procedure will be explained before analysing each individual poem, because the tools will differ slightly in each case. This is due to the fact that certain tools are more relevant in the case of each individual poem. Also the starting points of the analyses will vary, based on existing criticism and its views of (potentially) important issues and points in each individual poem. The selection of tools is mainly based on the comments of Plath criticism, and they will be chosen on the basis of finding the best possible means for inspecting/validating these comments. Additional tools will be discussed below, too. Their inclusion will be based partly on Fairclough’s own acknowledgement of their importance, even though he does not wholly incorporate them into his own analytic framework, as presented in Fairclough (1992). Also the comments and work of other scholars contributing to the field of CDA and discourse analysis support the inclusion of these tools, such as frame (Emmott 1994, Gough and Talbot 1996). To continue on the inclusion of frame, the studies of several Plath critics argue for aspects in the poems which can be best analysed with the help of this concept. Works of literary criticism discuss it as well (see, for example, Walsh 1995: 107-109 for the question of context, which can be termed as frame), though not necessarily using the exact terms, arguing for its relevance in the analysis of literary texts. Thus, frame and other concepts, as

will be shown below, are of relevance when looking at Plath's poetry and the poems analysed in the present thesis. For these reasons, the expansion of Fairclough's framework is appropriate. The aspects of the three stages of the actual analytical process (textual, discursive and social) will be discussed next, including the modifications of Fairclough's framework.

5.1 Level of text practice

5.1.1 Word meaning

Fairclough (1992:185) claims that as a producer or interpreter of language texts one is always confronted with clusters of words and meaning rather than words or meanings in isolation: words have various meanings and meanings are worded in various words (1992:185). Furthermore, these choices and decisions are socially contested, facets of wider social and cultural processes. The focus in the present study will be on the meanings of words. Williams (1976) points out that there are certain culturally salient 'keywords', of general or more local cultural significance. Fairclough (1992:186) uses the term *meaning potential* for the range of meanings conventionally associated with a word. He also suggests that an alternative mode finds support in texts with a creative orientation which treats meaning potential as an exploitable and changeable resource. These texts are characterised by ambiguities of meaning and by rhetorical play with the meaning potential of words, contributing to de-structuring and restructuring them (Fairclough 1992:186-7). This is precisely what Plath does in the poems analysed in the present thesis: for example, in 'Lady Lazarus', Plath uses words 'God' and 'Lucifer' to refer to the 'enemy' in the poem, in order to transform it to personified oppression, rather than to a specific person. Thus, it is valid to inspect word meanings in Plath's poetry. The examples above can be seen as 'key words', and thus the emphasis on analysis is upon the meanings of these words, which, as Fairclough (1992:236) points out, are variable and changing, and upon their meaning potential.

5.1.2 Wording

Here, the focus will be on the wording of meanings. As suggested above, a perspective on vocabulary that focuses upon wording contrasts with dictionary-based view of vocabulary. Leith (1983) claims that dictionaries are part of the apparatus of standardising and codifying languages: they tend to present dominant wordings and word meaning as the only ones. There are always alternative ways of signifying, that is, giving meaning to experience, which entails interpretation from a particular, for example, cultural and/or ideological perspective (see Kristeva 1986b). Fairclough (1992:191) claims that wordings generate new 'lexical items' (Fairclough prefers the term over 'words', which is used for multiple purposes): for example, nominalisation, which means the conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun, is particularly important in this respect. Multiplicity of wordings can also be seen as one aspect of intertextuality: wording an experience is tantamount to constituting a particular configuration of intertextual elements in producing a text. This will be seen in the poems analysed in sections 8-10: the manner in which Plath chooses to word her poems, constructs intertextual and -discursive networks from macro to micro level, in her poetry.

5.1.3 Metaphor

According to Fairclough (1992:194-198), *metaphor* has been traditionally (in literary criticism) thought of as a feature with little relevance to other sorts of language. According to Leech (1969:150-151), metaphor is "so central to our notion of poetic creation that it is often treated as a phenomenon in its own right". However, recent work on metaphor has suggested that metaphors structure the way we think and act, and our systems of knowledge and belief (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Therefore, the objective in doing CDA must be to characterise the metaphors used in the analysed text in contrast to metaphors used for similar meanings elsewhere: in the present thesis, this means inspecting the metaphors Plath uses for reforming and reconstructing frames (see, for example, section 8.2). In addition, in Plath's poetry the question of metaphor is fundamentally connected to the questions of discourse practices,

which will be the next focus to consider in the analysis: metaphors can be constructed on the level of discourse practices too, for example, by mixing discourses (for example, see section 8.2).

5.1.4 Transitivity: voice

Transitivity, the ideational dimension of the grammar of the clause (see Halliday 1985), deals with the types of process which are coded in clauses and the types of participants involved in them (for a detailed description of transitivity in use in CDA, see, for example, Fairclough 1992:177-185). Besides the analysis of processes and participants, Fairclough also groups nominalisation (conversion of processes into nominals) and *voice* (active/passive) under the larger group 'transitivity'. Fairclough (1989, 1992) argues that active voice is the 'unmarked' choice, which is selected when there is no need for passive. The ideological and/or political motivations for the use of the passive are, for example, to omit the agent (agent considered to be irrelevant or is unknown) and to obfuscate agency as is shown, for example, in Trew's famous example of newspaper reports of a riot in South-Africa (see Fowler et al. 1979), in which the passive form is used to hide responsibility. However, the active form seems to be somewhat neglected in importance in Fairclough's work, mainly due to its 'obviousness' (it presents the agent).

However, as will be shown in more detail in the analysis of 'Lady Lazarus', the contrasted networks of active versus passive in relation to agents are an important aspect of the analysis of agency. Thus the active form gains significance in this aspect. The analysis of voice will be connected to the analysis of agency (who/what are presented as agents and why), since as several critics, for example, Axelrod (1990) and Stevenson (1998) have argued, the question of agency is an integral aspect of several of Plath's poems. The inspection of this combination of voice and agency will, as will be later shown in detail (see, for example, the analysis of 'Lady Lazarus') lead to social and historical issues both together and separate of other text and discourse levels.

5.2 Level of discourse practice

5.2.1 Intertextuality and –discursivity

Intertextuality as a term was introduced by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s (see Kristeva 1986a, actually written 1966), in the context of her account of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas (see Bakhtin 1986). Bakhtin never actually used the term, but the development of the idea was a major theme in his work. According to Bakhtin, all utterances, both spoken and written, are demarcated by a change of speaker/writer, and are oriented towards either utterances of previous or next speaker(s). Thus, utterances are linked to the chain of speech communication: they are filled with others' words, varying degrees of 'otherness' or 'our-ownness'. To put it simply, utterances or 'texts' (Fairclough 1992 uses term 'texts' instead of utterances) are constituted of elements of other texts.

In terms of social change and structures, Kristeva observes that intertextuality implies "the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history" (1986a:39). What this means is that texts respond to, reaccentuate and rework past texts. Fairclough argues that this enables texts to "take on the major roles in ... society at the leading edge of social and cultural change" (1992:102). In other words, texts contribute to social change and thus project social criticism onto existing structures. Fairclough argues that rapid transformation and restructuring of textual traditions and orders of discourse is a contemporary phenomenon, and therefore intertextuality should be a major focus in discourse analysis.

Besides incorporating or responding to other texts, texts may also incorporate potentially complex relationships with conventions (styles, discourse, genres) as well as reaccentuate them, for example, use them ironically, parodically or mix them. This is termed as *interdiscursivity* by Fairclough (1992:104) Thus, as Fairclough argues, it is relevant to distinguish between intertextual relations of texts to other texts (*manifest intertextuality*) and relations of texts to conventions (*interdiscursivity* or *constitutive intertextuality*), since these issues operate on two different levels. In manifest intertextuality, other texts are

specifically drawn upon within a text and they are explicitly present, marked or cued by features in the surface of the text (quotation marks etc.), or merged/embedded inside the text. Fairclough (1992) divides manifest intertextuality into three different types: *sequential intertextuality* (texts or discourse types alternate within a text), *embedded intertextuality* (one text or discourse type clearly embedded in a text) and *mixed intertextuality* (texts or discourse types merged in a more complex and less easily distinguishable way). These terms will be used in the present thesis when the distinction between these different concepts is needed, and 'intertextuality' will be used as a general term when the distinction is not at issue. However, although this division is used in Fairclough's work and, consequently, in the present study, it must be born in mind that the division between intertextuality and interdiscursivity is by no means clear-cut. The interrelatedness of these concepts can cause analysts difficulties when trying to determine them in a text. Furthermore, as Fairclough (1992:105, 136) himself points out, the analysis of intertextuality depends largely on the analyst: some may ignore certain traits which others may see, or some may list a certain feature into a different group (of manifest intertextuality), depending on the interpreter⁸. This dimension of intertextuality, i.e. the dimension the analyst herself brings into the text, has also been noted by others: for example, Birch (1996:208) comments that the process of reading is an essential part of intertextuality.

In terms of the needs of the present study, intertextuality is of central importance in inspecting Plath's poetry. As such Plath critics as Melander 1972 (see, for example, pp. 103-104 on the Holocaust in Plath's poetry), Aird 1973 (see, for example, pp. 79-84, also on the Holocaust) and Bassnett 1987 (see, for example, pp. 26 -30 on contemporary political issues) have pointed out, Plath makes constant allusions to different issues, for example, to the Holocaust and Christian mythology, in the poems analysed in this study ('Lady Lazarus', 'Purdah'). It can be argued that these allusions are nothing but elements of intertextuality. As will be shown in the analysis, Plath uses

⁸ This issue of text consumption which Fairclough (1989 & 1992) mentions on several occasions, is an essential part of the analysis of discursive practice.

embedded and mixed intertextuality in, for example, ‘Lady Lazarus’, to construct the networks of social and historical commentary.

5.2.2 Interdiscursivity / constitutive intertextuality

As Fairclough (1992:124) argues, asserting the principle of interdiscursivity, orders of discourse (underlying conventions of discourse) have primacy over particular types of discourse, and the latter are constituted as configurations of diverse elements of orders of discourse. Fairclough (1992:124-130) discusses various elements combined in the constitution of discourse types, presenting the “widely-used terms“ (1992:124) of *genre*, *style*, *register* and *discourse*⁹. He states that advantages in using these terms in CDA analysis are that they enable the differentiation between elements of orders of discourse, and that it is easier to use an analytic framework with a small number of fairly well-differentiated categories. However, there are also disadvantages in this categorisation: the interrelatedness of the concepts makes the distinction between them sometimes artificial (as is the case with sub-categories of ‘intertextuality’ itself) and applying them too rigidly “can lead one to lose sight of the complexities of discourse“ (1992:125). In his later work, Fairclough (see for example, 1995b:76) offers a somewhat different account of these elements, by suggesting terms *activity type*, *mode*, *voice* and *style*. These latter concepts can be considered more useful in approaching certain kinds of texts, especially media texts (which Fairclough 1995b does; see *ibid.* for reasons).

For the purpose of the present study, useful concepts include ‘register’ and ‘discourse’ in particular. Register, as defined by Wales (1994:397-399), is a variety of language defined according to the situation. It suggests a scale of differences, of degrees of formality, appropriate to different social uses of language, and also constant switching of usage, selection of certain features of grammar, lexis etc., in different situations of everyday life. Register serves different social roles: this aspect can be seen in, for example, in ‘Purdah’ where Plath utilises *register-switching*, which means switching style, for example,

⁹ It must be noted that ‘discourse’ as a term used in here refers to a particular type of convention, and not to the general notion of language use as a mode of social practice.

according to different degrees of formality. A related concept is *register-mixing*, which means the use of certain register in an unconventional situation on purpose (formal features of one kind of discourse are borrowed for new subject matter).

Another relevant term is ‘discourse’, which, according to Fairclough (1992:128) corresponds roughly to “dimensions of texts which have traditionally been discussed in terms of ‘content’, ‘ideational meaning’, ‘topic’, ‘subject matter’, and so forth“. Thus, discourse is a particular way of constructing a subject-matter. For example, medical discourse, such as that of a doctor, includes the register of addressing the patient (including formal features, for example, a formal tone), appropriate topic (patient’s illness, cure, medicine) and topic control, power relations, etc. Discourse as a convention comes close to the notion of *genre*, which Fairclough (1992:126) terms as a “relatively stable set of conventions that is associated with ... a socially ratified type of activity, such as information chat, buying goods in a shop ...”¹⁰. However, since genre as a term implies a type of social activity rather than textual ‘boundaries’ and characteristics of that activity, discourse is a more useful concept for the purpose of this thesis. This is due to the fact that in Plath’s poetry, several discourses are utilised: for example, in ‘Lady Lazarus’, Plath draws on the discourses of Christianity and the Holocaust. Thus, a detailed investigation of text conventions relating to these issues is needed in order to find out how they contribute to the construction of social commentary in the poems.

5.2.3 Irony

An important aspect of Plath’s poems analysed in the present study is *irony*. For example, as Crofts (1998) and Väisänen (1999) argue, in ‘Lady Lazarus’ irony is an integral part in the construction of the level of historical awareness

¹⁰ As Fairclough (1992:128-129) points out, it is important to illustrate to complex relationship between genre and discourse. For example, a medical discourse, which includes e.g. special terminology and modes of addressing, is associated with a range of genres (for example, scientific articles, lectures and patient-doctor meetings) constructed via certain characteristic

of and commentary on the poem, due to the fact that it prevents the poem from becoming too 'personal'. This is because when ironising herself, Plath is acknowledging her position as a writer, and thus distancing herself from it, as well. Also in 'Purdah' Plath ironises stereotypical male conceptions of women. The account given by Fairclough (1992:123) specifies the concept of irony with the approach taken by CDA (for traditional literary critical notions of irony, see, for example, Lodge 1992). He argues that irony is intertextual in nature: an ironic utterance 'echoes' someone else's utterance. Fairclough points that irony depends "upon interpreters being able to recognise that the meaning of an echoed text is not the text producer's meaning" (1992:123). His notions are left somewhat vague: irony can be determined more accurately in terms of CDA. For example, Väisänen and Väättäinen (1999) have approached this issue in their study of the construction of social reality and criticism in the Simpsons, one part of which is achieved by ridiculing institutions and professional groups such as police, doctors and lawyers. They argue that by breaking and/or reconstructing discursive conventions, irony can be created on both the intertextual level (for example, blatant mismatch between constituents in a phrase applying embedded intertextuality) and on the interdiscursive level (for example, breaking up activity types via two mismatching discourse types). As will be shown in the analysis of, for example 'Lady Lazarus', Plath is operating on both levels.

5.2.4 Coherence: focus on macrostructures

As Fairclough (1992:134) points out, the concept of *coherence* is at the centre of most accounts of interpretation. Fairclough (1989:78) divides coherence into two kinds of connections made by an interpreter; namely the connection (i) between the sequential parts of a text (this surface coherence is often referred to as *cohesion*; see, for example, Stubbs 1983, Halliday and Hasan 1976); and (ii) between parts of a text and 'the world'. In his later study (1992:134-136), he states that coherence is not a property of texts, but a property which interpreters impose upon a text, thus making a clear distinction between

conventions. However, a genre can accompany several discourses: for example, a talk-show can include various discourses, such as the discourses of the host and the visitors.

cohesion and coherence. According to Fairclough (1992:135), coherence is expressed in texts in that they “postulate and implicitly set up interpretative positions for, interpreting subjects who are capable of using assumptions from their prior experience ... to generate coherent interpretations. This suggests the existence of *macrostructures*, specifically that of *frame*.

What is meant by ‘frame’ is that the interpretation of texts relates to and/or is influenced by models of structured information in the mind. Fairclough (1989:158) defines macrostructures in general as mental models that help us to interpret discourse structures. However, although he discusses their importance in the interpretation of texts and discourse, he does not incorporate them into his analytical framework, as presented in Fairclough (1992). Nonetheless, Gough and Talbot (1996), drawing on Fairclough’s model, discuss the importance of these structures as a part of coherence. Gough and Talbot (1996:225) point out that Fairclough uses the notion of frame to account for these ‘text-world’ connections (see above), and argue that in inspecting coherence, these connections are of central importance.

Also Emmott (1994) discusses mental structures (in narrative discourse), arguing that there are features of narrative discourse that cannot be accounted for without cognitive modelling, that is, mental structures. She divides these structures into *general knowledge mental structures (schema*, termed by Bartlett 1932; for further reference, see, for example, Rumelhart 1977, Schank and Abelson 1977), which is the information the interpreter brings into the text, and *text specific mental structures*, such as frames (her use of this term is different from Fairclough’s; see Emmott 1994 for reference), which are built up of “information that comes from the particular text we are reading” (1994:157).

Several Plath critics discuss the ‘background’ or the ‘context’ in which poems like ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Purdah’ and ‘Thalidomide’ operate: for example, Melander (1972:28-29) and Aird (1973:78-83) point out the relevance of the context of the Holocaust and the story of Lazarus within which ‘Lady Lazarus’ is placed, whereas Rose (1998:205-238) and Strangeways (1998:78-132) both

locate Plath's poetry, especially her later poems, into a specific 'place', shaped by the historical and social context. Since the critics have pointed out these connections to actual facts in the poems, the connection between the 'text' (poem) and in the 'world' (actual historical and social facts rendered into, for example, elements of embedded intertextuality and metaphors) must be inspected. Fairclough's notion of frames is helpful in understanding this issue. However, it needs to be expanded: since Plath constructs, for example, 'Lady Lazarus' with the help of familiar frames, but also re-constructs these frames (see 'Lady Lazarus: analysis of text and discursive practices'), the frames cease to be merely general knowledge structures, but become more text-specific (see Emmott: *ibid.*).

