DOI: https://doi.org/10.63056/jllsa.2.11.2026.424

Journal of Language, Literature & Social Affairs

journal homepage: https://scholarclub.org/index.php/jllsa

Semantic Representation of Death and Despair in Sylvia Plath's "November Graveyard". A Lexical, Connotative, and Semantic Field Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:
September 15, 2026
Revision Received:
October 08, 2026
Accepted:
October 28, 2026
Available Online:
November 01, 2026

Keywords:
semantic analysis, lexical semantics, connotation, semantic fields, death, despair, semantic negation.

ABSTRACT

In this article a comprehensive semantic analysis of Sylvia Plath's poem "November Graveyard" (1956) is presented. The core of the article is a discussion of how the poet uses language to produce a lasting representation of death, despair and existential denial. A close reading of the vocabulary of "November Graveyard" is offered in order to see how the poet uses a very large number of denotatively very 'rich' words that are at the same time also very 'charged' in terms of connotation, in a system of interrelated semantic fields. In the final chapter of the article, the results from the individual chapters are summed up and discussed from a more general point of view. The article should be of particular interest to scholars working within the field of literary semantics, as well as to scholars working within the field of Sylvia Plath studies.

1. Introduction

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) was a twentieth century poet of the highest linguistic precision and psychological complexity. Written in 1956, whilst the author was studying at Cambridge University, "November Graveyard" is one of a number of poems that preceded Plath's fullyconfessional style and which, however, exhibit already many of the hallmarks of her mature work: an unflinching examination of death; a refusal of all sentimentalism; the highest degree of linguistic precision, in which sound and image are always subordinated to semantic effect.

"November Graveyard" presents a real graveyard in the hardest and barest time of the year and suggests a philosophical commentary upon the real death of the physical body in contrast to the images of death found in art and literature the human mind's need for consolation.

Analysis of the semantic of Plath's poetry is the only method by which to analyze in detail how meaning is created by Plath's word choice. While literary criticism may focus on how a poem creates an impression of being cold, bleak and hopeless, semantic analysis focuses on what words are used to create this feeling, through what mechanism, and in what combination. In Semantics of Nature, a chapter of this study that analyzes Dyeing, it is shown how lifewords are clashing with death-words and

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how by negating the reader's expectations and using syntactic disruption, the poet is able to create semantic fields which describe a destructive and destructive process and how the graveyard is devoid of an afterlife and moral or spiritual lessons.

Matter and weather persist.

1.1. Research Objectives

- How do specific lexical choices in Sylvia Plath's poem of death convey the denotative meanings of death and despair and contribute to the construction of the poem's themes?
- How do the connotative meanings, emotional undertones, and cultural implications of selected lexical items deepen the emotional intensity of Sylvia Plath's writing through semantic means?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Plath Scholarship: From Biography to Language

While literary critical studies of the poems of Sylvia Plath, who took her own life in 1963, tend to read the poems as expressions of the psychologist-observed-suicidal self of the author, there is another long-standing tradition of Plath studies. These have read Plath's work from the perspective of biography. Such studies can give due attention to the artistic deliberation that went into choosing word after word to be the word in any given place, rather than reading the poems as if the entire work could be read as a kind of psychology of suicidal self. In a landmark biography of Plath, Wagner-Martin (1987) highlighted in some detail the artistic deliberation that went into certain word choices that in aggregate would serve as representations of deceased persons.

Axelrod (1990) perceptively argues that in Plath's writing language is used performatively to express the psychological self. In this sense, semantic fields in poems such as the poem under analysis here do not describe certain facts about a person who has died, but instead construct an impression of a person's despair. Studies have previously drawn attention to the destruction and decay field that includes such lexical items as bone and skeleton, as well as imagery of rot and of various states of physical dissolution (Uroff 1977: 14–15).

The semantic structures which contribute to the overall meaning of the poem under analysis here are for the most part drawn from that very field of destruction.The formal and linguistic features of a poem are part of the semantic properties of that poem and thus are part of the poem's meaning; they are 'semantically constitutive' (Rosenblatt 1979). To date "November Graveyard" has not been the subject of any critical discussion of Plath's work, though it has been mentioned in brief surveys of her poetry by Kendall (2001) and Tracy (2016).