5.3 Level of social practice

Fairclough (1989 and 1992) utilises in his work sociological theories of hegemony by Gramsci (1971) and ideology by Althusser (1971) to discuss discourse in relation to ideology and to power, placing discourse within a view of power as hegemony. The aforementioned scholars are 'classic' contributors to 20th century Marxism, whose studies Fairclough (1992:86) claims to "provide a rich framework for investigating discourse as a form of social practice".

However, the contributions of Marxism are not overtly useful in the present study, and the sole reliance on them can be doubted in CDA as such. The criticism against Fairclough (see Fairclough's commentary on them in Chouliriaki and Fairclough 1999) has pointed out that in trying to apply certain types of social theories to texts, CDA neglects examining the validity of applying these theories, i.e. whether there are any textual or discursive backing for them. There exists also a lot of criticism towards Marxist theories, and Mills' (1997) observations illustrate an essential dilemma in these theories. Mills (1997:29-47) points out that in utilising a Foucaultian notion of discourse together with Marxist theories of power, there exists in CDA a certain ambiguity. She claims that to many theoreticians, particularly after the collapse of Soviet-Union, ideology tended to imply "a simplistic and negative process

whereby individuals were duped into using conceptual systems which were not in their own interests” (1997:30). According to Mills, this is because Althusser’s notions of ideology, for example, regard the ‘State’ as a supreme determinant and source of power relations (see Althusser 1984 for further reference) and power, in general, as repressive. Mills states that these notions oversimplify the notion of power in society and power being manifested via language. She uses Foucault’s (see 1979a, 1979b, 1981) observations of the differences between a discourse-analytic and ideologically-oriented approach to discourse as a starting point.

In addition to this, Fairclough himself (1992:91, 94-95) acknowledges his inspection of the social level of texts by applying the theories of ideology and hegemony is, in some cases, questionable, since not all discourse is ideologically invested (see 1992:91) and since hegemony is not the only organisational form of power in society (see 1992:94-95).

Thus, it is important to keep an open mind to social theories outside of Fairclough’s original framework of CDA. Although the above-mentioned theories and concepts (hegemony, ideology) will be of use in the present thesis in investigating, for example, the issue of female struggle against oppression in ‘Purdah’, a more ‘local’ sociological background is important when inspecting the poems in terms of the issues present in text and discourse levels as part of a larger, social practice(s). For example, in the case of trying to relate the Holocaust and its importance in modern society into the poems, specific theories of the Holocaust are certainly more useful. Therefore, in inspecting the questions of, for example, the Holocaust in ‘Lady Lazarus’, a sociological view of the importance and role of the Holocaust in modern society is utilised as a background, upon which Plath’s use of the phenomenon is discussed and analysed. These various background theories and information of relevant issues will be explained in more detail in the analytical section.

6 Goals of the present study

The theme of oppression, usually connected with the idea of relief or escape from it, is one of the central themes in the *Ariel* collection, and it is intertwined with other major themes, such as the problems in Plath's relationship to her father and to her husband. Plath often constructs the poems that deal with this theme via references to, for example, contemporary political issues (the cold war), historical facts (the Holocaust) and social questions (oppression of women). Although the poems can be said to have a strong personal quality, in terms of point of view and other stylistic features, the extent to which these different social issues are used, suggests that the description of personal suffering is accompanied and supported by social criticism.

Thus, the main research question is as follows: is the earlier criticism right in its claim that Sylvia Plath's later poetry contains elements of social criticism, and if it is, what are these elements? In other words, how does Plath attack certain existing values (male dominance in society and in language) and institutions (religious authorities), comment on contemporary issues (thalidomide scandal, the threat of nuclear war), and, while criticising them at the same time, make use of the conventional beliefs and discourses to emphasise her own arguments? In the course of the investigation, two important and related questions will be inspected, as well. These are: how central are these elements in the poems? By what means are they conveyed? Finally, in the conclusion, the present study will attempt to put a provisional end (since no conclusive argument can ever be reached in a discussion upon literary text/texts) to the discussion of whether these elements are subjected to personal elements in the poems analysed.

7 The materials and the analytic procedures

7.1 The materials

The materials of the present study are three poems by Sylvia Plath: 'Lady Lazarus', 'Purdah' and 'Thalidomide'. As several Plath critics have argued, the selected poems reflect upon many contemporary social, political and historical issues, for example, the Holocaust and women's oppression. Although these issues have been discussed by Plath criticism, they have not been studied elaborately in terms of close linguistic analysis linked with the inspection of the socio-historical background. For example, critics such as Crofts (1998) and Stevenson (1998) discuss 'Lady Lazarus' in terms of its social commentary, largely neglecting the textual backing for their arguments, and Bassnett (1987) and Muckleroy (1999) discuss 'Purdah' in the same manner. Furthermore, these poems present different, distinct issues of social criticism and historical commentary in Plath's poetry: for example, Marsack (1992), Aird (1973), Strangeways (1998) and Stevenson (1998) have pointed out the questions concerning the Holocaust in 'Lady Lazarus' and Muckleroy (1999) the questions of women's oppression, Bassnett (1987) and Muckleroy the issue of women's oppression in 'Purdah', and Stevenson (1998) the issue of thalidomide scandal in 'Thalidomide'.

An interesting point is raised by Muckleroy (1999), who claims that 'Purdah' and 'Lady Lazarus' discuss the issue of "objectifying male gaze" (1999:254), i.e. the oppression and objectification of women by men. The critical commentary on 'Lady Lazarus' has mainly focused on the issue of the Holocaust as expressing historical awareness, and 'neglected' this aspect in the poem. This issue will therefore be approached in more detail in the analysis of the poem (see sections 8.2 and 8.4). Together the two poems can be seen to elaborate on the issue of female oppression, but since 'Lady Lazarus' also discusses the issue of historical awareness of and morbid interest in suffering, the focus is still on social criticism and historical awareness in a wider sense and not on the particular issue of female oppression.

'Purdah' and 'Thalidomide' are also relatively unknown to a larger audience: for example, in the research literature reviewed for this study, they are analysed only rarely, and even then discussed with less exactness and integrity than many other poems written during the time Plath composed the main body of the *Ariel* poems. For example, Aird (1973) discusses 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy' for several pages, but does not analyse 'Purdah' nor 'Thalidomide'; also Marsack (1992) leaves the poems out of discussion, although her focus is on social and literary context. However, as mentioned above, critics such as Bassnett (1987) and Muckleroy (1999) have briefly discussed these poems, and raised out issues which are worthy of more detailed inspection and elaboration. In order to inspect these issues, the poems need to be inspected in more detail. Of course, the analysis of three poems will offer an extremely limited view on the issue of whether Plath's poetry contains elements of social criticism or not, However, according to Plath critics (see above) the selected poems do represent major social themes in Plath poetry and show her observations on contemporary issues. Due to combination of limited space and the need for a close critical analysis, this will have to do.

Of course, in order to be able to determine the (possible) existence of elements of social criticism and historical awareness in the three poems, one must be able to define these terms. To give a rough definition: social criticism is discussion of issues that are related to society – and, ultimately, all issues are (see, for example, Fairclough 1992:67) – in a manner which points out malpractices, shortcomings and also possibly suggests ways to change these issues. And as far as historical awareness is considered, it is related to this in the way Crofts (1998) points out: commentary on historical and social issues can be considered to be a form of social criticism itself (see also Bauman 1995 for a more specific view in the case of the Holocaust).

7.2 Steps in the analysis

The analysis in the case of each poem will be carried out in a close reading typical of traditional literary criticism (for examples, see Atkin et al. 1995). Before the analysis of each poem, the reasons for using particular tools of CDA

will be explained. The points raised by earlier Plath criticism will serve as starting points: the elements of social criticism and historical awareness pointed out by Plath criticism are either legitimised and/or elaborated on or dismissed as having no textual, etc. grounding. The use of earlier criticism as a starting point for analyses is based on Fairclough's (1989 and 1992) notion of social, historical and cultural contexts of production and interpretation: neither the producer nor the recipient (in this case, the interpreter) of a text are ever independent of the historical and socio-cultural context surrounding them. Thus, the literary background in Plath criticism is acknowledged, and used as a starting point. The issues discussed by Plath critics will be inspected more thoroughly via CDA, which enables the inspection of textual and discursive levels via specific tools and further examination of social and historical context surrounding the poems and its (possible) reconstructing. In doing this, the analytic framework of CDA, as presented by Fairclough (1992) will be used. In addition, certain concepts and tools which Plath critics have commented upon (but have not used in a systematic analysis), for example, those of 'frame' and such literary critical notions of as the importance of the title as setting the frame, will be used in the analysis since they are relevant in the present study (contribution of Plath criticism into this thesis). These concepts fit into the analytical framework of CDA, since they have been acknowledged by Fairclough (see, for example, 1989:158-160 for commentary on frame and other macrostructures), although he has not incorporated them into his own notion of the analytical framework.

Thus, the analysis will inspect the features which construct the elements of social criticism, beginning on the analysis of textual aspects, which will lead to discursive practices, leading to analysis of social practices and historical data (according to the three-levelled notion of doing CDA analysis). Due to the fact that a literary text has to be perceived as a whole, the analysis will proceed on via close reading of the poem, inspecting features (listed before every poem) on the surface on the poem as they emerge. This aspect was argued for, indirectly, by Fairclough (1992) himself; CDA analysis has the habit of 'dissecting' texts. Further, as Fairclough (1992:73) points out, there exists an overlap between text analysis and analysis of discourse, due to the fact that

features of a text cannot be discussed without some reference to text production and/or interpretation. Therefore, the division between topics of text analysis and topics of discourse analysis is a blurred one, based on the salientness of the formal features.

The analysis will thus proceed from textual facts to social facts, which are discussed both in the analysis of textual and discursive features, for example, to clarify metaphors, and after the analysis in more detail. Issues, which can be understood better when looked at separately, will be analysed individually (for example, agency in 'Lady Lazarus'). Finally, larger social and historical issues and the background they contribute into the poems as well as how these issues are dealt with (for example, the possible reconstructing of contemporary beliefs about the role of the Holocaust) will be discussed in relation to and with the help of relevant sociological approaches: for example, female oppression in 'Purdah' will be approached via theories of male domination and patriarchy. It has to be noted that since 'Lady Lazarus' discusses both the issues of public interest in suffering and male oppression and since the question of agency is more central in the formation of these arguments (and is best to be analysed separately) than in the other two poems, the analysis will be somewhat lengthier than the analyses of 'Purdah' and 'Thalidomide'.

8 'Lady Lazarus'

'Lady Lazarus', written in October 1962, is one of the central poems in the *Ariel* collection. Plath critics, such as Stevenson (1998:269) and Melander (1972:102), have argued that the poem is clearly autobiographical in outline, with references to Plath's personal life (her suicide attempt and the loss of her father), and that the poem describes the actions and life of a figure Plath had constructed of herself in her later poems. However, Aird (1973:83-4) points out that the poem also has an aspect of social commentary in it, for example in the manner in which 'Lady Lazarus' comments on the people's reactions to the revelations of the concentration camps. Melander (1972:103) also claims that

despite references to Plath's life, the poem does not become merely a "private case-book", due to the allusions to more general sources (which will be discussed below). Several other Plath critics conform to this view (see, for example, Bassnett 1987, Marsack 1992 and Väisänen 1999). Thus, the analysis of 'Lady Lazarus' from the point of view of social criticism and historical commentary in the poem seems well justified.

8.1 'Lady Lazarus': concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures

The above-mentioned aspects in the poem will be analysed so that the starting point will be points raised by Plath critics. These points will be related to the issues of historical commentary and awareness (the references to the Holocaust in the poem and the use of its discourse in metaphors, etc.), as pointed out by several Plath critics (see, for example, Väisänen 1999, Bassnett 1987, Marsack 1992), and the issue of public interest towards suffering and the subsequent trivialisation of death (as pointed out by Aird 1973, Väisänen 1999). Since, as Fairclough (1989 and 1992) points out, in conducting CDA, the analyst is never independent of the historical, social, etc. context of interpretation, it is important to acknowledge the existing literary background in Plath criticism, and also to use it as a starting point, from which the issues of social criticism and historical awareness will be inspected. The analysis will then proceed from these points in showing how these issues are constructed firstly on textual level and then on discursive level.

This will be integrated into the analysis and within the context of the two frames of the poem, the Holocaust and the Biblical story of Lazarus (see the section 8.2), which will serve as starting points in inspecting the textual and discursive features. For example, individual instances of discourse mixing will be related to these larger textual structures, which provide the background in interpreting the individual instances. Several Plath critics (see, for example, Aird 1973:83-84 and Marsack 1992:75-76) have identified the existence of these two frames, although they have not used the concept 'frame' itself (see the section 5). Therefore, it will be a valid procedure to integrate these frames

into the analysis. The notions of frame and mental models of structured information in the mind are useful concepts, since they enable the analytical inspection of interpretations based, for example, to a reference to the Holocaust (which may direct the interpretation of the close context and similar features further in the poem). Due to the fact that frames can be discursive (drawing on general systems of knowledge, belief, superstition etc.) and/or ideological (representing someone's interests, represented as 'natural' and 'commonsensical'), the analysis of the frames, which Plath is both restructuring and using to convey her arguments, will be essential.

In terms of finding out whether 'Lady Lazarus' contains elements of social criticism and historical commentary, it will be an important task to inspect the use of wording and metaphors and investigate how they enable Plath to construct her commentary on historical facts and their significance in a critical manner, and, of course, what the message is that Plath is presenting to the readership. In doing this, the analysis of wording and metaphor (these two concepts will often be combined, for example, in the analysis of wording of a metaphor) is necessary, due to the fact that the investigation of linguistic items in the text inevitably leads to more general considerations: first that of discourse practice, and then to that of social practice. Again, the need for an inspection of the textual level gains its justification from Plath criticism: several Plath critics have focused on, for example, the diction and punctuation of the poem. For example, Aird (1973:82) comments on the poem as being "misleadingly light", meaning that the vocabulary and rhythm approximate normal conversational speech and the repetitions bring an ironic, theatrical quality to the poem by both ridiculing the speaker herself as well as the people she describes. In addition to these features, some basic grammatical features will be used to explain the poem when necessary: the most prominent of these is collocation (which explains the manners Plath uses in discourse mixing).

As several critics (Melander 1972:103, Aird 1973:83-84 and Bassnett 1987:115) have pointed out, in 'Lady Lazarus', Plath operates to a large extent through allusions to Christianity (with the Biblical story of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead by Christ, serving as the overall context) and the

Holocaust. To use concepts of CDA, these allusions are elements of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, and the main focus in the analysis of discursive practices in 'Lady Lazarus' will be on these concepts. These elements help to construct the 'story' of the speaker of the poem, a person who is subjected to suffering but who manages to escape from her oppressors via death and rebirth¹¹. The features of intertextuality include types of manifest intertextuality, embedded intertextuality being the most prominent in the case of discourse mixing which occurs on several occasions in 'Lady Lazarus' and interdiscursive elements such as register mixing (also frame and irony) The features will then be inspected to find out the effects they create. It must be stressed once again that the most practical manner in analysing the poem will be to combine the textual and discursive aspects in the close reading, since they are inseparable and since they construct larger networks of meaning.

The whole of the analysis of textual and discursive features will be placed within the selected frames: that is, the features raised by the analysis of, for example, intertextuality, will be discussed within the context of frames. This procedure is admittedly somewhat rigid and artificial, and this is because the frames are shaped and reshaped as the poem progresses. This renders the utilisation of the frames as a background for the inspection of the precise features, which are at the same time constructing them, somewhat odd. However, as pointed out by Fairclough (1992), the interpreter is never detached from her surrounding context, meaning that her background (gender, culture, personal knowledge on different issues and so forth) is bound to influence her interpretation and indeed constitutes a part of the analysis. The interpreter also adds a further dimension into the analysis of, for example, intertextuality by interpreting it. Thus, in analysing a text, the interpreter is required to make the decision how to proceed, on the basis of earlier research into the matter, but finally, it is also a case of personal choice. After all, as Fairclough (1995b:77)

¹¹ As Melander (1972:104) claims, this idea of death as purification is an important aspect in several *Ariel* poems. Thus, 'Lady Lazarus' can be seen as a part of a larger context and therefore analysing it merely as a single piece of writing can be argued to be misleading. However, the whole context of *Ariel* poems cannot be discussed in detail here (nor can it be discussed in the following analyses), and this element, perhaps an important one, must be left for further research to study in more detail. Here it will be drawn upon when considered necessary.

argues, “intertextual analysis is an interpretative art which depends upon the analyst’s judgement and experience” – and this can be said to apply in all kinds of analyses. Thus, choosing to utilise frames in the analyses can be considered to be a justified procedure.

Thus, the first part of the analytic section to ‘Lady Lazarus’ receives its grounding on the ideas brought up by Plath critics: firstly, the historical awareness and commentary on the Holocaust; and secondly, criticism towards public interest towards death and suffering and their trivialisation. The analysis will begin on the textual level, which constructs (as will be shown in the analysis) the level of discourse practices: in this manner, the networks of commentary and criticism will be inspected, to see whether the points raised by Plath critics find justification in CDA analysis, and to elaborate on and clarify these points. However, another aspect that is of importance when analysing ‘Lady Lazarus’, and which will constitute the second part of the analytic section, is that of agency: this has been suggested by several Plath critics (see, for example, Marsack 1992:75 and Bassnett 1987:114-115). Although agency is listed among textual features in Fairclough (1992), here it will be dealt separately, for it creates an additional dimension of commentary in the poem. This dimension cannot, of course, be totally separated from the whole of the poem, for the interconnectedness of the arguments Plath makes in social and historical issues is extremely multi-dimensional and elaborate. However, the analysis of agency will reveal an aspect of the poem, which cannot be covered satisfyingly via analysing, for example, the intertextual networks: the question of struggle between women and men in terms of voice and, consequently, of power (as will be shown below). This separation in the analysis is, it must be admitted, somewhat artificial and even damaging to the poem, but it has to be maintained for the sake of keeping the analysis readable: including the discussion of the voice in the close reading of intertextuality, etc. would confuse the reader and damage the literary whole (which the poem arguably is) even more.

In analysing agency (Fairclough 1992:235-236), one must pay attention to different issues, for example transitivity (processes), voice (active/passive, use of personal pronouns to identify the agent) and nominalisation. The concept of voice will be employed here, for it is the means by which Plath constructs the narrative and the character roles, which create an effect that is related both to the issues discussed via the analysis of other textual and discourse practices (via the frame of the poem and the historical context it draws on) as well as a separate whole.

After the analysis of textual and discursive practices, the results and questions raised by the analysis will be related to issues that directly concerned Plath as a person (her interest in politics, history and culture) and to the social background, both historical, such as the Holocaust, and contemporary, such as people's attitudes towards the Holocaust in Plath's times. The frames of the poem, the Holocaust and the Biblical story of Lazarus, will be commented on at the level of social practices, using relevant social theory (see below) to identify the possible reasons why Plath chose to deal with them in the poem and to discuss the effects they produce. Furthermore, after the analysis of agency, the question of power struggle expressed in agency will be discussed via reference to relevant feminist social theory. After these, the overall effects and arguments of the poem will be inspected in the conclusion, to determine how the poem expresses social criticism and historical commentary.

8.2 Analysis of textual and discursive practices and their effects

The title of a poem, as of any text, is, as Lodge (1992) points out, the first part of it. Therefore it has "considerable power to attract and condition the reader's attraction" (Lodge 1992:193), meaning that has an effect on the reader's interpretation of the whole poem, conditioning him/her to what follows after the title. The title of 'Lady Lazarus' creates inevitably an overall frame to the poem, which is set to be the Biblical story of Lazarus who was resurrected

from the dead by the Christ¹². On the formal level, the title itself, as Marsack (1992:75) points out, has a mocking quality in its alliteration ('Lady Lazarus'). Furthermore, as Marsack argues, it re-shapes a familiar frame by making Lazarus a female. Thus, the title guides, or at least influences the interpretations of the poem's metaphors and the poem itself, because of the interdiscursive link to Christianity. In terms of power relations and social structures, this link which re-shapes Christianity creates a sense of legitimisation of the poem's theme(s) and metaphors, since Christianity and church were in Plath's times (and still are) seen as an authority.

However, the title also questions this authority by re-shaping Biblical discourse. These contradictory elements of the title can also be found in the parts of the poem itself, and their effect is similar. On the one hand, Plath uses religious and social discourses to legitimise her description of pain and to bring it closer to the reader. On the other hand, she attacks authorities (such as religious authorities, public opinions) and social indifference by using the same discourses in her own manner and to her advantage. Thus, the frame of Lazarus becomes essential in interpreting and analysing features on the textual and discursive levels. Therefore, these features are integrated as belonging within the two frames, that of Lazarus and that of Holocaust (which enters the poem in the beginning stanzas and will be discussed below).

The poem begins with lines: "I have done it again. / One year in every ten / I manage it –". Several Plath critics, for example Melander (1972:103-105) and Stevenson (1998:269) have claimed that 'Lady Lazarus' is, to a large extent, autobiographical and in this sense, "one year in every ten" can be seen to refer to Plath's own crises, which had occurred roughly every ten years (first, the death of her father; then, her nervous breakdown which led to an attempted suicide; and finally, her separation from her husband). Explicit biographical details of Plath's life will not be analysed here, but the commentary on the writing of poetry in the poem is important in introducing social criticism into

¹² As an alternative argument, Collins (1998) also argues that besides this particular Lazarus, Plath alludes to Lazarus who is a character in a parable from Luke told by Jesus; however, this interpretation seems less valid, when considering the poem in more detail.

the poem, and will thus be analysed. CDA does take aspects such as text production (see Fairclough 1992:233) into account, treating them as features constituting the analytic framework for analysing discourse practices and not as the fundamental starting point against which, for example, metaphors are analysed. Although there are features in the poem which can, and have been interpreted in this way and although Plath approaches the historical and social issues in the poem from the point of view of an individual, relating them to personal experiences, the ‘personal’ side of the poem (that is, the autobiographical details) is not the only issue related to the question of social criticism and commentary. As will be shown below This aspect can be analysed by looking at agency. In this manner, the notion of textual and discursive aspects in the poem can be interpreted in a larger context.

In the poem, Plath never actually directly refers to resurrection by using this particular word; rather, the idea is conveyed to the reader on the level of discourse through the overall frame of the poem (the story of Lazarus) and on the textual level through, for example, phrases like “Peel off the napkin / O my enemy“.

In stanzas 2-3, the nature of the speaker’s achievement is commented on.

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Several Plath critics, for example Väisänen (1999:19) and Aird (1973:83), have pointed out that these lines construct the image of the speaker as a concentration camp victim, thus introducing historical commentary into the poem. Let us now inspect the textual and discursive manner in which this is created, to see whether a closer analysis validates these arguments and to see

what the effect of this commentary is, and how it shows the historical awareness in the poem.

Here, Plath proceeds on mixing discourses and purposefully expanding the boundaries of collocation. The discourse mixing begins on the textual level, in terms of lexical choices that belong to different discourse types (i.e. embedded intertextuality). The word “miracle“ in the beginning has, in the frame set by the poem’s title, a strong religious overtone and thus creates a religious discourse in the first line, which the word “Nazi“ changes into the discourse of the Holocaust. An additional level is achieved as Plath, while operating within the boundaries of these two discourses, creates an image of the speaker as an object by resorting to wording in terms of unconventional collocations: words related to humans (skin, foot, face) are placed in the same clauses with words that are inanimate objects (lampshade, paperweight, linen). This system of reference objectifies the speaker completely, using the discourse of the Holocaust to emphasise this even further: now mentioned, the Holocaust becomes a ‘rival’ frame, or rather, a co-frame in the poem. The story of Lazarus still functions as a frame, perhaps as a slightly more dominant one, due to the facts that it occurs first (the ordering of elements is vital in any respect) and that it gives the speaker of the poem her dominant characteristics (as mentioned above, and analysed in the agency later). However, the frame of the Holocaust also becomes a vital ingredient of the poem, and as stated above, it will be essential in interpreting and analysing features in textual and discursive level.

Thus, the overall effect of this is that Plath manages to create an image of a concentration camp victim (or a person whose suffering is equal to one), who is a mere object to her torturers and who is indeed used as an object. Marsack (1992:75) points out that “the Nazi lampshade“ alludes to a Nazi commandant whose wife had lampshades made of human skin. Therefore, “the Nazi lampshade“ is a metaphor rendered from an actual historical fact. The combined effect of these stanzas in a larger context is that they already emphasise an important aspect of historical commentary in the poem (pointing to the horrors of the Holocaust) on a smaller scale. In addition, they introduce

aspects of agency, another relevant issue in the poem, which (as will be shown later) also constructs the reality in the poem.

As mentioned above, the question of agency steps into the poem already in the first three stanzas. The death implied in these lines is not expressed directly; yet, it can be deduced from the frame of the poem (Lazarus is dead, until Christ resurrects him) and the discourse of the Holocaust, which itself is associated with the death of millions in the concentration camps. Together with the absence of any other agent than the speaker herself this ‘death’ even seems to hint at the possibility of suicide: however, nothing certain can be said about this. Even the speaker’s resurrection seems to be self-made: Marsack (1992:75) claims that the speaker raises herself, and this claim is indeed supported with the overall frame of the poem, the story of Lazarus with the exclusion of Christ (the main agent in the original story). Thus, the speaker is describing herself as an object, that is, in the manner in which the “enemy“ and others see her. The fact that the “enemy“ itself is placed in a role which is not that active anymore (the speaker never directly mentions that this is how the “enemy“ sees her) adds to the theme of survival and escape from oppression. This issue will be discussed in more detail under the following heading.

After stating the nature of her experiences, the speaker elaborates on the comparison between them and the experiences of the victims of the Holocaust, thus introducing her critical observations of the public interest in the Holocaust and suffering, in general.

The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot –
The big strip tease.
Gentlemen, ladies ...

In these stanzas, yet another type of discourse, the discourse of the circus, is brought in. This is created by a change in register: the speaker addresses the 'audience' ("Gentlemen, ladies") in a manner, which a circus director would do. Furthermore, "the peanut-crunching crowd" is a characterisation of the nature of the 'audience' (another of the aspects in the poem which will be dealt in section 8.4) which creates irony. To be more specific, irony is created through the reliance on a frame of the circus in which peanuts are presented as integral, characteristic of the audience. Irony, as Fairclough (1992:123) points out, is intertextual in the sense that it 'echoes' someone else's utterance: here, the utterance is not specifically anyone else's but instead Plath is using a commonly known characteristic of circus discourse to create irony.

On the level of metaphor ("peanut-crunching crowd"), the issue expands from the text to interdiscursive practices. According to Aird's interpretation (1973:83), Plath connects the interest that the "peanut-crunching crowd" has in the speaker with the interest aroused by revelations and news flashes from the concentration camps; thus, she condemns a morbid fascination with death. The effect of this comparison is, according to Aird (1973:83), not to emphasise Plath's personal experiences but to subordinate them to a larger dramatic structure. This interpretation may seem far-fetched at first, but a careful look at the poem's internal system of reference proves it to be quite valid. References to the Holocaust can be found both in the beginning and in the end of the poem, which causes the whole of the poem to settle into the frame of the Holocaust, which inevitably affects the interpreter's judgement. The frame of Lazarus is still present, and the frame of the Holocaust relates to it as it expresses historical commentary and social criticism more clearly on the 'surface' of the poem.

However, in terms of the metaphor these lines contain even more ambiguity than what Aird comments on. Plath, being a writer herself, did try to attract her own "peanut-crunching crowd", that is, her readership. Thus, these lines can be interpreted as an ironic reference to her readership and their interest in her poetry, which dealt with her personal suffering, as well to the public's interest in the Holocaust. "The big strip-tease" is what the speaker is being submitted

to, as the crowd “shove in to see“ her suffering. Indeed, Plath could be seen to be making a statement about the dangers in writing confessional poetry (arguably, stanza 17 is making this more specific, claiming that the difficulty comes from exposing it to the public: “It’s easy enough to do it in a cell“). In any case, the impression is given that the public’s interest in suffering, both non-personal and personal, is terrifying and even lethal. However, by stating this she is also ironizing herself, for her aim, as a writer was precisely to convey her personal experiences to readers. Thus the voice of the speaker becomes more distinctly Plath’s voice. This means that the poem becomes polyphonic. This shift and the multiple dimensions of the commentary they both emphasise the speaker’s own experience and link it closely to the ambiguities inherent in the interest in the Holocaust. Plath returns to this issue later in the poem, in lines “Dying / Is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well“. These lines also clearly employ irony: here, irony is created by equalising ‘death’ and ‘art’ (copula ‘are’), implying that death is indeed a form of art.

As far as social practices are concerned, these two instances lead to them as follows: Plath operates on a more general level, by letting the speaker mock the trivialisation of suffering (death can be turned into art and entertainment). However, she also ironises herself when doing this - perhaps showing her awareness of the problems in writing confessional poetry, but rather distancing herself from the text. This gives the text an aspect of ‘universality’ (of not being tied to its writer, but of functioning on its own, driven by its meaning). This contributes to direct criticism towards the morbid interest with suffering and death, present in sections dealt with. This is thus an important aspect of social criticism in ‘Lady Lazarus’.

In the fourth stanza, Plath introduces the “enemy“ (“Peel off the napkin / O my enemy“), whom she categorises later in the poem with the help of German and Holocaust imagery. She does not state explicitly who or what this enemy is. Plath critics (for example, Väisänen 1999) have speculated that the poet is referring to her father or/and to Ted Hughes (they being the most frequent male threats in the *Ariel* poems). An equally valid interpretation is surely that the

“enemy“ is no particular person, but a personification of the ideas and authorities Plath opposes. The “enemy“ becomes more explicitly a Nazi towards the end of the poem.

So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,
I am your valuable,
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

Here, Plath relies on discourse mixing via embedded intertextuality: the discourse of the Holocaust (characterised by the German language; this link is based on connotation “Holocaust“ → “German“) is embedded into the discourse of addressing the “enemy“. “Herr Doktor“ is still wholly German, but “Herr Enemy“ is a mixture of these two different languages. The use of German thus links the phrases to the Nazis. If these two phrases are treated as allusions, “Herr Doctor“ can be seen referring to the concentration camp doctor Mengele (Väisänen 1999:21), due to the existence of the frame of the Holocaust. Väisänen also argues for a possible link to the doctor in *The Bell Jar* who gave electric shock therapy to Plath’s alter ego Esther (BJ:148-154): however, in the context (the Bible and the Holocaust), this claim does not seem so valid in here. The wording the speaker uses to refer to herself is again objectifying. This wording draws on intertextual relations (embedded intertextuality) on the text: “opus“ and “valuable“ are words belonging to the discourse of lifeless objects, and they stand in contrast with the “I“ (a personal pronoun referring to humans), a living person (this may sound a bit rough, but still it characterises best what is going on in here). This creates an effect of the speaker being a mere object to her opponent (“your opus“). However, the actual link to historical commentary comes in the following lines and in the next two stanzas, where Holocaust imagery is explored directly.

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.

The lines “The pure gold baby / That melts to a shriek“ from the previous part mark the transition, which is obtained with a metaphor, created with the help of discourse mixing. What this means is that the first line is still the same objectifying discourse (wording of “pure gold baby“ continues the wording of objects, as earlier), but the next line is the discourse of humanity. The verb “shriek“ requires an animate object, which means that the “baby“ is now transformed into to a living human being. The ‘melting’ can be interpreted in the context (the overall frame, and the specific discourse of Holocaust created with the use of German earlier) to refer to concentration camp ovens.

Now that the transition is complete, Plath exploits the Holocaust imagery. “Ash“ is again the discourse of the Holocaust (the ash of the bodies burned in the ovens), further added by “flesh, bone“ which are the remains (thus, not all is ash). The following stanza is an intertextual link (or rather, interdiscursive link, since it operates in a larger scale than within one clause or sentence) in itself: here, Plath drawing on a specified discourse used when discussing the Holocaust. The line “a cake of soap“ refers to the fact that Nazis made soap from the fat they extracted from human bodies. Lines “a wedding ring / a gold filling“ (of a tooth), on the other hand, refer to the ovens in the concentration camps, where these objects taken from the prisoners were melted into gold bars. Here, the effect that these create (on the level of social and historical reality) is again the informative of the poem, which has emerged in every instance where Holocaust has been referred to: the need to remember and to know of the horrors of the Holocaust. As Bauman (1995:211) observes, when articulating the public notion of the Holocaust, “much of life and thought as it is still carried on now is based on the assumption that Auschwitz and

Hiroshima never happened, or if they did, ... that need not concern us now“. Plath is obviously working against this notion.

The last two stanzas add another aspect to the character of the “enemy. The discourse of the Holocaust (as well as the frame) is finally brought together with the discourse of Christianity. The oppressive nature of the former goes without saying, and the latter is now characterised by the former via embedded intertextuality: God becomes a Nazi, as well as Lucifer. Also the word meanings are of importance: since both ‘God’ and ‘Lucifer’ are central in Christian (and consequently in Western) society, being the opposite poles in the Christian mythology, they transform the “enemy” into a personification of oppression. Thus, the “enemy“ is absolute and total. Now, the issue of gender comes out even clearer. As hinted earlier, the frame (Lazarus) of the poem challenges the religious authority by re-constructing it: a female figure is introduced into the male world of Christianity (where nearly all the important figures are male, except for Virgin Mary), and she is capable of attending to herself. She does not need Christ to revive herself. The closing lines bring an ancient interdiscursive element into the poem: the myth of Phoenix (in Greek mythology, the phoenix bird has to be burnt to death in order to be born again from the ash). The myth of the phoenix closes the poem via a metaphor: as Phoenix rises from the ash, so does the speaker; and as Phoenix is red, the speaker has red hair. This is a case of mixed intertextuality, which operates on the correspondences in wordings.