2.2. Lexical Semantics and Denotative Analysis

Cruse's (1986) Lexical Semantics, in particular the denotative analysis offered to it in Chapter 4, was used as the main theoretical tool for this study. The potential that each sense of a polysemous word has to be contextually activated, in order to make sense of a particular occurrence of that word or of that word together with other words in a phrase, was particularly notable in the case of grave (a burial site, or something serious). Lyons's (1977) two-volume work Semantics established the vocabulary which is used in this study for the denotative analysis, that is, sense, reference and denotation.

Geeraerts (2010) is used here to establish a historical account of the semantic theory from the structuralism through to the current cognitive approaches, including a detailed account of the prototype theory of Rosch (1975) that accounts for the way in which terms such as skeleton and rot are members of the DEATH field. The study of metaphor, in particular of the conceptual metaphors, as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is also used. This study exposed the cognitive metaphors that underpin the philosophical argument of the poem under analysis, in particular the **DEATH IS HONEST REDUCTION** metaphor, and the **IMAGINATION IS A STARVING ANIMAL**. As mentioned earlier, the study of connotation has its roots in the work of Leech (1974) who laid down a number of criteria for meaning.

The analysis of connotation is based upon the work of Leech (1974) who laid down a number of criteria for meaning and set out a taxonomy of meaning types.

Additionally, the semantic differential model of Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) was applied to gain more substance for the study of connotation. This model describes three dimensions which define the meaning of words: the evaluative, potency and activity dimension. An analysis of the semantic fields of vocabulary in Plath's poems has led to the results of a constant negative bias on the evaluative dimension, low potency and low activity. These features add up to a feeling of despair.

2.3. Semantic Field Theory and Stylistics

Lehrer (1974) established the framework for the field analysis to be undertaken in this study. Lehrer showed that words have many fields, and that the major categories or fields for any word are often highly overlapped so that one word can be associated with many other words in a number of different fields.This study draws on Stockwell's (2002) text world theory in order to understand the workings of the five major semantic fields which interact to create a total text world of despair which refuses access to any other, more consolatory text world.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study is a qualitative research study. It is an interpretive study. It is a close reading study of a single poem. The study is text-immanent. That is to say that the primary data for the study are the words of the poem as they appear in the Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath (Hughes, Ed., 1981). No use is made of paratext or other biographical data as if they were constraints on interpretation. Rather the study proceeds by analysis of the linguistic data of the poem itself. The methodology of the study can be described in terms of three interlocking levels of analysis

3.1.1. Text of the Poem

The scene stands stubborn: skinflint trees

Hoard last year's leaves, won't mourn, wear sackcloth, or turn

To elegiac dryads, and dour grass

Guards the hard-hearted emerald of its grassiness

However the grandiloquent mind may scorn

Such poverty. No dead men's cries

Flower forget-me-nots between the stones

Paving this grave ground. Here's honest rot

To unpick the heart, pare bone

Free of the fictive vein. When one stark skeleton Bulks real, all saints' tongues fall quiet:

Flies watch no resurrections in the sun.

At the essential landscape stare, stare

Till your eyes foist a vision dazzling on the wind:

Whatever lost ghosts flare,

Damned, howling in their shrouds across the moor

Rave on the leash of the starving mind

Which peoples the bare room, the blank, untenanted air.

Source: Plath, S. (1981). The Collected Poems (T. Hughes, Ed.). Harper & Row.

3.2. Semantic Field of Darkness

The Semantic Field of DARKNESS is examined literally and figuratively as it conveys the lack of light, warmth and divine illumination in the poem. The time of year in which the poem was written, November, serves as the primary darkness signal in the poem. As a month of decreasing light and the beginning of winter, November is culturally perceived as a time of death. The word "Dour" in line 3 of the poem conveys a sense of harsh severity or sternness. Additionally, "Dour" can connote images of the perpetual overcast skies found in northern climates as well as an overall sullen and dismal atmosphere which refuses to acknowledge or celebrate any sense of cheer. The word "Stark" in line 10 conveys a sense of harsh severity or bareness.

Additionally, “Stark” can connote images of harsh visibility under cold winter skies in which all things are exposed to view in a pitiless and unforgiving manner. There is no warmth or light to be found in such an atmosphere, and all things appear in a harsh and exposure manner rather than in a warm and illuminated one.

The darkest point in the poem is lines 11–12, “all saints’ tongues fall quiet: / Flies watch no resurrections in the sun.” Here the sun appears in the counter-field of light, life, and divine grace but is made powerless. The “dazzling” sight “dazzling on the wind” (line 14) is foisted on us in an attempt to illuminate our dark world but this is a fake and the DARKNESS field is a world that refuses to reveal redemptive meaning.

Word / Phrase	Line	Denotation	Connotation	Field Function
November (title)	Title	Eleventh month	Dying light, prewinter death, melancholy	Establishes DARKNESS as temporal-chromatic key
dour	3	Stern, gloomy, austere	Cold overcast, sullen refusal, northern hardness	Attributes darkness/gloom to the natural world
stark	10	Bare, severe, unadorned	Harsh cold exposure, pitiless visibility	Strips material reality of warmth
no resurrections in the sun	12	Absence of renewal	Sun's impotence; hope extinguished in daylight	Ironic negation of lifelight symbol
dazzling on the wind	14	Brilliant brightness	Illusory, deceptive, feverish, unreal light	Darkness via irony: brightness as hallucination

3.3. Semantic Field of the Graveyard and Death

The GRAVEYARD/DEATH semantic field is the central organizing feature of the poem, its architectural ground. In “Grave ground” (line 8) of this poem, two meanings are activated simultaneously, as in many instances of Plath’s lexical economy: the nominal sense of “Grave ground” or burial ground and the adjectival sense of “Grave ground” or serious, weighty matters.

So too with “Dead men’s cries” (line 6). The dead cannot cry; yet we hear in “Dead men’s cries” the expectation of the dead speaking in elegy or ghost-lore, an expectation brutally negated in this poem. And in “No dead men’s cries / Flower forget-me-nots” (lines 6–7), the most impossible of reminders, Forget-me-nots, are mentioned. In “No resurrections in the sun” (line 12), Skeleton (line 10), the skeletal remains of human bodies are stripped of all covering and are reduced to their barest and most fundamental material."Shrouds" is a return to the GRAVEYARD field in the final movement of the poem. Here the ghosts are, in death, bound by the same burial wrappings that bound the dead in the graveyard.

Word / Phrase	Line	Denotation	Connotation	Field Function
grave ground	8	Burial site / serious ground	Finality, heaviness, sacred but hopeless	Establishes graveyard as existential setting
stones	7	Grave markers	Permanence, hardness, cold endurance	Death encoded in the landscape's surface
dead men's cries	6	Voices of the deceased	Silenced pleading; failure of elegiac tradition	Negates the consolatory function of lamentation
forget-menots	7	Blue wildflowers; remembrance plea	Memory, mourning, desire to be remembered	Negated: no memorial flowers grow here
stark skeleton	10	Bare human bones	Mortality in its most naked form	Death stripped to irreducible biological truth
saints' tongues fall quiet	11	Religious speech ceases	Failure of spiritual consolation	Death defeats religious narrative
shrouds	16	Burial wrappings	Confinement in death; inability to transcend	Traps even ghosts within the condition of death
lost ghosts	15	Spectral dead	Damnation, displacement, the unquiet dead	Death continues as suffering beyond the grave

3.4. Semantic Field of Silence

The SILENCE field contains more than silence. It contains the entire space of silence which has been systematically and totally emptied of speech. No words of consolation are left for this dead landscape and the 'howling' of the lost ghosts is the only speech left. As in all Plath's work, the landscape resists the mourning of the dead. In this poem three main verbs are negated by the trees: they won't mourn, they won't wear sackcloth for the dead, they won't turn into dryads (or into trees of mourning) to mourn the death of the natural world. The silence of this landscape is a silence of resistance, not of failure. It refuses all speech of consolation.

All saints' tongues fall quiet in this grave yard, speech silenced by the stark skeleton of bare bones before them. The facticity of that skeleton is far greater than any resurrection or any other form of grace that the saints might offer. Counter-pointed to that is the howling of the lost ghosts in the grave yard in the final movement of the poem: that is the anti-language of the damned, vocal but semantically empty, the pure expressiveness of pain and suffering.