8.3 Background to the Holocaust: its role in modern society and relevance in ‘Lady Lazarus’

As is clear by now, the historical context in which ‘Lady Lazarus’ is partly placed in is that of the Holocaust. The extermination of six million Jews during the Second World War in the concentration camps and elsewhere is “a communal wound that cannot heal“ (Crofts 1998). What makes it even more disturbing is the fact that it happened in a modern civilisation, in modern times. Bauman (1995) inspects the Holocaust in these terms, and states:

The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture. (Bauman 1995:viii).

In connection to this, Bauman (1995) claims that there exist two ways to belittle or misjudge the significance of the Holocaust for sociology as the theory of modern civilisation. One way is to present the Holocaust as something that happened to the Jews, concerning Jewish and German history: as Bauman (1995:211) claims, “Auschwitz has gone down in history as a ‘Jewish’ or ‘German’ problem and as Jewish or German private property“. The Holocaust has also been presented as the culmination point of European-Christian antisemitism, and also as an extreme case of a wide category of social phenomena, that of genocide. These views seem, as Bauman argues, to embed an idea of uniqueness in them; the Holocaust is seen as an episode, a burst of non-sensical barbarism.

The strategy that results in the two-pronged effect of marginalizing the crime and exonerating modernity is one of exempting the Holocaust from a class of comparable phenomena and interpreting it instead as an eruption of pre-modern (barbaric, irrational) forces ... (Bauman 1995:212).

Bauman claims that the commonly held view that the Holocaust cannot be repeated, precisely due to the progressive triumph of modern civilisation, is false. Bauman also points out that there exists a self-healing process in the consciousness of the modern society, which, according to him, is for the reason mentioned above, a sign of dangerous blindness. This self-healing takes place through two intertwined processes: firstly, the forcing of the Holocaust into the status of a specialist industry left to its own scientific institutes and foundations; and secondly, the “sanitation of the Holocaust imagery sedimented in popular consciousness“ (Bauman 1995:xi). The latter means that occasions of public information of the Holocaust offer little room for depth analysis of it, and particularly of its more unsightly and disturbing aspects.

Thus, according to Bauman (1995), the views and thoughts expressed on the Holocaust belittle the importance of the Holocaust in modern society and in modern civilisation, and in terms of social theory, dismiss the need of significant revision of current social theory. The Holocaust has to be understood as deeply rooted in the modern society and in the categories of modern social thought. Bauman's views cannot be elaborated here in full detail, but his approach to the Holocaust is a valid and applicable one. He inspects the Holocaust in a wider social and historical context, for example, in relation to the technological advances and their application in the concentration camps (which can be seen as modern 'factories'). Furthermore, he does not limit himself to particular social theory or notion of historical phenomena, but draws on from different sources in order to create a thorough social, cultural and economical view of the Holocaust.

Plath's use of the Holocaust in 'Lady Lazarus' can be inspected from the point of view of Bauman's ideas. This inspection will reveal how Plath's commentary on the Holocaust expresses many of the ideas which, according to Bauman (1995), are important in discussing the Holocaust in a 'new sense', free from the limiting views expressed above. One point to consider is the inspection of the disturbing aspects of the Holocaust that occur in Plath's poetry. The direct references to "Nazi lampshades" and "pure gold" babies "melting to a shriek" may not be depth analysis of the horrors of the Holocaust in the very meaning of it (as demanded by Bauman) but at least those issues are confronted and acknowledged in the poem. This conforms to Bauman's view: the Holocaust cannot be let to become a 'satiated', non-disturbing event in history, which is too unreal to be true. Plath attacked this idea of the Holocaust being distant and unreal in people's mind in her poem 'The Thin People', as well ¹³.

¹³ The 'sanitation' process which Bauman (1995:xi) refers to, may be the reason why Plath's treatment of the Holocaust has provoked so much criticism towards her. The use of the Holocaust in an atypical manner which does not fit in within the boundaries (context, actual language used) set to it by modern society, may have been (and still may be) too much for many people.

Another point that must be borne in mind is that Plath (as pointed by Crofts 1998) dismisses the notion of the Holocaust belonging to the Jewish and German history. She proceeds in her argument against this limiting idea of the Holocaust is done by bringing the discourse of the Holocaust together with other, more general discourses. And by bringing these issues into a larger context (with the help of the frame of Lazarus) Plath adds a sense of universality in her arguments, creating an effect that the Holocaust is not strictly Jewish. Since discourses, as Fairclough (1992) points out, constitute social relations as well as are constructed by them, the discourse of 'Lady Lazarus' re-constructs the modern notion of the 'place' of the Holocaust in history.

Thus, Plath's use of the Holocaust is precisely breaking the boundaries within which, according to Bauman (1995), the Holocaust has traditionally been confined. She employs the discourse of concentration camps and Nazism outside the context within which they are often placed (historiography, Jewish history). Thus, it can be argued that she sees the Holocaust as deeply rooted into modern society and consciousness, and also advocates a discussion of its significance in modern society.

8.4 Agency in 'Lady Lazarus'

As discussed above, the agency in 'Lady Lazarus' is best dealt with separately. This is because including it in the close reading of intertextuality and other issues would confuse the reader and 'dissect' the issue. In other words, too many aspects of textual analysis would do damage to the poem as a literary whole. The analysis of agency will be conducted by inspecting voice (active/passive) and connected features (who/what is the responsible/agent) which create participant roles into the poem: for example, the 'voice' of the speaker, and how she is pictured in the poem will be inspected. Furthermore, the participant roles in the poem, for example, those of the "enemy and the 'audience' will be inspected, since they both construct the speaker's role as well as insert elements of social criticism into the poem (together with the speaker).

When compared with the analysis of text and discourse practices in the poem, the analysis of agency shows a ‘mismatch’ (or rather, a tension) between the discourses of objectification and the Holocaust (which emphasise the status of the speaker as a victim) and the system of agency in the poem, in which the speaker is in control. The ambiguity of, on the one hand, presenting a threat (a personification of, for example, Nazis) constructed by references to historical and social factors, and, on the other hand, dismissing its influence by restraining its voice contributes to the argument for survival in the poem: the “enemy“ and the ‘audience’ morbidly fascinated with death and suffering are cast aside by the speaker who manages to escape the oppression. This creates another level of social commentary into the poem, which functions alongside with the issues dealt with above. These issues will be elaborated on below.

The system of reference of the poem is complicated. The speaker has the leading voice: she is the one that is reporting what is happening and why. This is shown in that a single narrator, in the first person singular (‘I’) reports the poem. In the bulk of the poem, her voice is in the active voice: in the beginning of the poem, she states what has happened (“I have done it again“), then she mockingly commands her “enemy“ (rhetorical “Peel off the napkin...“), reports on her suffering (“I do it exceptionally well“) and finally escapes her “enemy“ (“ ... I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air“). In fact, most of the sentences in the poem are in the active voice. Instances of the passive voice (and the use of the formal subject “there“) in connection with the speaker (identified with the first-person singular pronouns ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’) are extremely rare; these are listed below.

1. Soon, soon the flesh
 The grave ate will be
 At home on me

2. 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 the hearing of my heart –

The use of the active voice articulates the speaker's power in the poem, and consequently the passive forms might be expected to do the opposite. However, since the speaker is the narrator of the poem, everything that is expressed is being focalised through her. This is a major contributing factor, together with other aspects discussed below, that create an additional dimension of social discussion into the poem: the struggle for existence and survival.

Besides the speaker, there are other participants in the poem, presented in the active voice. These instances are listed below.

1. The peanut crunching crowd
 Shoves in to see
 Them unwrap me hand and foot –
2. They had to call and call
 And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.
3. Ash, ash –
 You poke and stir.

The first example of an active role is that of an 'audience' ("the peanut-crunching crowd" is the subject in the sentence): as seen in the analysis above, the 'audience' is Plath's construction which refers to the public, whose macabre interest in death and suffering Plath is criticising. The pronoun "them" in the same sentence links together with pronoun "they", the second active role, in the next example: these unidentified actors are different from the 'audience' in that they participate in action. "They" unwrap the speaker and also "pick the worms" off of her. These physical actions are directly connected with the speaker (doing something to her; "they" is the subject, speaker is the object), whereas the actions of the audience, although it does act physically ("shoves in to..."), are not. Who "they" are, is left without clarification: what can be said, is

that “they“ are separate from the ‘audience’ and the “enemy“ and that they are on the same side with the speaker, since they help her (for example, by picking the worms off of her).

The third role, which is arguably (see, for example, Väisänen 1999) the most important, is that of the “enemy“. As stated earlier, Plath categorises the “enemy“ with the help of the German language and the discourse of the Holocaust, creating a force opposing the speaker: when the speaker is “the pure gold baby“, she is “the opus“ of the “enemy“. Also, the frame of Christianity is turned into a male-oriented, oppressive system where “Herr God“ (a male) is the opposite force to the speaker, who is a woman. However, all this objectification of the speaker is in contrast with the “enemy’s“ textual role in the poem. The first time the “enemy“ is mentioned, the speaker is referring to it with a rhetorical command (“Peel off the napkin / O my enemy). The second time it is brought in it is belittled in a manner similar to a parent chiding a child (“So, so, Herr Doktor. / So, Herr Enemy“). The third time the “enemy“ is presented as having an active role (“you” in the third example), where it is the subject of the sentence. However, this is the only line where the “enemy“ is presented as an active and present threat and even here the speaker manages to escape its grasp: the only things that are left behind are lifeless objects. The speaker has already escaped and threatens the “enemy“ with a rebirth: “Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air“. Thus, she has beaten her oppressor.

The fact that the speaker of the poem is a female and the “enemy“ is a male (“Herr Enemy“), whose position is absolutely dominant both in this world (the Holocaust with “Herr Doktor“) and in afterlife (the Biblical context created by the frame of Lazarus, with “Herr God“), creates a strong tension between the two sexes in the poem. In addition to this, the fact that the enemy is not stated to be a specific person, but is characterised by different discourses, creates an effect of it being ‘all over’ the ‘world’ of the poem. The “enemy“ can be seen as a personification of male-dominated authorities and institutions (those in power in society, religion): this issue already surfaced in the question of the frame of Lazarus (see above). This is presented alongside with criticism of and

commentary on the historical issue of the Holocaust and other forms of social commentary (public interest in death and suffering): although these elements are (as just mentioned) extremely interconnected, they function together in creating the multi-dimensional network of social criticism and commentary into the poem.

The question of the opposing roles of the speaker and the “enemy“ also foregrounds the question of struggle for power (see below) represented in the poem. This struggle takes place between the female speaker and the male “enemy“, reflecting the larger strands of social reality: the power relations between the two sexes. As Patterson (1978) claims, feminist criticism has set out to discover the impact of sex stratified social relations on how women perceive themselves in relation to the society at large. The issue of consciousness is integral in this: in the case of the poem, the consciousness is reflected upon the speaker’s role as opposed to the male threat. And because consciousness is integrally tied to socio-historical processes (Patterson 1978:9), all of this is integrated within the frames of the Holocaust and Lazarus: thus, the interconnectedness of these issues is extremely tight.

Fairclough (1989) claims that an important question in considering language and power is access to power. In ‘Lady Lazarus’, the issues of access to power comes down to the access to self-determination, which, according to feminist theoreticians (see, for example, Chafetz 1988 and 1989) is always a case of struggle for women. However, in ‘Lady Lazarus’ the situation is the opposite: the speaker is the active participant, controlling the “enemy“ (see above). Therefore, the struggle on the level of agency is over, although the objectifying discourses, etc. in the textual and discursive level persist to create a sense of threat. The effect of this is that the ‘battle’ begins on the level of textual and discursive practices, and ends on the level of agency: the survival story is complete together with the end of the poem.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
 I rise with my red hair
 And I eat men like air.

The issue of female oppression can also be approached from the point of view of hegemony, or rather, challenging hegemony. The speaker portrays the 'enemy' to be in power via references to Christianity (God, Lucifer) and Nazism (in which power in the hands of one leader was the case). These two issues relate the poem into society, by making otherwise seemingly general commentary more specific. However, the poem is controlled by the speaker, on the level of discourses and agency, which is a case of the discourse in the poem (constituting of several sub-discourses) re-shaping the male hegemony. Therefore, the speaker challenges the "enemy's" hegemony, and wins the battle by escaping, by surviving.

8.5 Conclusion: question of the public and the private

Plath's use of the Holocaust has caused an outrage among Plath critics: for example, Joyce Carol Oates, Seamus Heaney and Irving Howe (for detailed information on the criticism, see Rose 1998:206) argue that Plath is opportunistically taking advantage of these issues to emphasise her own experience and thus trivialising the Holocaust. However, many critics have also argued against this: for example, Strangeways (1998) and Rose (1998) claim that instead of discussing whether Plath has the right to utilise the Holocaust in her poetry or not, the discussion should be of the effects that are created. Therefore, the 'battle' is being waged over the issue whether the purpose of the Holocaust in 'Lady Lazarus' is to emphasise personal events or whether it creates arguments for something else. Thus, there is a need for inspection of whether there exists historical and social commentary in Plath's poetry or not.

Commenting on the issue, Strangeways (1998:96-97) points out that the intimate sounding titles, emotive tones and the first-person narration in poems such as 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus', suggest that something autobiographical is being written. However, he argues that the actual focus is on all human

beings, drawing on Rose's (1998) argument that the division between history and subjectivity in Plath's poetry is a false one. Following a similar line of reasoning, Crofts (1998:5) claims that in the case of 'Lady Lazarus' Plath uses the Holocaust as a metaphor to place her suffering within a wider context, questioning "the relationship between the personal and the political" (1998:7). She emphasizes the fact that during the time that the *Ariel* poems were written, Plath recognised the weight of cultural and historical facts that bound her and the surrounding human community to the Holocaust and realised that she could use it as a part of "her vocabulary" (1998:6). Finally, Väisänen (1999:17,22) coincides with Rose by stating that in her later poetry, the socially conscious side of Plath is ever present, even though the personal matters (ambiguous statements which can be interpreted as references to personal events) are also prominent in her poetry.

These points raised by Plath critics are indeed validated by the analysis of text and discursive practices, agency and the social and historical practices behind them. For example, the discussion of the horrors of the Holocaust and the morbid interest in them is integrated into the story of the speaker, and the question of oppression receives a 'universal' tone due to the representation of the opposing force, the "enemy", as a personification of different (male) institutions and powers. Therefore, the personal is always involved in the poem on some level. Thus drawing the line between subjectivity and historical or political concerns can be said to be impossible in the case of Plath's poetry in general and 'Lady Lazarus' in particular. However, this can be argued to be a fact applicable to not only Plath's work but to all kinds of texts displaying these elements: as Fairclough (1989:24-25, 1992:272-73) points out, the social and historical context of the production of the text are inseparable from the text. Fairclough also takes account of the fact that the individual properties of the text producer are an integral part of the text itself. Thus, the persona of the author is important in this respect: as seen earlier in the present study, Plath herself was a 'political person', meaning that she was interested in contemporary political and social issues and was also aware of the historical legacy of both the USA and the western world. The justification for these is the definition of what can be considered as 'social criticism' and whether the

awareness of historical facts (expressed via discourse) is a part of it (see chapter 7). Furthermore, as Crofts (1998) points out, commentary on historical and social issues can be considered to be a form of social criticism itself.

To conclude the discussion of 'Lady Lazarus', the effects that all the features of the poem have on the reader are extremely complex. By different means, for example, by stretching the limits of a familiar frame (Lazarus) and by mixing discourses to create effects of objectification, Plath creates a strong, critical tone into the poem. This tone, in relation to the references to, for example, the morbid popular interest in the Holocaust and Nazis creates a strong message against oppression, violence and the abuse of power and positions of authority in general. The two more explicit issues of social criticism and historical awareness, that of the public interest towards the Holocaust (in general, suffering) and that of the horrors of the concentration camps (in general, persecution), are presented in an elaborate and highly complex manner. The morbid interest in suffering is approached from a public point of view (by contrasting the interest towards speaker's suffering with the interest towards the Holocaust victims) and from a personal point of view (Plath makes her own ambiguous position as a commentator clear by ironizing herself). In addition to presenting the horrors of the Holocaust via wording and metaphors which constitute intertextuality (and vice versa), Plath also presents them via an "enemy", a personification of male domination based on institutions (Christianity in the frame of Lazarus) and historical facts (Nazism), which however remains under Plath's control in terms of voice and discourse. This ambiguity of, on the one hand, presenting a threat constructed by references to historical and social factors, and, on the other hand, dismissing its influence with the help of victory in the struggle for power (expressed in agency) characterises the poem, thus creating an additional element of social criticism, the question of women under male domination, into the poem.

In this manner, Plath skilfully directs the reader's interpretation(s) and emphasises the triumph of the speaker, which, as seen above, was quite evident from the beginning. Thus, she both reminds the reader of the horrors and the weight of the memory of the Holocaust by presenting the speaker as a sort of a

living memory of the concentration camps, and also expresses the fact that, despite oppression and violence, survival is possible. This survival is also survival from under male oppression. Therefore, the poem not only discusses the Holocaust and criticises the public trivialisation of death and the male domination, but also makes a positive statement for survival.