Word / Phrase	Line	Denotation	Connotation	Field Function
won't mourn	2	Refuses lamentation	Resistance; cold indifference of the natural world	Denies mourningspeech to the landscape
won't wear sackcloth	2	Refuses sign of grief	Refusal of human mourning ritual	Negates the gestural language of sorrow
no dead men's cries	6	Dead voices are absent	Silence of those who should speak	Negates the voice of the dead
saints' tongues fall quiet	11	Religious speech ceases	Death of theological consolation	Silences the highest form of meaningful speech
howling	16	Loud, inarticulate vocalisation	Anguish without meaning; antilanguage of damnation	Fills silence with noise that is not speech
untenanted air	18	Empty, unpopulated atmosphere	Total absence of voice, presence, warmth	Silence as the poem's final condition

3.5. Semantic Field of Coldness

In 'November Graveyard', the word cold is applied in three different ways – as a description of weather, of a person and of money. The semantic field of cold is one of the major fields used in the poem and, when combined with other ideas, creates a powerful affective impression. The first use of the word, 'Skinflint trees / Hoarding their leaves' (1), transfers the human term for a mean person who does not give enough to trees, to describe their behavior in not releasing their leaves. In this way, there is created an impression of cold self-interest and of a refusal of gift. As a result, not only is the natural scene physically cold, it is also morally calculating. In 'Hard-hearted' (4), a transferred epithet, there is a further semantic deviation (Leech & Short, 1981) created in that the adjective hard is applied to describe a person's heart. In this case, the impression created is that of physical hardness as well as moral coldness.

"Poverty" (5) continues the economic aspect of the semantic field for cold, highlighting the fact that the graveyard is spiritually and imaginatively poor. The poem concludes with the bare room and the bare, blank, untenanted air (18) of the mind drained of all warmth, as the cold formal language of legal/property terms "untenanted" are used to describe a vacancy.

Word / Phrase	Line	Denotation	Connotation	Field Function
skinflint trees	1	Trees personified as misers	Cold calculation, refusal of generosity	Transfers economic coldness to nature
dour grass	3	Stern, gloomy grass	Cold austerity, sullen resistance	Extends coldness to ground level
hard-hearted emerald	4	Emotionally cold green grass	Moral coldness fused with physical hardness	Transferred epithet: emotional cold as landscape
poverty	5	Destitution, lack	Spiritual, economic, and emotional bankruptcy	Coldness as existential deprivation
bare room	18	An empty, unfurnished room	Unheated space, absence of domestic warmth	Final emblem of cold desolation
untenanted air	18	Air without occupant	Legal vacancy; cold absence of human presence	Coldness as legal/existential abandonment

3.6. Semantic Field of Destruction and Decay

"Rot" in line 8 of "Flee on Foot" is the poem's most explicit word for decay. It is qualified by "honest" in the phrase "Here's honest rot" which creates a collision of semantic fields between MORAL VIRTUE and BIOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION. The honest fact of the biological process of decay is morally superior to the comforting fantasies of religion and the imagination. The word "rot" carries the poem's central argument within two words, one word from each of the two semantic fields involved.

"Unpick the heart" (9) is from the CRAFT field and makes a comment on the physical seat of emotion, or life. Here the word is being used to denote the act of undoing a sewn seam, and the work is being done on the heart, the very seat and center of the human's emotions. "Pare bone" (9) uses the vocabulary of the CULINARY field and refers to the stripping away of the outer covering of something in order to get to the very core. Here the object being stripped is the human body. The "fictive vein" (10) of life is the imaginative account that is made of a person's life and death. In this case the stripping of the body of the life has removed its ability to tell any sort of positive story about itself. The mind in these poems is a starving thing. It is a mind that is consumed from within and can only generate more and more phantasmagoric images because it has not been able to find any real nourishment. "Starving mind" (17) is the culmination of the semantic field of Destruction and Decay.

Word / Phrase	Line	Denotation	Connotation	Field Function
honest rot	8	Genuine organic decomposition	Moral superiority of material truth over fiction	Pivotal: DESTRUCTION as epistemological virtue
unpick the heart	9	Unravel, disassemble (craft metaphor)	Psychological dissolution; dismantling of self	DESTRUCTION enacted as methodical unravelling
pare bone	9	Strip to bare essential (culinary)	Reduction of human being to skeleton	DESTRUCTION as domestic/ordinary inevitability
fictive vein	10	The vein of imagination/narrative	Consoling fiction; lies by which the mind protects itself	DESTRUCTION targets imagination, not just the body
stark skeleton	10	Bare bones	Ultimate material reduction; all elaboration gone	End-product of the DESTRUCTION process
starving mind	17	A mind deprived of sustenance	Psychological exhaustion; spiritual starvation	DESTRUCTION as ongoing psychological consumption

4. Discussion

The five semantic fields are not independent domains; their power derives from their interpenetration. The following table lists the cross-field memberships of all the words and phrases in the poem.

Term	Primary Field	Secondary Field(s)	Effect
stark	DARKNESS	COLDNESS, DESTRUCTION	Synesthetic desolation: cold + dark + bare
dour	DARKNESS	COLDNESS	Overcast + stern: chromatic and thermal gloom fused
grave ground	GRAVEYARD	DESTRUCTION	Burial + seriousness: spatial and moral weight
hard-hearted	COLDNESS	SILENCE (indifference)	Thermal cold becomes moralemotional unresponsiveness
honest rot	DESTRUCTION	GRAVEYARD, DARKNESS	Decay + burial + absence of consoling light fused
saints' tongues fall quiet	SILENCE	GRAVEYARD, DARKNESS	Death defeats religious speech in graveyard setting
starving mind	DESTRUCTION	COLDNESS, SILENCE	Consumed, cold, empty of utterance: triple despair

4.1. Semantic Negation as Structural Device

The most distinctive feature of the semantic organization of this poem is the semantic negation. This is to say that in order to criticize religious doctrine, the poem must invoke the consolatory semantic fields of WARMTH, LIFE, SPEECH, GROWTH, and RESURRECTION, and then after a moment's hesitation, cancel them. The total number of instances of such semantic negation is eight, and they are organized on eight different lines, and as a rule each instance of semantic negation is a complete unit and is found on a single line. In other words, the semantic negations are organized on the surface as a series of isolated lines, and this organization in turn reflects the fact that the poem's destruction of material comfort and religious promise is a matter of separate and distinct moments of insight.

Negated Term / Field	Consolation Invoked	Negation Device	Effect
won't mourn	Lamentation (MOURNING field)	Explicit modal negation	Natural world refuses the human ritual of grief
won't wear sackcloth	Penitence, ritual grief	Explicit modal negation	Religious mourning gesture denied to landscape
won't turn to elegiac dryads	Poetic transformation of grief	Explicit modal negation	The elegy genre as a form is refused
No dead men's cries	Voice of the dead; elegiac address	Explicit negative quantifier	The dead do not speak; elegy has no subject
[No] Flower forget-me-nots	Memory, memorial nature	Implicit via 'No' above	Nature produces no memorial; remembrance fails
Flies watch no resurrections	Resurrection; the sun's life-power	Explicit negative quantifier	Central Christian consolation negated
dazzling [but foisted]	Brilliant vision; transcendence	Semantic irony via 'foist'	Vision is illusion, not genuine illumination
saints' tongues fall quiet	Religious speech; theological consolation	Lexical negation (quiet)	Spiritual authority silenced by material death

The Technique: Plath first names the thing that consoles i.e. the resurrection, the mourning, the forget-me-nots, the saints' tongues etc. and then she takes that thing and linguistically cancels it. Thus the reader has a moment's knowledge of the thing that consoles before it is removed from the poem. Its removal is felt as loss not as absence.

4.2. Findings of Research Objectives

In the following section the findings to the research questions and objectives of section 2 are presented in the order that they appeared. Each point is supported by examples from the poem under analysis and by reference to the theory that has been used to analyze that point.

4.3. The lexical items of the poem's denotative content

- **Objective 1**: To establish a list of words in the poem whose denotative content surrounds death, despair, darkness, silence, cold and destruction and to consider their contribution to the poem's themes.
- **Objective 2**: Identify lexical items with denotative content related to death, despair, darkness, silence, coldness, and destruction.