9 'Purdah'

'Purdah', written in October 1962, was written approximately at the same time as 'Lady Lazarus'. The poem was not included in the *Ariel* collection, but as Marsack (1992:112) claims, it develops a similar idea of "the woman who transcends her torments and exacts revenge for her suffering on men", and can thus be seen as being essential in terms of the continuity of themes and symbolism which appeared in Plath's poetry during the time the poem was written. Stevenson (1998:269) argues that the poem can be seen as a self-projection of Plath herself, meaning that the poem draws on Plath's biographical details, transforming them into "*performances*" (original italics): she states that this was seen explicitly in 'Lady Lazarus', where the speaker performed a sort of a "strip-tease" in front of a "peanut-crunching crowd". However, other critics have identified more socially oriented themes and issues in the poem: Bassnett (1987:93-119) sees 'Purdah' as one of Plath's 'feminist' poems, of which the most proficient is, according to her, 'The Applicant' (A:14-15). She relates the feminist context in the poem with Plath's personal life, showing how the life as a house-wife and mother and the collapse of her marriage have influenced the picturing of female and male agents and related issues ¹⁴. Thus, the poem can be seen as being characterised by issues concerning the oppression of women and struggle for voice - all of which later became central issues in feminist study (Patterson 1978:8-12).

¹⁴ This can be seen to correspond to the feminist idea of "personal is political" (see, for example, Patterson 1978 and Hartmann 1981). Hartmann (1981:13) points out that feminists have argued that women's discontent is a response to a social structure which exploits and dominates women systematically (patriarchy), and not a case of women's neurotic behaviour. Ironic enough, male Plath criticism (see, for example, Holbrook 1976 and Butscher 1976) has often defined Plath precisely in these terms.

9.1 **‘Purdah’: concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures**

The analysis of ‘Purdah’ will be conducted in a manner similar to the analysis of ‘Lady Lazarus’. The starting points of the analysis will be points raised by Plath critics, who discuss the issue of female oppression (see, for example, Bassnett 1987:112). The analysis will then proceed from these points in showing how this issue is constructed firstly on the textual level and then on the discursive level. As in ‘Lady Lazarus’, the analysis of textual and discursive features will be integrated into the analysis (and within the context) of the frame of the poem, the male-oriented social practices contributing to women’s oppression. This frame will serve as a starting point in inspecting the textual and discursive features: for example, individual instances of discourse mixing will be related to these larger textual structures. Bassnett (1987:112-113) discusses the issue of the frame in ‘Purdah’, also stating that the question of female oppression is included into this frame. Although she does not use the exact term ‘frame’, this term best describes the ‘context’ which is considered to be important.

Due to the fact that the frame in ‘Purdah’ (as will be shown) is clearly political, criticising male ideology¹⁵ and domination, its analysis is essential. It must be pointed out that due to the fact that (as in the case of ‘Lady Lazarus’) the frame of the poem is being shaped and reshaped as the poem progresses, the analytic procedure (see above) is admittedly somewhat rigid and artificial. However, it is still a valid one, for as will be shown below, the starting point of the analysis of frame, the title, sets up the boundaries for the frame, and these are made clearer and expanded as the poem progresses. Therefore, using the concept of frame is useful in interpreting, for example, the elements of intertextuality and –discursivity in the poem.

¹⁵ What is meant by male ideology in here, is basically a term used for an interpretation of Plath’s idea of male ideology (as represented in the poem). Briefly, it is the ideas represented in the poem (for example, the expectations concerning women’s role and appearance), which are argued to be typical of all men. See section 9.2 for inspection of how this is achieved via textual and discursive means in the poem.

In terms of seeing how the above-mentioned frame and the issue of women's oppression is constructed, an important task will be to inspect the use of wording and metaphors and to investigate how they enable Plath to construct her commentary and to find out what is the message that Plath is presenting to the readership. In doing this, the analysis of wording and metaphor (these two concepts will often be combined, for example, in the analysis of wording of a metaphor) is necessary, due to the fact that the level of linguistic items in the text inevitably leads to more general considerations: first that of discourse practice, and then to that of social practice. Again, the need for an inspection of the textual level gets its justification from Plath criticism: Bassnett (1987:112) argues that this "carefully minimised language" creates an image of the speaker contained both within the walls of a building as well as within "the boundaries of her own consciousness". What I take Bassnett to mean is precisely the issues of wording and metaphor. Also word meanings are essential in finding out the construction of 'female vs. male' networks: the ambiguous word meanings (such as "jade") construct the argument of women's oppression in two ways. First, the word "jade" refers to the speaker as an object, and second, it is a gendered, even sexist reference ("jade" meaning a woman with bad reputation). In addition, some basic grammatical features will be used to explain the poem when necessary: the most prominent of these is collocation, which explains the manner Plath uses discourse mixing.

'Purdah' can be argued to contain intertextual and -discursive elements. For example, Muckleroy (1999:255) points out the allusions to Ariel and the murder of Jean-Paul Marat in the last stanzas. Also, Bassnett (1987:114) points out the change in the manner in which the speaker addresses herself and others, which means a change in the discourse ('obedient woman' → 'rebellious woman'). In addition, Plath makes allusions to, for example, Islam (the title of the poem means Islam's practice of keeping women away from public places) and Christianity (she uses the word "Adam"). As will be shown below, the poem becomes distinctly feministic in terms of theme(s) and tone via these allusions and other features. Therefore, based on what earlier research on the poem has indicated, it can be argued that inspecting the elements of intertextuality and -discursivity in the poem is important in finding out what

effects they create. The features of intertextuality that need to be inspected include embedded intertextuality, in the case of discourse mixing which occurs on several occasions in 'Purdah': this is pointed out by Muckleroy (1999:255) and Bassnett (1987:112-114), although they use the term 'allusions' to discuss this aspect. Also interdiscursive elements, which include discourse and register switching and mixing, are worth inspecting, as suggested by Bassnett (1987:114) who observes a change in the manner in which the speaker addresses herself and others. It must be stressed once again that the most practical manner in analysing the poem will be to combine the textual and discursive aspects in the close reading, since they are inseparable and since they construct larger networks of meaning.

The analysis will begin on the textual level, which constructs (as will be shown in the analysis) the level of discourse practices: in this manner, the networks of commentary and criticism will be inspected, to see whether the points raised by Plath critics find justification in critical discourse analysis, and to elaborate and clarify these points. The whole of the analysis of the textual and discursive features will be placed within the context of the frame. This enables the interpretation of, for example, intertextual elements and the inspection of the points of criticism which Plath raises. The second part of the analytic section will aim to place the issues Plath discusses in the poem into a wider context: the results and questions raised by the analysis will be related to the social background, of the forms of women's oppression described in the poem by Plath. The topic of the poem, women's oppression, will be commented on the level of social practices, using social theory to identify possible reasons why Plath chose to deal with them in the poem and to discuss the effects they produce. This means referring to the issue of power struggle in discourse, which will be discussed via reference to relevant feminist social theory and feminist theory of discourse, as well. Feminist theories are better off in inspecting the issues of female vs. male hegemony, since they are specially meant for inspecting issues of power struggle relating to gender. Fairclough's model of CDA (in this case its sociological aspects) concentrates on the question of economic, social, etc. struggle in society, but not in the struggle between the sexes – or rather, Fairclough's own focus is on the former issues

rather than issues relating to gender. Therefore, besides the inspection of women and men as two social groups, some additional background information is needed in order to approach the issue from several sides. After these, the overall effects and arguments of the poem will be inspected in the conclusion, to determine how the poem expresses social criticism and commentary.

9.2 Analysis of text and discourse practices and their effects

As Muckleroy (1999:254) points out, the title of the poem, 'Purdah', means a practice of Islam of keeping women out of public places. The oppression of women is a part of Islamic tradition (or rather a part of pre-Islamic tradition that still exists in Islamic societies, commonly confused with more recent Islamic tradition). The title sets up the overall frame of the poem as religiously 'loaded', referring explicitly to Islam and its oppression of women. In this frame, the speaker of the poem can even be seen as a woman placed in a harem (this is supported with metaphors and wordings, and will be shown later). The fact that the title 'concentrates' on one religion only may seem a bit hostile and even racist, but it also serves to emphasise the themes and the poem's content which soon expands from Islam to Christianity and Buddhism (in the first stanzas). Thus the function of the title is to create the religious frame which adds an integral element into Plath's argument, introducing one institution which Plath seems to be attacking: women's oppression is, according to Plath, at least partly based on religion. However, the frame of the poem develops mainly via other discourses than religious discourse. It can be seen to be the male-oriented social practices (of which religion is a part) that contribute to women's oppression. Muckleroy (ibid.) states that the focus on the poem is on "cloistering rather than on Islam".

The poem begins by the speaker describing herself as being

Jade –
Stone of the side,
The agonized

Side of green Adam, I
Smile, cross-legged,
Enigmatical,

Shifting my clarities.

Bassnett (1987:113) claims that the sense of restriction is physically present in the opening stanzas on the linguistic level: the speaker has no voice and is described indirectly in a restrictive manner as being “cross-legged“ (this is based on connotation; crossed legs as a gesture express reservation and restriction). However, the speaker does describe herself. In the first stanza, the description is totally impersonal (no referring pronouns, no active voice), and the information that the speaker is actually describing herself comes in only in the second stanza (a cataphoric reference). This order emphasizes the objectification even further: women are first seen as objects, and only later they receive a voice.

In terms of inspecting the textual and discursive levels, the main characteristic in the first three stanzas is the use of embedded intertextuality. First, the speaker describes herself as an object, as an artefact or a gem (in ‘Lady Lazarus’ the speaker was an “opus“ or a “valuable“), creating an objectifying discourse. Then, Plath uses an intertextual link to Christianity: “The agonized / Side of green Adam“ refers to a Biblical story according to which Eve was created out of Adam’s rib. The mixture of two discourses (those of objects and religion) which occur in the same sentence create an effect of the speaker’s objectification being connected with religion, thus hinting that women’s oppression has its roots in religion. On the level of metaphors, “the agonized / Side of green Adam” contributes strongly to the impression of women’s inferior position in religion: Eve was originally a part of Adam, and not a ‘whole’ person. Plath also uses a metaphor, which refers to the appearance of Buddha’s statues, which are cross-legged and smiling enigmatically (just like the speaker): this further enforces the idea of objectification. Also the frame of the poem, which was introduced in the title and which is constructed throughout the first stanzas, guides the interpretation: because ‘purdah’ is a term belonging the Islamic society, the situation pictured in the first two stanzas

creates an image of a harem, where the speaker resides. Furthermore, the frame of the poem is now more clearly 'universal' (the inclusion of three major religions, typically connected to both eastern and western parts of the world).

In stanza four, the poem begins to approach the idea of women's oppression via the use of a particular metaphor which is typical of poetry in general and in Plath's poetry, in particular: the personification and gendering of the objects of the sky (for further examples on this, see Kroll 1976:21-79). The moon is personified as the speaker's relative ("my indefatigable cousin") and stated to be a female entity in the fifth stanza by using the feminine pronoun "her". The wording is also important in considering this: besides the moon, the sun is also mentioned in the same context. Since the sun is mentioned in the previous stanza, the introduction on the moon creates a backward reference, thus establishing a semantic network based on collocation: since "the moon" is a female, "the sun" must be a male. This use of objects of the sky (which are universally acknowledged as symbols) creates a sense of the sexes being fundamentally different. In stanzas 6-7, another means of juxtaposing the sexes is used. In phrases "I gleam like a mirror. / At this facet the bridegroom arrives / Lord of the mirrors!" the female speaker refers to herself as having an appearance of an object (mirror) and being subjected to her male "lord".

Thus, in the first seven stanzas Plath develops the theme of the poem via wording and metaphor (objects of the sky) and intertextuality: women and men are argued to be fundamentally different and the former are shown as being oppressed by the latter. Plath also completes the frame of the poem: the use of large religions, objects of the sky and mirror imagery in textual and discursive levels has created the effect of 'universality'. By now it is clear that the poem discusses the oppression of women, and not merely one form of it.

Bassnett (1987:113) claims that there are developing patterns in the poem that show movement within the structure of the poem, for example, the repetition and the similarities in sound patterns (sibilants). However, a change occurs quite abruptly in the twelfth stanza, in the middle of a long sentence.

Even in his
 Absence, I
 Revolve in my
 Sheath of impossibles,

 Priceless and quiet
 Among these parakeets, macaws!

The last line is set apart from the rest of the sentence by a change in tone: the descriptive, 'sincere' tone changes quite suddenly into an ironic one. This change in tone can also be seen as a case of discourse-switching. The first part of the poem (first 11 stanzas) can be seen as Plath displaying the discourse of an 'obedient woman': the representation of the speaker is objectifying (as shown in the analysis of first three stanzas), especially in relation to the "bridegroom" she addresses. Furthermore, the speaker does not address anyone directly as in the following stanzas (for example, in "Attendants of the eyelash!"), nor does she really describe anyone but herself. Even the "bridegroom" is just stated to be "lord". Detecting the elements of this discourse – interpreting the individual elements (as shown above) and connecting them – is influenced by the frame of the poem. Without reference to a system that oppresses women, the inspection of the intertextual elements would be difficult; the interpretation could even change completely.

The new discourse, that of a 'rebellious woman' is characterised by the contrasts: now, the speaker shifts the attention from herself as an object and attaches active qualities to herself (for example, active verb form "I shall"). In addition to this, she includes other people into her speech, and begins addressing these "attendants" directly. Another aspect of the new discourse is the frequent occurrence of irony and the increasing ambiguity. In stanza 12, the second line "among these parakeets, macaws" this is explicitly clear. Fairclough (1992:123) claims that irony is intertextual in nature: it can be seen as 'echoing' someone else's utterance. In this case, the utterance is the speaker's own, but now the addressee is uncertain, for the first time in the poem. There is no certainty of to whom/whose the phrase is referring. "The

parakeets“ and “macaws“ can be interpreted as a reference to men who have control of the ‘voice’ (in society) and the speaker is forced to remain “quiet“.

Another possible interpretation is that Plath is referring to other women who submit themselves to male oppression: the overall frame of the poem (idea of a harem) supports this interpretation. This interpretation seems perhaps more valid in relation to the manner in which the speaker addresses women in the following stanzas, commenting on male expectations of women’s behaviour. This commentary begins on the level of wording. In expressions such as “attendants of the eyelash“ and “attendants of the lip“, eyelashes and lips are areas of the face to which women typically pay attention. The collocative network then leads from paying attention to one’s beauty to doing so for the sake of pleasing men, who also expect that from women.

Thus, Plath is ironising stereotypically male ideas of women as putting a great deal of effort in their appearance, and having to look beautiful. The ambiguity in these expressions is, however, evident since Plath does not explicitly use either expressions used traditionally by men or ironize them in typical manner. Thus, it can be seen that she attacks not only men who view women from this narrow perspective but also women who allow themselves to be objectified. This implies a proto-feminist idea of women being able to release themselves from male domination (this issue will be discussed in more detail in section 9.3).

There is also a case of register-switching going on in here, simultaneous and overlapping with the change in discourse. The fact that the speaker addresses the “attendants” as if giving a speech, can also be seen to create another type of register into the poem ¹⁶. If in the first half of the poem, the speaker was situated in a harem, her register was that of ‘an obedient wife’ (no rhetorics, no

¹⁶ The use of terms ‘discourse’ and ‘register’ is somewhat overlapping and complicated in here. The distinction is that register refers to a role ‘inside’ the poem, and to the language use in that role. The language use of ‘obedient wife’ (role) is different from the language use of ‘rebellious woman’: the latter includes active, stative verb forms, such as “I shall”, and rhetoric statements (“Attendants ...”), typically used when addressing a crowd. Change in discourse, being ‘outside’ this role, covers this change in register and other changes, such as the change in the speaker’s manner of referring to herself (from objectifying to active).

strong active and stative verb forms). Now, as her role has changed, it is that of a 'rebellious woman in the streets', giving a speech and provoking other women to realise the insanity and falsity of having to conform to male expectations. It must be pointed out that the changes in the discourse and the register are overlapping and intertwined with each other: however, the changes support each other in creating the element of social commentary in the poem. After this change in the poem's register and discourse, Plath's point is obvious: the speaker is no longer content with merely commenting on her appearance (a passive role, for it involves no active participation), but begins to plan her future in an active manner. Earlier, the speaker merely described herself (the only active verb form was "breathe"), but now the future reference created through the use of "shall" indicates that although the speaker is not yet free, she has already taken the first step towards freedom: she has become aware of her position.

The change in register and discourse creates two distinct parts into the poem, in terms of expressing Plath's argument of the existence of female oppression and her attack against it. In the first part, the focus is on the speaker's position, on how she is seen by men and how she describes herself on their terms. In the second part, the speaker rejects these ideas and breaks violently free from the boundaries of both traditional patriarchal discourse and roles. This two-part structure (problem – solution) serves as a context for socially critical commentary towards the oppression of women. In the beginning of the poem, Plath keeps the speaker in a relatively passive role, merely describing her position: by doing this, Plath manages to create a clear contrast between the speaker and the "lord of the mirrors" by various intertextual links, for example, by mixing discourses and using gendered metaphors. In the second part of the poem, the speaker suddenly changes her tone and breaks away from the boundaries of being a mere object: here, Plath brings the opposites created in the first part of the poem into a (forthcoming) struggle and states the potentials of the speaker's powers. The argument against women's oppression and male domination is evident, accompanied with a call for women to realise their inferior status and to learn to react against it.