Upon completion of the denotative analysis, 31 lexically significant content words within the five semantic fields of the poem were identified. Of these 31 words, six are found primarily within the DARKNESS field, eight words are found within the GRAVEYARD/DEATH field, six words are located within the SILENCE field, six words are found within the COLDNESS field, and seven words are found within the DESTRUCTION/DECAY field. The words within the SILENCE field that do not appear to be related to silence are those that also appear in other semantic fields (e.g. "saints' tongues" appears in both the GRAVEYARD/DEATH and SILENCE fields). The interlocking network of the 31 words forms the poem's thematic architecture. No word that functions as a content word in the poem is outside of the semantic fields of death and despair; each word functions to reinforce the reinforce the dominant theme of the poem.

Textual Evidence: The first two lines of the poem read "The scene stands stubborn:

skinflint trees / Hoard last year's leaves, won't mourn" (lines 1–2). Later in the poem the following lines read: "Here's honest rot / To unpick the heart, pare bone / Free of the fictive vein" (lines 8–

10). The final line of interest from this section reads: “the bare room, the blank, untenanted air” (line 18).

Furthermore, the denotative terms selected by Plath in the POEM are, for the most part, semantically polysemous and thus have the capacity to extend or even to multiply the terms’ thematic significance. Thus, ‘Grave’ in ‘grave ground’ not only denotes a specific site where a person has been buried but also in its adjectival form connotes seriousness and gravity, and thus the scene of this POEM is not only a real graveyard but also a very serious place. Similarly, ‘stark’ not only connotes bareness and thus visual poverty but also severity, and thus in this context is not only a description of a place but also a moral statement.

Semantic Field	Number of Terms Identified	Key Terms	Thematic Contribution
DARKNESS	6	November, dour, stark, dazzling (ironic), untenanted	A sense of a world without light which can be redemptive.
GRAVEYARD / DEATH	8	grave ground, skeleton, shrouds, stones, dead men's cries	The focus of the poem is on a literal and metaphysical graveyard where the action of death is being unfolded
SILENCE	6	won't mourn, saints' tongues fall quiet, howling, untenanted air	Forecloses every form of consolatory or meaningful speech.
COLDNESS	6	skinflint, hardhearted, poverty, bare room, blank	Makes the landscape morally, economically, and thermally frigid
DESTRUCTION / DECAY	7	rot, unpick, pare bone, fictive vein, starving mind	Enacts physical and psychological dissolution as ongoing process

4.4. Finding for Objective 2: Connotative Dimensions of Key Terms

There were three main findings of the connotative analysis of the vocabulary of the poem. Firstly, using Osgood et al. 's (1957) semantic differential, the content words of the poem cluster at the negative evaluative pole (bad, unpleasant, aversive), the low-potency register (helpless, submissive, weak) and the low-activity register (passive, still, inert). These three dimensions of meaning give the poem its precise affective or emotional register and clearly represent the feeling of clinical depression and/or that of existential despair.

Secondly, several of the key terms of the poem have negative connotations which are specific to aspects of culture and/or religion. For example, the term ‘Damned’ has all the Christian theological connotations of suffering and/or punishment eternally. The term ‘Sackcloth’ immediately brings to mind the mourning of individuals in the Old Testament who would wear the coarsest materials to indicate their extreme grief. Therefore, the fact that the landscape of the poem does not wear sackcloth to indicate its mourning of the dead, gives out a strong sense of rejection of the Judeo-Christian traditions of mourning the dead. Finally, the negation of the term

‘Forget-me-nots’ gives a sense of negation of the whole culture of remembrance of the dead that these flowers symbolize.

This analysis turned up three salient patterns in the connotative of this poem. First, using the categories for the semantic differential from Osgood et al. (1957), the vast majority of content words in this poem have highly negative connotations, they are low in potency and low in activity. Such a profile in a semantic analysis would indicate that the writer is depicting scenes of extreme negative affective state. A reader could therefore say that this poem not only encodes the emotional state of the writer (which it most likely does), but that it has actually encoded the emotional state of clinical depression or other form of extreme despair.