The ending of the poem serves to emphasise the idea of battle against oppression. After stating the stereotypical male expectations and criticising them and women who conform to those expectations, Plath begins to elaborate on the means to combat them. First, the idea of acquiring a voice comes out clearly in stanzas 14-16.

I shall unloose
One note

Shattering
The chandelier
Of air that all day flies

Its crystals
A million ignorants.

Here, the speaker finally receives a voice, or rather, decides to use it to break the silence she has been subjected to. The theme of silence comes out in several of the *Ariel* poems, for example in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' and in 'Little Fugue', where the silence is caused by failures to communicate. However, it can be argued that the silence here is the silence of oppression, the denial of the right to use one's voice. The speaker states the power of the effect her voice has as she shatters "the chandelier / Of air that all day flies / Its crystals", that is, the male voices which dominate the female ones.

After this, the poem begins to reach its ending, the final resolution and solution to the problem of oppression.

And at his next step
I shall unloose

I shall unloose –
From the small jeweled
Doll he guards like a heart –

The lioness,
The shriek in the bath
The cloak of holes.

The speaker refers to the male threat expressed in concrete terms (personal pronoun “he“) and states that she is capable of taking care of this threat. The word meanings and wordings in this ‘breakout’ form a unified idea of raw force together with the allusions in the last stanza. The verb ‘unloose’ has a striking physical quality in it, indicating possible violence. Also the wording of the phrase “at his next step“ carries slightly ambiguous connotations: it is not entirely clear whether the speaker is only stating a warning (if the threat comes any closer, she will act) or whether she is already planning a violent solution. This solution is, as Bassnett (1987:114) puts it, “the lioness, symbol of female strength“ which the speaker will “unloose” against the male ¹⁷. Gender becomes explicit through wording: “lioness”, a female lion, is the female equivalent of a lion, a symbol of masculine power. The effect of this is that of expressing the nature of female power, showing that it is by no means inferior to masculine power. In any case, the speaker is now capable of unleashing her true self, transferring from a “small jeweled doll“, an inanimate, unchangeable object to a “lioness“, a powerful subject. The last two lines are occasions of mixed intertextuality, a kind of intertextual paraphrases of historical and mythological events: Bassnett (1987:114) points that they refer to the stabbing of Marat in his bath by Charlotte Corday and to the stabbing of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra. The effect that these create serves to further emphasise the potential of female power, indicating that women are capable of ridding themselves of their oppressors.

Together with the wordings and word meanings (see above), the element of violence is very much present in the last stanzas. This violent resistance to male oppression implies the idea of turning the violence men use to dominate and abuse women against themselves. However, despite the violence in discourse, the effect that is created in a larger context is more that of responding to the oppressors in a similar manner, using their own means

¹⁷ The reference to the “lioness“ occurs elsewhere in the *Ariel* collection in slightly different forms and has different connotations. For example, in ‘Stings’ (A:65-67), the context is similar as it is here: the speaker has to recover in herself the queen “with her lion-red body“ (A:66), in order to free herself from mindless labour and oppression. On the other hand, in ‘Ariel’, the “lioness“ is the power urge which drives the speaker “Into the red / Eye, the cauldron of morning“ (that is, towards death and/or rebirth via it).

against them. Plath is not advocating physical violence, but direct action; she is not portraying the actions of Charlotte Corday or Clytemnestra as 'ideal', but using them as references to show that women indeed can fight men in their own ground.

9.3 Background theory to inspecting female oppression

As was shown in the previous section, the critical issue that is dealt with in the poem is that of female oppression by men and women's chances of freeing themselves from it. Plath introduces the issue via a reference to 'purdah', the cloistered state of women in Islamic societies. However, by referring to Christianity ("The agonized / Side of green Adam") and Buddhism (metaphor referring to Buddha's cross-legged position in statue) and describing the speaker as an object, and by juxtaposing men and women (men as 'sun' and women as 'moon'), Plath shifts the critical point towards cloistering and oppression in general. As the frame expands from Islamic societies to cover other societies – as the intertextual link to Christianity creates a sense of 'universality' – she discusses the expectations men have of women in terms of behaviour ("I / Smile, cross-legged") and appearance ("Attendants of the eyelash"), and their objectification and abuse of women ("It is himself he guides / In among these silk screens").

In terms of being able to approach the issue of female oppression in 'Purdah', Janet Chafetz (1989) provides some valuable insights into the question of male power in society and the issue of fighting against the dominant elite¹⁸. In discussing the theory of change in gender equality, Chafetz claims that there exists, by definition, superior male power in gender-stratified societies (see also Chafetz 1988), which is based on the ability to "either coerce or bribe compliers" (1989:137). Chafetz further claims that this is because the gender division of labour provides inferior power resources to women: this circle is

¹⁸ In terms of relating Chafetz's notions to CDA, it bears resemblance to Fairclough's (1992: 62-100) view of power as hegemony, as introduced by Gramsci (1971). The concept of hegemony is also useful in describing the idea of 'battle' in the poem. However, since Chafetz

completed when men, due to their hold on the power resources, can coerce women into assuming work roles that reinforce their disadvantaged status. Superior power resources, on the other hand, also permit men to exercise both macro –and micro-level definitional power. At the macro level, social definitions (what is good, valuable, etc.) are created by elite members, that is, men, who control dominant social institutions (for further information on this issue, see, for example, Hartmann 1981, Schur 1984). At the micro level, superior power enables the elite (men) to control interactions with those who have less power (women) and define the situation of the interaction (for reference, see, for example, Ferguson 1980, Fishman 1982). Although the change towards equality is on progress, Chafetz claims that men still dominate society on both levels.

The assumptions of superior male power and definitional power are expressed in 'Purdah'. At the macro level, Plath introduces the idea of women being defined by men with mixing discourses of Islam and Christianity and then proceeding on a more general level, which creates a sense of 'universal authority' into the poem. In addition to this, since the references to the male expectations and women who conform to those expectations ("Attendants of the eyelash!") are not made explicit nor reduced to deal with a certain group of women in certain society, the argument can be seen to concern the level of society, not *a* society. At the micro level, on the other hand, the definitions come out through the speaker's discourse of objectification and impersonification: this is shown best in the first stanza, where these elements are followed by a cataphoric "I". The effect of this is to represent the order in which men see women: firstly, as 'objects' to be defined like true objects, and only secondly as subjects. In terms of relating Plath's notions to Chafetz's view of gender (in)equality, the effect that Plath creates is that of portraying women as being oppressed by men, of describing society as *patriarchal*.

introduces more specified ideas of male power, her theory provides perhaps more useful insights into the issue of female struggle under male dominance.

Let us now turn to discuss the concept of patriarchy, and its usefulness in inspecting the poem. Patriarchy can be roughly defined as a social system characterised by male domination (for more detailed definition, see, for example, Hartmann 1981:14). As Hartmann (1981:15) argues, the material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor power (which Chafetz 1989 also points out). What relates this to the poem is that, according to Hartmann, one way for men to maintain this control is to restrict women's sexuality and to enforce the existing gender roles (1981:15-17). This is precisely the case in 'Purdah', where the speaker is restricted in several ways: she is forced to meet the expectations concerning appearance and behaviour. The setting which Plath portrays in 'Purdah' can thus be seen as a characterisation of patriarchal society.

However, since the speaker advocates a 'rebellion' against oppression, it is also important to inspect how she attacks the existing order on the level of discursive and social practices and how this can be inspected via the theory of hegemony, and consequently, the struggle in it. The issue of hegemonic struggle comes out in the poem in its latter part, where the register change from the 'obedient woman' to the 'rebellious woman' has taken place. The speaker challenges the dominant power group (males) by threatening to break out from silence (in society): "I shall unloose / One note / Shattering the chandelier". In terms of relating the issue of hegemonic struggle to actual life, Chafetz (1989:148) points out that social movements have two basic ways in which they can directly influence those in power: to make it costly for the elite to fail to make change and/or reward them from doing so. She states that one way to make the status quo costly is physical violence. In this context, 'Purdah' can be seen to represent a schemata for a social movement. The first part to become aware of the unfulfilling state of things: in the poem, the speaker is already aware of this. The second part is to seek for solution, and thirdly, to engage into it. In the poem, the third part is seen as action, even in the sense of physical violence: this is created by intertextual links to events of female violence directed towards males.

Thus, 'Purdah' can be seen to express ideas later discussed and examined by feminist theoreticians (the issue of female oppression in society), as well as introducing a possible solution to the problem, that of direct action. Plath crafts the poem into a kind of a forum, where she both discusses the female oppression in its different forms as well as calls for measures against it.

9.4 Conclusion

'Purdah' is a relatively unknown poem in Plath's body of writing, and as Muckleroy (1999:255) points out, it has often been interpreted as "contemplated, unempowered revenge against Hughes". However, the poem discusses the issue of female oppression from a much wider and universal point of view. Plath's notions can be even seen to pre-date the ideas and issues of feminist social criticism.

In terms of expressing Plath's argument of the existence of female oppression and her attack against it, 'Purdah' can be argued to have two distinct parts (as was shown in the previous section). In the first part, the focus is on the speaker's position, on how she is seen by males and how she describes herself on their terms. In the second part, the speaker rejects these ideas and breaks violently free from the boundaries of both traditional patriarchal discourse and roles. This two-part structure (problem – solution) serves as a context for socially critical commentary towards the oppression of women. In the beginning of the poem, Plath keeps the speaker in a relatively passive role, merely describing her position: by doing this, Plath manages to create a strong contrast between the speaker and the "lord of the mirrors" by various intertextual links, for example, by mixing discourses and using gendered metaphors. In the second part of the poem, the speaker suddenly changes her tone and breaks away from the boundaries of being a mere object: here, Plath brings the opposites created in the first part of the poem into a (forthcoming) battle and states the potential of the speaker's poem. The argument against women's oppression and male domination is evident, accompanied with a call for women to realise their inferior status and to learn to react against it.

The background (that is, Plath's own experiences) to 'Purdah' has been discussed among Plath critics to certain extent, and some critics see them more integral in the poem than others. Bassnett (1987: 93-119), for example, sees 'Purdah' as closely related to Plath's personal life, as emerging from her own experiences, although she recognises the social dimension in the poem.. Muckleroy (1999:254-256), on the other hand, sees the poem as discussing "male reductionism of women" (1999:256). This debate seems to miss the point that despite the possible personal troubles which might have affected the production of the poem, the poem builds up its argument in a larger, universal context. The issues concerning women's role in a male-dominated society, which later feminist and social critics have discussed and debated over during the past decades, can be found in the poem. Plath attacks the patriarchal society, criticises the oppression of women, and finally advocates a way of fighting the oppressors.

Thus, as earlier criticism, such as Muckleroy (1999) and Bassnett (1987) have pointed out, 'Purdah' can be seen to incorporate elements of social criticism and awareness. These elements are not easily interpretable – as Fairclough (1992:71-72, 136) points out, the question of interpretation is always inseparable from the interpreter – and various other interpretations exist. Still, based on earlier criticism and on observations shown in two previous sections, 'Purdah' can be said to be a socially critical poem, discussing the oppression of women.

10 'Thalidomide'

'Thalidomide' was written in November 1962, and like 'Mary's Song', it is one of the later *Ariel* poems that followed the main thematic body of the *Ariel* poems (written during the summer and autumn of 1962). It was published posthumously in the *Winter Trees* (1971). 'Thalidomide' does not occupy the self-projective figure, which appears in poems such as 'Daddy' nor does it involve thematics of oppression and a fight for freedom. Instead, it discusses a

contemporary issue from a slightly similar perspective as, for example, 'Mary's Song'. As Stevenson (1998:276) claims, 'Thalidomide', reflects on an issue, which concerned Plath as a mother quite directly and intimately: the Thalidomide scandal in the early 1960s. Also Bassnett (1987:66) points out the connection, but states that instead of focusing on the scandal itself, the poem uses the imagery of the thalidomide babies to discuss sterility in life and writing. However, the issue still exists in the poem, and determining the elements of social criticism and commentary in the poem is therefore justified. Also because 'Thalidomide' is a little known poem in Plath's body of writing, a detailed investigation of its with the means of CDA is needed.

10.1 'Thalidomide': concepts used in the analysis and the analytic procedures

As in the case of 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Purdah' analysed above, the analysis of 'Thalidomide' will be conducted by using the points raised by Plath critics as starting points. As Stevenson (1998:276) claims, the theme of the poem is the thalidomide scandal in the early 1960s. She points out that Plath was extremely aware and observant of social issues in contemporary society (see, for example also 1998:21, 92, 191-192), and thus argues that the connection between the scandal and the poem is worthwhile inspecting. A similar point is also made by Bassnett (1987:66), who points out that the poem discusses the question of giving birth (concretely and metaphorically) and deformity via utilising the imagery of thalidomide children. The analysis will then proceed from these points in examining these issues and elaborating on their analysis, firstly on the textual level and then on the discursive level. As in the analyses of 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Purdah', this will be integrated into the analysis and within the context of the frame of the poem, the thalidomide scandal and its consequences. This will serve as a starting point in inspecting the textual and discursive features. For example, individual instances of discourse mixing, will be related to these larger textual structures, which provide the background in interpreting the individual instances.

An important task, in terms of seeing how the above-mentioned frame and the commentary on the thalidomide babies is constructed, is to inspect the use of wording and metaphors. In doing this, the analysis of wording and metaphor (these two concepts will often be combined, for example, in the analysis of wording of a metaphor) is necessary, due to the fact that the level of linguistic items in the text inevitably leads to more general considerations: first that of discourse practice, and then to that of social practice. Especially the issue of metaphor is essential, due to the fact that the commentary in the poem is intimately connected and expressed via the 'moon' metaphor. This has been pointed out by Bassnett (1987). As in the case of the previous analyses, some basic grammatical features, the most prominent of which is collocation, will be used to explain, for example, the construction of meaning networks.

'Thalidomide' contains intertextual and -discursive elements, such as mixtures of different discourses and manifest intertextuality: the main focus in the analysis of discursive practices in the poem will be on these concepts. The features of intertextuality include embedded intertextuality, in the case of discourse mixing which occurs in several occasions in 'Purdah' (as pointed out by Muckleroy 1999 and Bassnett 1987). Also interdiscursive elements, which include discourse and register mixing, are worth inspecting, also suggested by Bassnett (1987:114). The features will then be inspected to find out the effects they create. It must be stressed once again that the most practical manner in analysing the poem will be to combine the textual and discursive aspects in the close reading, since they are inseparable and since they construct larger networks of meaning. The whole of the analysis of textual and discursive features will be placed within the selected frame: that is, the features raised by the analysis of, for example, intertextuality, will be discussed within the context of frame.

The second part of the analytic section will aim to place the issues Plath discusses in the poem into a wider context, showing that it is reasonable to see the thalidomide scandal and issues connected to it as being the frame and theme of the poem. Finally, the overall effects and arguments of the poem will

be inspected in the conclusion, to determine how the poem expresses social criticism and commentary.

10.2 Analysis of text and discourse practices and their effects

The poem's title, 'Thalidomide', is the name of a chemical substance that was used in the early 1960s as a sleeping pill and also for treating symptoms caused by morning sickness during pregnancy. However, it had terrible side effects, the most notorious of which were birth malformations such as blindness, deafness, disfigurement and phocomelia; in some cases, thalidomide caused even deaths. The whole issue received quite a lot of attention in media and was a part of public discussion in the beginning of the 1960s, also affecting Plath (as probably every other mother). Due to her direct reference, Plath can be seen guiding the reader's interpretation, or at least, setting an overall frame inside which the reader can 'operate'. The wording therefore presents the overall frame within which the poem operates, a contemporary social issue. The frame also directs the reader when interpreting metaphors, wordings and intertextual elements, rendering this interpretation possible and bringing coherence into the poem.

The wording in the first line can be seen to present an intertextual link. Since the poem opens with a symbol typical of Plath's writing (the moon, or "half-moon", as it is phrased in here), the link here is on the level of the author's body of writing. As several Plath critics (for example, Väisänen 1999) have presented, the moon often represents a female entity in Plath's poetry. For example, it represents a female entity in 'The Moon and The Yew Tree', where critics (see, for example Aird 1973:73-75) have often identified the moon as Plath's mother and the yew tree her father. In 'The Rival (A:53) the moon serves as the speaker's enemy and her total opposite: thus, it has often been interpreted as Plath's mother. The moon is also an observer (who is often involved in the matters she observes, to a varying degree), as in 'Edge' (A:85). The moon also symbolises barrenness in some of Plath's poems, for example, in 'Barren Woman' (CP:157). Barrenness is a theme which occurs in several of Plath's poems, for example, in 'Childless Woman' (WT:16) and in 'Morning

Song' (CP:156-157). It which was intimately related to Plath's life as one of her greatest fears, especially after her miscarriage (Stevenson 1998:206). Therefore, it is no surprise that Plath found children and family, in general, essential to women.

I am inclined to babies and bed and brilliant friends and a magnificent stimulating home ... this is what I was meant to make for a man, and to give him this colossal reservoir of faith and love from him to swim in daily, and to give him children; lots of them, in great pain and pride (J:122).