Second, the semantic analysis indicated that there are several highly negative terms which not only convey very negative connotations within the semantic features that Osgood et al. (1957) provided for their differential, but also many of these highly negative terms have connotations that are tied to very specific negative features of human experience or a culture's or a religion's negative views on life. Terms such as ‘Damned’ not only convey a highly negative evaluation in the semantic features from Osgood et al. (1957) provided for their analysis, but also bring with them connotations from the writer's and the reader's cultural and religious history. In the case of the term

‘Sackcloth’ it not only carries highly negative connotations within the semantic features that are used to describe any feature of human experience (that of being very unpleasant), but also conveys specific connotations in this poem that evoke images of a Judeo-Christian's mourning ritual. The failure of this landscape to don ‘sackcloth’ thus symbolizes the landscape's rejection of the traditional Judeo-Christian modes of expressing and of dealing with the emotions of grief. In the same way that ‘Sackcloth’ is evoked by this landscape and it has highly negative connotations within this semantic analysis of the poem, the term ‘Forget-me-nots’ also has a highly negative evaluation of strong, negative connotations in this poem, but they symbolize the negative

aspect of the culture's or the human's desire to engage in remembrances of the deceased or in negative reflections upon the negative aspect of any loss.

Thus the poet of this work is also negating the entire aspect of the mourning of the dead as has been engaged in by cultures and by individuals throughout history. Using this model of meaning, it was possible to conclude that terms such as 'skinflint' and 'hard-hearted' not only carried highly negative connotations within this poem, but also transferred negative connotations of human behavior (that of miserly or emotionally hard and insensitive to others) to describe the negative aspect of a November landscape populated with inanimate corpses in a graveyard.

Thus in the connotative semantic analysis of this poem it can be concluded that every significant term in this work not only has negative connotations of its own denotation, but that every significant term in this poem's lexicon of words also have connotations of a moral failure to be a fully human being, while simultaneously evoking a sense of silent, emotionless despair and feelings of helpless submission to the bleak silence and lifelessness of nature has brought to the moribund landscape of the poet's world.

Term	Evaluative Dimension	Potency Dimension	Activity Dimension	Connotative Effect
skinflint	Negative (morally bad)	Low (miserly, petty)	Low (static hoarding)	Economic cold + moral failure
dour	Negative (unpleasant)	Low (passive severity)	Low (inert gloom)	Atmosphere of cold austerity
rot	Negative (disgusting)	Low (passive dissolution)	Low (slow decay)	Biological dissolution as moral honesty
damned	Strongly negative	Low (condemned, helpless)	Low (trapped)	Theological damnation without reprieve
howling	Negative (anguished)	Medium (desperate)	High (but meaningless activity)	Anti-language: energy without meaning
starving	Negative (depleted)	Low (weakened)	Low (consumed)	Psychological exhaustion and ruin

5. Conclusion

An initial semantic analysis of Sylvia Plath's poem "November Graveyard" was carried out in order to demonstrate the poem's extreme linguistic and philosophical coherence. The vocabulary of the poem is organized within the space of five interconnected semantic fields:

DARKNESS, GRAVEYARD/DEATH, SILENCE, COLD, and DESTRUCTION/DECAY. In addition to this organization of content, Plath uses the important structural device of semantic negation in order to set up a world within the poem in which every possible consolation is foreclosed. The findings of the study, which were arranged under the five research objectives, are summarized in Section 8.

Principal findings: (1) the lexical system of "November Graveyard" consists of 31 content words and is organized into a lexical network of 5 semantic fields that are all involved with death and despair, (2) the connotative profile of the vocabulary in the poem consistently shows a focus on a negative evaluative dimension, low potency, and low activity; in short the affective and evaluative profile of the poem can be described with the term despair and this is the way in which this affects profile is realized at the level of the linguistic sign.This particular poem by Sylvia Plath illustrates how the language of poetry can be utilized to create a world of reality of despair. The semantic analysis of "November Graveyard" exposed how the vocabulary of the poem constructed the landscape of death and despair. In summary, Plath's poetry does not report psychological events as they occur in natural language; rather, it builds up the world as it exists in language, word by word and field by field. It is only through semantic analysis that this creation can be uncovered

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