Thus, the use of a symbol typical to a larger body of writing inevitably affects the reader's interpretation. The moon in 'Thalidomide' is therefore interpreted as a female entity, even though actual information about the nature of the moon is lacking (at least, for now). Here, the moon has a slightly different function than in Plath's writing in general: instead of, for example, barrenness, the "half moon" represents imperfection, even physical deficiency. This is due to word meaning in the case of adjective "half", which has these aforementioned meanings. The opening line and the first three stanzas serve as a characterisation of the moon, and the poem begins to slowly develop towards the issue expressed in the poem's title. The "half-brain" functions in a manner similar as the "half-moon", and the wording in the last line of the first stanza, "Negro, masked like a white" further emphasises the imperfection of the moon: the need to mask itself implies inferiority. The wording ("negro") also refers to the appearance of the half moon.

The idea of physical imperfection is developed further in the second stanza, with the phrase "Your dark / Amputations crawl and appall –". Here, Plath operates with the means of embedded intertextuality. The switch to physical, even medical discourse ("amputation") causes the reader to link this description with birth defects, due to the fact that the presence of these is already hinted in the poem's title: the frame thus guides the interpretation towards the direction desired by Plath. In addition, the use of the verb "crawl", which requires an animate subject, turns the "dark amputation" into a living

thing. However, “amputations“ cannot literally crawl: thus, the mixing of two discourses, the medical discourse (mentioned above) and the ‘discourse of babies’ (babies cannot walk, but they do “crawl“) creates an image of babies, the offspring of the moon, which suffer from the same kind of physical deficiency.

Thus, this image can be seen as referring to thalidomide babies. Since it is an extremely ambiguous one, there are several possible interpretations: it can, for example, be argued that it presents the babies with birth defects as some sort of mistakes which produce horror (this impression comes out strongly when reading the first stanzas), in which case the description would be somewhat improper and even cruel. Another interpretation would be that Plath echoes the initial reactions to the sight of thalidomide babies, the reactions which mothers would have if they saw what could have happened to their children. This more ‘universal’ point of view is the more likely one: it is supported, for example, by the omission of speaker’s presence in the phrase “Your dark / Amputations crawl and appall”. If the phrase would end with, for example, “ ... appall me”, then the tone would be much more personal and easier to conceive as mere disgust; now, the description seems to concentrate more on the distress. Nonetheless, the imagery is strong and the argument is already beginning to form as the poem approaches its topic, developing both its symbolism and themes.

After this, Plath begins to explore the issue and moves away from the moon symbolism. Although the next part of the poem lacks cohesion (there are no linking conjunctions or adverbs), coherence is developed via imagery (the presence of the moon becomes a “shadow“ in the fifth stanza and via a shared context, for example, a reference to night) and via the overall frame of the poem. The speaker wonders “What glove / What leatheriness / Has protected / Me from that shadow“. These elements of wording and intertextuality are significant. The wording is quite unusual: “glove and leatheriness“ belong to a yet different type of discourse. A case of discourse mixing is also in progress in this phrase, starting with connotations: “glove“, “leatheriness“ (or simply just ‘leather’) occur together with the verb ‘to protect’. Since gloves (made of

leather, hence “leatheriness”) are indeed used as protection for hands, and “shadow” as a word is not usually associated with protection, there are actually two discourses (one of ‘protection’ and the other one of ‘threat’) in the phrase. Plath is creating a strong contrast between ‘the protection’ and “the shadow“, viewing them as opposing forces. This “shadow“ cannot be directly traced back to refer to a certain issue or thing in the poem. Therefore, the link remains opaque: although it can be interpreted as referring to the moon, there are no explicit markers that would indicate this. Thus, Plath is perhaps stating indirectly that either she had used thalidomide (“shadow“) herself or then wondering what stopped her from using it.

After this, the thalidomide children are described in the middle part of the poem in more detail.

The indelible buds,

Knuckles as shoulder-blades, the
Faces that

Shove into being, dragging
The lopped
Blood-caul of absences.

The beginning of this description is more ambiguous, due to the fact that two words carrying different connotations are combined in the first phrase “indelible buds”. The word “buds“ is a strong determinant for the tone of the description, since it carries no threatening modifiers (such as “half-moon”). It is used in an ambiguous, metaphoric sense, and the metaphor is worth inspecting in more detail. Firstly, the word “buds” refers to the children. Secondly, it also carries connotations concerning the children’s physical appearance: since the thalidomide children have no proper arms, their arms are presented as “buds“ (even though, unlike real buds, they will never grow). However, the fact that the “buds” are “indelible”, meaning that their memory cannot wear off, creates the effect of inability to forget the effects of thalidomide. The “buds” will remain as buds, and that can never be forgotten.

The horror enters the picture as the speaker states the children's difficulties of being born in phrases "Faces that / Shove into being, dragging / The blood-caul of absences". The birth is characterised here with the help of wording: verb 'shove' expresses difficulty, as children arrive into the world in pain. The phrase "dragging the lopped blood-caul of absences" indicates how the child itself may not survive: its call is cut short, "lopped", as the birth defect ("absence" hints of a missing limb or a vital organ) takes its life.

After this, the poem moves on a bit abruptly. The lines "All night I carpenter / A space for the thing I've given, / A love of two wet eyes and a screech" mix discourses in a curious manner. The word meaning of the word "carpenter" indicates physical work done for the "thing", which receives clarification only in the following lines, "A love of two wet eyes and a screech". The combination of the discourses of comfort ("two wet eyes") and terror ("screech") creates another impression of the thalidomide babies, who are still loved and cared for. As a whole, this sentence creates an impression of motherly love, as the speaker 'carpenter' for her baby, even though the "space" she is 'carpentering' for is left unclear.

After this, the poem comes to the turning point where the description of thalidomide babies ends and the poem begins to reach its closing. The exclamatory sentence "White spit of indifference!" remains mysterious, and its meaning can only be guessed: one interpretation could be that it refers to thalidomide as a substance (perhaps somehow referring to its appearance, if it was given in a liquid form). On the other hand, the contrast between the previous, 'maternal' sentence and this 'indifferent' ("... of indifference") sentence seems to indicate the separateness of this world of motherhood and love and the world of substances used to blur or strip something away from it – after all, thalidomide was used to take away the morning sickness, an essential part of pregnancy and thus of motherhood. This reference to substances, i.e. chemicals occurs also in the last lines of the poem (see page pp). After this ambiguous sentence, the poem closes in four lines.

The dark fruits revolve and fall.

The glass cracks across,
The image

Flees and aborts like dropped mercury.

Here, the moon and its offspring suddenly disappears from the speaker's vision / mind. The line "dark fruits" utilises a metaphor: that of babies being referred to as fruits. However, the phrase "dark fruits" seems to refer to the thalidomide threat rather than actual thalidomide babies, for which the speaker has felt sorrow and distress earlier in the poem (see above). It is more likely that the "dark fruits" is connected more intimately to the "half-moon", which now ceases to haunt the speaker. It is also worth closing the discussion on the central metaphor of the moon, as it seems that its nature is now settled here: the moon is a symbol of the thalidomide threat, a female entity capable of giving birth. It can be argued whether the moon also acts as a metaphor for thalidomide mothers. This interpretation also seems valid when the frame of the poem is considered: since the thalidomide issue concerns directly mothers and babies, the metaphors also tend to become less abstract (thalidomide threat) and personalised (mothers).

An interesting feature in the last lines, as well as in the whole poem, is that one might get the idea that Plath is somehow placing the fault of the thalidomide births on the moon (woman/women). This is because the order of representation, with the moon being already a "half-moon" (physically imperfect) which gives birth to "dark amputations", seems to place the responsibility and fault on the women. This quality is connected to the thalidomide issue so intimately that the imperfection seems almost attached to the moon itself, and not being the cause of an outside agent. However, the frame introduces the vital element (direct reference to thalidomide) required for the interpretation of the textual and discursive elements.

The following two lines, which are also the last lines of the poem, first seem to be a bit out of place here when considered in connection with the overall frame of the poem: their main function seems to be to serve as a means for letting Plath comment on a related issue. “Dropped mercury“ can be seen to refer to the danger caused by chemicals: this is constructed via wording (reference to a well-known and dangerous substance, mercury). The danger of the reckless use of chemicals was an issue which was beginning to be noticed during the time the poem was written (early 1960s). Also the dangers of nuclear warfare, atomic bomb testing and nuclear waste can be seen as a background for this. Plath herself certainly was aware of this.

Already a certain percentage of unborn children are doomed by fallout and no one knows the cumulative effects of what is already poisoning the air and sea (LH:378).

This reference to another substance which humankind has utilised carelessly connects with the issue of thalidomide, creating an argument against the misuse of such dangerous substances. However, an interesting feature is that this threat is introduced in the end of the poem, where the dangers of thalidomide are somewhat dismissed: as the “half-moon” disappears from the speaker’s sight, the “image” (possibly of thalidomide babies) also disappears. This would seem to create an effect of a ‘solution’ or ‘ending’ to the threats of thalidomide and other dangerous substances, as if the preceding poem as a whole has been merely a terrible vision or a possible fate which the speaker had evaded.

However, if one considers the wordings and the two metaphors in the last phrase, “The image / Flees and aborts like dropped mercury”, then the argument is placed into a more maternal context, once again. Firstly, the metaphor of the image being a living thing, being able to ‘flee’, makes explicit the fact that the image must be that of the thalidomide children. Secondly, the wording of the next metaphor, “... aborts like dropped mercury”, is worth inspecting. It places the verb ‘abort’, which produces the connotation to abortion, together with the noun “mercury”, a dangerous substance which can

cause damages to the foetus. Thus, mercury is also seen as something which can ‘abort’, most likely the lives of those who have been submitted to it. And since the “mercury” is “dropped” (abandoned, by a human agent), Plath is also pointing to the growing irresponsibility in the use of substances such as mercury (a contemporary phenomenon, which as beginning to receive attention during the time the poem was written).

Thus, the effect of the dismissal (see above) in the last phrase is somewhat misleading. Instead, the phrase ends the poem in an effective fashion, alerting the reader of existing dangers and not letting them think that the threat ends when the poem does. It closes the discussion of the thalidomide children effectively (their images disappear, ‘abort’), and also introduces another important argument in the poem, concerning the threats of reckless and irresponsible use of substances such as mercury. Thus the main issue, introduced by the poem’s title, ‘expands’ to a larger issue at the end of the poem. Since this issue is brought into the poem only at the end, one can always wonder what Plath’s intention's a writer truly were, whether the reference to mercury is based on connotation (thalidomide → chemicals → mercury) or whether Plath wanted to connect these two issues as a critical commentary on human recklessness.

10.3 The thalidomide scandal and its relevance in analysing the poem

Thalidomide is a chemical substance that was synthesized in West Germany in 1953 and it was marketed from October 1, 1957 to the early 1960s. Thalidomide was first introduced as a sleeping pill and it became a success in Europe due to its cheapness and since it seemed to be safe even when taken larger quantities (Spiegel 2000:1). Thalidomide was also found to be effective when given to pregnant women to prevent many of the symptoms caused by morning sickness during pregnancy (Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada:1).

However, by the early 1960s, it was realised that thalidomide had side effects: it caused a percentage of the users peripheral neuritis, the symptoms of which included tingling, numbness and pain in fingers and toes (Spiegel 2000:2). Furthermore, thalidomide became truly notorious when it was discovered that when taken during the pregnancy (particularly during the first trimester), thalidomide caused birth malformations and death to babies. Those babies that survived suffered from birth defects such as blindness, deafness, disfigurement and the disabilities most associated with thalidomide, phocomelia (Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada:1). The effects mentioned above were discovered before thalidomide entered the American markets, and it was withdrawn from the European markets by December 2, 1961 (Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada:1). The whole issue received quite a lot of attention in media and was a part of public discussion in the beginning of the 1960s, also affecting Plath (as probably every other mother).

The argument that 'Thalidomide' indeed discusses this issue can be seen to be valid due to the following reasons. Firstly, as Strangeways (1998) points out, Plath can be seen to be a 'political person': she was interested in contemporary political and social issues such as the Korean War, American politics (the presidential elections in 1952) and McCarthyism (Strangeways 1998:77-81). This is shown in *Letters Home*, where Plath frequently discusses political issues, for example the presidential election of 1952 (LH:96), the election of 1960 and her participation on a protest march against nuclear warfare (LH:378) and American armament policies (LH:438). Secondly, as several Plath critics have argued, many contemporary issues and events surface, for example, in 'Mary's Song', in which Strangeways (1998:95) identifies cold war and nuclear warfare. This is thus the case in 'Thalidomide', where Plath can be seen commenting on an issue which was still a relatively new one and in fresh memory. Thirdly, as Fairclough (1992:64) points out, language use is shaped by existing social structure and historical context, being influenced by the trends of the time of production, which makes the author's position and personal interests also important to consider. Therefore, the argument that "Thalidomide" discusses the thalidomide scandal in the early 1960s indeed seems to be valid.

10.4 Conclusion

As argued by, for example Stevenson (1998) and Bassnett (1987), and as shown above, 'Thalidomide' discusses an issue which received quite a lot of attention in the media during the time the poem was written: the thalidomide scandal. Plath engages with the commentary of this issue via a specific part of it, the effects of thalidomide on foetuses and the mothers' distress for their children.

As Stevenson (1998:276) shows, Plath was deeply affected by the thalidomide scandal. The scandal received a lot of attention during the early 1960s, especially during the time thalidomide was banned to enter the American markets, and when it was withdrawn from the European markets by the end of the year 1961 (Thalidomide Victims Association of Canada:1). The whole issue received quite a lot of attention in the media. Also, as shown above, the argument that 'Thalidomide' discusses this scandal can be seen to be valid, based on Strangeways' (1998) argument that Plath was a 'political person', on the work of several Plath critics who have identified connections between Plath's poetry and many contemporary issues, and on Fairclough's (1992:64) observation of language use being shaped by existing social structure and historical context, in collaboration with the author's position in production.

However, the discussion in 'Thalidomide' expands from the scandal to cover the threat which had just entered the public consciousness: the dangers of chemicals and other substances. These arguments are constructed via wording, word meanings and intertextual elements, which create an atmosphere of horror and danger into the poem, emphasising both the terror caused by the thalidomide defects as well as the dangers of the careless use of chemicals of all sorts. Unlike in 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Purdah', Plath is not attacking any specific institutions or groups. The manifest in 'Thalidomide' is one for public consciousness, for the recognition of the dangers in the contemporary science and society. The "dropped mercury", i.e. the harm caused by substances such as mercury to the nature and humankind, was beginning to reach the media and people's consciousness. Plath, who was well aware of the contemporary

political and social issues, was no doubt aware of other dangers in the modern world.

Thus, 'Thalidomide' begins as a reflection on a contemporary issue, approached from the point of view of a mother. The use of language draws explicit attention to the physical side of the issue, picturing thalidomide children and using the moon symbolism as emphasise the horrors. This may be seen either as an emotional response to the birth defects (emotionality in Plath's poetry having often been emphasised by many critics) or as a representation of the scandal in the form it had mostly been dealt with, the horrors of the birth defects, combined with a more personal tone, a maternal one. In any case, the poem confronts the issue in an atypical manner, presenting the consequences of thalidomide, but targeting no one in particular: not the manufacturers, not the officials who allowed it to be marketed. It seems that Plath is not accusing anyone, merely stating that there are certain issues which require more carefulness and attention than they have received so far. The poem then closes with a reference to the dangers of other chemicals and substances, with a specific reference to mercury. The horrors and suffering caused by thalidomide are linked together with a threat of similar kind, thus expanding the argument to cover the dangers of misuse of chemicals and other substances in general.

Thus, 'Thalidomide' does contain elements of social criticism and commentary. The language and the tone in the poem is not as ironic and fiery as in 'Lady Lazarus' nor as physically attacking as in 'Purdah'. The difference may perhaps be in the fact that this time there are no dominating and suffocating institutions to oppose nor oppressors to point out: instead, the thalidomide children need to be remembered as victims of fast scientific progress, which has failed to protect those who were to benefit from it. Plath is, by identifying the speaker with those who are suffering (the mothers), showing the consequences of recklessness and hastiness, and by doing this, warning us to devote attention to the things that tend to be cast aside of the way of progress.

11 Conclusion

The critical and public reactions to Sylvia Plath's later poetry, especially to the poems published in the *Ariel* collection, have been controversial. The above examination has hopefully shown some of the reasons to this. The use of explicit and direct Holocaust imagery in 'Lady Lazarus' and the provocative and personal (in the light of biographical data) manner of addressing the male opponent in 'Purdah', to mention but a few instances, have produced outrage in many critics. On the other hand, her ironic, even bitter, commentary on the world and life dominated by men, 'the lord of the mirrors' have received praise among many critics, who consider her an important feminist (or rather, a proto-feminist) figure in modern poetry and prose. And her dealing with contemporary social and political issues (such as the thalidomide scandal, nuclear armaments race) have also earned her praises from contemporary readers and critics (see Alvarez 1970) and from later generations (see, for example, Stevenson 1998, Muckleroy 1999).

This present study has been an attempt to inspect the elements of social criticism in Plath's later poetry, and to investigate them thoroughly with the help of elaborate linguistic, discursive and social analysis. The need for this kind of a study is founded on earlier Plath criticism, which has identified the socially and politically conscious aspects in the *Ariel* poems (see, for example, Aird 1973, Bassnett 1987, Strangeways 1998), but which has not pursued the inspection in all the relevant paths or via relevant manner. As mentioned in chapter 3, the criticism on Plath has often focused on her as a confessional writer – which, in Plath's case, is probably the most obvious manner of approaching her poetry, considering the events of her life and the influence of the people who knew Plath personally (Al Alvarez, Ted Hughes) on Plath criticism as a whole – or then focused on the more traditionally 'literary critical' elements in her poetry, such as the extraordinary imagery and myth-making. Until the 1990s, the critical discussion on the socio-historical context and social criticism displayed in Plath's poetry has been, at best, a slightly down-played element among these more traditional points of focus. And even

though during the past few years, a number of critics (such as Jacqueline Rose and Al Strangeways) have aimed at unravelling the ‘mystery’ of Plath’s political persona, as manifested in her poetry, they have proceeded on with the task of analysing the elements of social commentary and criticism without enough emphasis on the two levels which can be considered relevant in all literature: textual and social. Although these studies, as cases of literary criticism, are both elaborate and conclusive, without a detailed inspection of the language, the levels of linguistic and discursive analysis, the inspection is bound to remain, at best, slightly one-sided. And without any means to combine the literary reality with social and political reality, the research cannot penetrate deeper into the socio-cultural and historical context.

Thus, the purpose of this thesis has been to start from these attempts, and to proceed on with the analysis with the help of CDA. Fairclough’s theories, together with modifications on certain concepts and tools considered relevant in this case, have provided a means for the analysis of three of Plath’s poems. And as the analyses show, CDA has indeed provided a valuable view on the poems, and made possible to inspect them thoroughly on the levels of textual, discursive and social practices. Let us now turn to discuss the findings and the results.

‘Lady Lazarus’, the first one of the poems analysed, has been one of the most debated, criticised and praised poems among all of Plath’s work – in fact, among all the poems written in the English language in the 20th century. The incorporation of the language of the Holocaust, with its German words and metaphors describing actual horrors in the concentration camps, into the poem has caused both outrage and praise among Plath critics. The newer Plath criticism, for example, Strangeways (see 1998) and Väisänen (see 1999), has directed the discussion from whether anyone has the right or not to mould the Holocaust together with issues of one’s personal life, towards the need to investigate what effects are created and what they tell us of the way the horrors of the Holocaust are conceived. Since these studies have their shortcomings (see chapter 3.3), there has long existed a need for a detailed inspection of

'Lady Lazarus' to determine whether the poems contains critical historical and social commentary or not.

As shown earlier, the points raised by Plath critics (arguing for the existence of social criticism in 'Lady Lazarus' are indeed validated by the analysis of text and discursive practices, agency and the social and historical practices behind them. The analysis shows that Plath creates a strong message against oppression, violence and the abuse of power and positions of authority in general by different means, for example, by stretching the limits of a familiar frame (Lazarus) and by mixing discourses to create effects of objectification. To conclude briefly on the separate issues of social criticism in the poem: Plath discusses the question of female oppression by men, presenting it via an "enemy", a personification of male domination based on institutions (Christianity in the frame of Lazarus) and historical facts (Nazism), which however remains under Plath's control in terms of voice and discourse. On the one hand, by presenting a threat and, on the other hand, dismissing its influence with the help of victory in the struggle for power (expressed in agency) in the poem, she creates a strong argument for survival into the poem. The two more explicit issues of social criticism and historical awareness, that of the public interest towards the Holocaust (in general, suffering) and that of the horrors of the concentration camps (in general, persecution), are also presented in a elaborate and highly complex manner, for example, the morbid interest in suffering are approached both from public and personal points of view. And since these issues are all interconnected, mainly due to the "enemy", a personification of different (male) institutions and powers and a symbol of historical issues (the Holocaust), the poem also shows that the personal is always involved in universal on some level. Thus, Plath skilfully directs the reader's interpretation(s) and emphasises the triumph of the speaker, presenting her as a survivor of the concentration camps and a survivor from under male oppression. Therefore, she makes a statement that, despite oppression and violence, survival is possible, thus making in fact a positive statement on life

19.

¹⁹ Plath critics such as Holbrook (1976) and Kenner (1979), who have regarded Plath as suicidal and even dangerous, have thus failed to see this side of her later poetry. Perhaps the

As the analysis of the second poem investigated in this thesis, 'Purdah', shows, the poem has two distinct parts in terms of expressing Plath's argument of the existence of female oppression and her attack against it. In the first part, Plath focuses on the speaker's position as a mere object (she uses, for example, discourse-mixing and gendered metaphors to demonstrate this), showing how she, and consequently, due to the universalisation of the male oppressor, all women, are seen by males. In the second part, the speaker rejects these ideas and breaks violently free from the boundaries of both traditional patriarchal discourse and roles. This two-part structure (problem – solution) serves thus as a context for socially critical commentary towards the oppression of women. The argument against women's oppression and male domination is evident, accompanied with a call for women to realise their inferior status and to learn to react against it. Earlier critical writings on 'Purdah' (see, for example, Bassnett 1987) has partly missed – perhaps due to the lack of investigation of the poems rhetorical structure and textual and discursive finesses – the point that despite the obvious setting (and despite Plath's the possible personal troubles which might have affected the production of the poem), the poem builds up its argument in a larger, universal context. Plath attacks the patriarchal society, criticises the oppression of women, and finally advocates a way of fighting the oppressors.

The third poem, 'Thalidomide', as shown above, discusses the thalidomide scandal and another related topic, the danger of the misuse of chemicals. In the poem, Plath engages into the commentary via wording, word meanings and intertextual elements (which create an atmosphere of horror and danger into the poem), elaborating on the effects of thalidomide on foetuses and the mothers' distress for their children. The use of language draws explicit attention to the physical side of the issue, picturing thalidomide children and using the moon symbolism as emphasise the horrors. Then Plath expands the commentary onto the dangers of chemicals and other substances. The poem approaches the issue directly (although via a very complicated system of metaphors and other textual elements) and even shockingly, in terms of the language use. Unlike in

inadequate attention paid to the complex semantic networks and the interconnectedness of themes in many of Plath's later poems has contributed to these views.

'Lady Lazarus' and 'Purdah', Plath is not attacking any specific institutions or groups, but vetoing for public consciousness, for the recognition of the dangers in the contemporary science and society.

Thus, the analyses have indeed confirmed the claims made by earlier Plath critics on the existence of elements of social criticism in Plath's poetry, and hopefully dealt with them as completely as possible. What has made this possible, is the application of CDA and the large number of tools it provides for close textual and discursive analysis, and the expansion of the analytical framework. The modifications to the analytical framework of CDA have proved out to be useful. Especially, the notion of frame (and, in general, the notion for general knowledge structures) has provided a practical solution in approaching Plath's poetry which makes use of complex structures in constructing the arguments and themes. Also the application of social theorisation, which relates to the poems more intimately than the Marxist - theories favoured by Fairclough, has proved itself integral in understanding Plath's views on contemporary social issues – views which often differ radically from those that were dominant in her times (see, for example, the analysis of 'Lady Lazarus').

Let us now turn once more to the issue that has been (and most likely continues to be) the central element or problem among Plath critics: the relationship between personal and 'universal' (a somewhat clumsy term, but nonetheless the best one to illustrate the following). To put it more clearly, in terms of the goals of this thesis: are these elements of social criticism subjected to personal elements in these poems? And if they are, if Plath thus intertwines these two, is she expressing social criticism as a political person or is she merely using a similar kind of argumentation and metaphors (and other textual means) derived from historical and social issues to construct her poems? These questions were dealt with in the case of each individual poem, but since this is an important issue, and not only in the case of these three poems and in the case of Plath, but in the case of poetry and literature, in general, it will be discussed here in the conclusion, as well.

Let us begin by inspecting the role of biographical data in Plath's poetry and its usefulness in interpreting and analysing her poetry. Fairclough (see, for example, 1989:24-25, 1992:272-73) shows the fact that the individual properties of the text producer are an integral part of the text itself ²⁰.. However, too heavy a reliance on biographical information may often, in the case of analysis of a literary text, limit the perspective – and in Plath's case, it has often done so (see chapter 3 on the discussion of the influence of biographical data to Plath criticism). After all, it has to be remembered that a text is not an autobiography nor a listing of highly personal emotion conveyed to the reader in a direct manner, but a piece of writing which has properties in itself. As several critics (see, for example, Väisänen 1999, Strangeways 1998, Stevenson 1998) have shown – and as she herself commented (see Plath 1966) – Plath used biographical data in her work. This surfaced in her, for example, in references such as the statement “One year in every ten / I manage it –“ in ‘Lady Lazarus’ (see chapter 8.2 for interpretations). As already mentioned, the knowledge of explicit biographical details of Plath's life is relevant to some extent in terms of CDA, which takes text production (see Fairclough 1992:233) into account in analysing texts. However, CDA treats them as features (among others) constituting the analytic framework for analysing discourse practices and not as the fundamental starting points. And this, as the analyses have confirmed, is correct: since the analyses conducted in the present thesis have succeeded in their goal of explicating the elements of social criticism in the poems, it can be consequently concluded that the personal elements do not dominate the poems and that knowledge (or ignorance) about them is not a prerequisite for a successful analyses. To end this matter: although personal and universal in Plath's poetry are often intertwined in extremely complex manner, and the knowledge of the personal (i.e. explicit biographical data) does indeed provide some insight, it functions best as a background knowledge and not as an integral part of the analysis.

²⁰ In this case, the information about the persona and the life of the author can be said to be more relevant in this respect than in a some other kind of a text. Literary texts, especially (lyric) poetry, do demand more from the interpreter in this respect than, for example, a newspaper article, in the case of which the knowledge about the author may not need to be as explicit in order to be able to interpret the text

However, the larger social and political issues and their influence on Plath are something that have to be accounted for. As Fairclough (1989:24-25, 1992:272-73) points out, the social and historical context of the production of the text are inseparable from the text. The trends, events and issues manifested in the society of which the author is a part, are reflected in a text produced by the author in one way or another. Therefore, the inspection of these issues is an integral part of the analysis. However, since they are reported via an author, who in this case chooses to express her views and criticism in a literary manner, and by integrating them into poetry which has certain themes and arguments, which may or may not reconstruct these issues, it all comes finally down to the question of subjectivity. As discussed earlier, Plath indeed was a 'political person', meaning that she was interested in contemporary political and social issues and was also aware of the historical dimensions of these issues (see chapter 2.1 to 2.1.2). However, no person can discuss these kinds of issues from a totally objective point of view. Fairclough's claim of the importance of the context of text production works in this way, too. A text is always a product (or rather a process, since the interpreter adds an additional dimension to it by interpreting it), produced by an author who is subsequently influenced by his/her surrounding context, which means the context of society, but also the context of personal life. The relation between these two varies: in the case of the poems analysed in this study, the analyses have clearly shown that the poems are primarily socio-critical and that the biographical details do not have a major role in the language of the poems itself. Let us now take an example of the relations between the personal and universal context.

In 'Lady Lazarus', the discussion of the horrors of the Holocaust and the morbid interest in them is integrated into the story of the speaker, and the question of oppression receives a 'universal' tone due to the representation of the opposing force, the "enemy", as a personification of different (male) institutions and powers. The (possible) existence of biographical issues in the poem does not matter that much in the poem: what matters, is the inseparability of the social, cultural and historical context of production of the poem, and the form. If the level of language is concerned, the point of view of the poem is that of a female, of single person, i.e. a personal point of view; and if this issue

is considered from the points of view of social practices and reality outside language, this is also a personal point of view, the text being a product of an author. Therefore, the consequence is that personal (be it the speaker or Plath as an author) is always involved in the poem in some level. Thus drawing the line between subjectivity and historical or political concerns can be said to be impossible in the case of 'Lady Lazarus' – and consequently in the case of all the poems analysed in this study. However, as the analysis has shown (backed by what Fairclough has shown in terms of CDA's theoretical stand), this does not render the social criticism obsolete. Instead, Plath's manner of stating her subjectivity via employing personal issues together with political and social ones in her poetry, shows her acknowledgement of the fact that only by stating one's starting point or point of view, can true criticism be achieved. And this can be argued to be a fact applicable to not only Plath's work but to all kinds of texts displaying these elements. Thus, although Plath's personal opinions about Ted Hughes in the autumn of 1962 may have been a factor contributing to the writing of 'Purdah', it does not matter: what matters is the poem itself, what it argues and advocates. The universal is not subjected to personal in the poems analysed in this thesis, nor, as Muckleroy (1999) has argued in his dissertation, in Plath's poetry in general.

In terms of further research on Plath's poetry, there still remains quite a lot to be done. The following is merely one proposition for further research, which needs to inspect Plath's poetry in close detail – thus, a continuation of the work presented in this study. The very first step would be to conduct a close linguistic and discursive study on Plath's poetry as a whole. One possible option for a framework of theories and tools is CDA, with certain expansions and modifications – in terms of a more precise definition of concepts and additions to the analytical practices concerning the analysis of social practices – which has certainly performed well, at least in this study. As noted earlier, concepts and tools need to be selected according to the task: therefore, to speculate on the matter at the moment is premature. Nonetheless, at least in the case of Plath's later poetry, the inspection of intertextuality and –discursivity seems to be important, on the basis of the results of the present thesis and the comments of several Plath critics (see, for example, Bassnett 1987, Aird 1973;

although they do not use the actual term 'intertextuality', the issues they discuss fall under this category).

Secondly, the analysis has to expand from the level of text into the level of social practices and historical background. Attention has to be paid to the contexts of contemporary society (social and political issues, such as the cold war) and literary community (authors such as Axelrod 1990 and Strangeways 1998 have studied Plath work in context of her literary influences and schools of literary tradition, such as the Romantics). So far, no study which has studied Plath's poetry via closed linguistic analysis has ventured into the examination of social factors, nor has any study examining Plath's niche in the tradition of English literature attempted a close linguistic analysis. And since attention has to be paid to the whole of Plath's writing, a lot of work remains to be done ²¹.

The present study is but a one step closer to this. Hopefully, it has proven successful in demonstrating the usefulness of and demand for closer linguistic analysis of Plath's poetry, as well as the need to pay more attention to the surrounding socio-historical context than to the instances of proper references to events and people in Plath's life. The latter factor needs attention, as well, but it has already been covered to such an extent that it is indeed hard to think for justification to any further study in that field. However, Sylvia Plath as a poet deserves more attention, and it will be essential to proceed with the analysis of her works in the manner suggested above. Her work not only portrays a keen observer and commentator, but a person who could transform her observations into a poetry with strong messages and valid criticism. Plath was much more than a proto-feminist icon, a person who realised the male domination and decided to express it and fight it in her poems. She was a person, who observed to society around her, and who can indeed tell us much of the way in which social and political issues affect individuals, as well as of the way which these issues (see, for example, chapters 8.3 to 8.5) need to be

²¹ One step towards this direction is Muckleroy's (1999) dissertation. Muckleroy attempts to examine Plath's entire body of writing in order to discover the elements of social criticism in her poetry. However, he does not proceed via linguistic analysis or via special attention to the context(s) of production.

approached. Personal is indeed political, and Sylvia Plath realised it and brought it on display in her writing.

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APPENDIX. The poems.

Lady Lazarus

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it –

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face featureless, fine
Jew linen.

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

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

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 hell.
It do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call.

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

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

Purdah

Jade –
Stone of the side,
The agonized

Side of green Adam, I
Smile, cross-legged,
Enigmatical,

Shifting my clarities.
So valuable!
How the sun polishes this shoulder!

And should
The moon, my
Indefatigable cousin

Rise, with her cancerous pallors,
Dragging trees –
Little bushy polyps,

Little nets,
My visibilities hide.
I gleam like a mirror.

At this facet the bridegroom arrives
Lord of the mirrors!
It is himself he guides

In among these silk
Screens, these rustling appurtenances.
I breathe, and the mouth

Veil stirs its curtain
My eye
Veil is

A concatenation of rainbows.
I am his.
Even in his

Absence, I
Revolve in my
Sheath of impossibles,

Priceless and quiet
Among these parakeets, macaws!
O chatterers

Attendants of the eyelash!
I shall unloose
One feather, like the peacock.

Attendants of the lip!
I shall unloose
One note

Shattering
The chandelier
Of air that all day flies

Its crystals
A million ignorants.
Attendants!

Attendants!
And at his next step
I shall unloose

I shall unloose –
From the small jeweled
Doll he guards like a heart –

The lioness,
The shriek in the bath,
The cloak of holes.

Thalidomide

O half moon –

Half-brain, luminosity –
Negro, masked like a white,

Your dark
Amputations crawl and appall -

Spidery, unsafe.
What glove

What leatheriness
Has protected

Me from that shadow –
The indelible buds,

Knuckles as shoulder-blades, the
Faces that

Shove into being, dragging
The lopped

Blood-caul of absences.
All night I carpenter

A space for the thing I am given,
A love

Of two wet eyes and a screech.
White spit

Of indifference!
The dark fruits revolve and fall.

The glass cracks across,
The image

Flees and aborts like dropped mercury.