



## **EXPLORING PLATH AND THE POSTHUMAN: AGENCY, POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND EMBODIED ENTANGLEMENTS IN SYLVIA PLATH'S THE BEE MEETING**

*Windha Tera B Sangma*

*Research Scholar, Department of English, North Eastern Hill University, Tura Campus,  
Meghalaya, India*

### **Abstract**

*This article investigates Sylvia Plath's "The Bee Meeting" within the theoretical framework of posthumanism, engaging with the ideas of Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Cary Wolfe. The poem "The Bee Meeting" portrayal of the speaker's unsettling encounter with the hive functions as a metaphor for the breakdown of the autonomous human subject, undermining human exceptionalism and engaging with the relational, embodied, and interspecies dynamics emphasized in posthumanist thought. Haraway's perspective of companion species and becoming-with offers a lens to interpret the hive as a posthuman community, where agency is no longer the sole domain of human but is shared across species boundaries and the speaker is drawn into more-than-human collective. Braidotti's theory of the nomadic subject and affirmative posthumanism reveals the speaker's identity as a posthuman subject—decentered, hybrid, and constituted through affective relations with the nonhuman entities. Drawing on Wolfe's critique of anthropocentrism and his call for ethical relation with nonhuman animals, the speaker's vulnerability and exposure are reconfigured as central to a posthumanist ethics. In the end, the hive does not signify alienation but as a space of ontological transformation, where the human subject dissolves into a relational multispecies assemblage. This interpretation positions Plath's poem as a rich literary ground for theorizing posthuman subjectivity, embodied experience and ethical entanglement within broader context of ecological and philosophical decentering.*

### **Keywords**

*The Bee Meeting, Sylvia Plath, Posthumanism, Hybridity, Non human, Collective, etc.*

### **Full Article**

#### **Introduction:**

In *The Bee Meeting*, Sylvia Plath presents a compelling poetic vision of subjectivity that challenges the boundaries between self and other, human and nonhuman, personal and collective. Extensively read through psychoanalytic, feminist, or biographical perspectives, Plath's bee poems have also emerged as rich terrain for ecological and posthumanist interpretations. In particular, "*The Bee Meeting*" enacts a ritualistic encounter between the speaker and a hive collective, wherein the human subject experiences a symbolic disrobing and assimilation into a nonhuman network of meaning and power. This transformation aligns closely with the aims of posthumanist theory, which endeavors to displace the human as the central site of thought, agency, and ethical value.

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) is widely recognized as a leading figure in confessional poetry, known for her intense, emotionally powerful verse that explores themes of self-identity, death, gender, authority and the body. Her work has traditionally been interpreted through the lenses of psychoanalysis, feminism, and autobiography, particularly in light of her personal struggles and tragic death. However, recent scholarship have started to examine how her poetry also engages



with nonhuman agency, ecological awareness, and material embodiment rendering her work increasingly pertinent to posthumanist discourse.

During her final creative phase, Plath wrote a series of five poems collectively known as the *Bee Sequence*, including *The Bee Meeting*, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, and *Stings*. These poems are rich in imagery that dissolves the boundaries between human and nonhuman, self and collective, body and environment. In "*The Bee Meeting*," the speaker's identity is neither stable nor autonomous, but rather shaped and unsettled by her relationship with a nonhuman collective (the hive), echoing the posthumanist emphasis on entanglement, materiality, and relational subjectivity.

### **Dissolution of human subject in Bee meeting:**

Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting* (1962) explores themes of identity, transformation, and the dissolution of the self within natural and communal spaces. When read through the lens of Donna Haraway's posthumanist theory—particularly her ideas in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) and *When Species Meet* (2008)—we can trace how the poem dramatizes the breakdown of the human subject and the boundaries between the human, animal, machine and nature.

The human subject as dissolution reflects in Plath's *The Bee Meeting* where the narrator undergoes a deep loss of self-entity and control:

Who are these people at the bridge to meet me? They are the villagers—  
The rector, the midwife, the sexton, the agent  
for bees (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 1).

Here, Plath constructs a kind of ritualistic initiation, in which the speaker feels disoriented and alienated in a collective group. The speaker is being observed, evaluated and possibly prepared for transformation. The 'agent for bees' is a term which suggests the transformation for managing bees. The shared language and use of collective pronouns erode individual agency:

I am nude as a chicken neck, does nobody love me?  
Yes, here is the secretary of bees with her  
white shop smock, (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2)

This metaphor conveys vulnerability and dehumanization—a dissolving of individuality and personal subjectivity, resonating with posthumanist ideas.

### **Haraway's the Breakdown of Boundaries in The Bee Meeting:**

Haraway advocates for the breakdown of the boundaries between human and animal, organism and machine, physical and non-physical. In Plath's poem, the bee meeting itself function as a hybrid ritual between human and animals, reflecting Haraway's assertion that "nature" is neither innocent nor separate from culture. The bees are more than mere insects—they are social agents, integral parts of a system that includes humans:

And a black veil that molds to my face, they are making me one of them.  
They are leading me to the shorn grove,  
the circle of hives (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5).

This environment is both natural and artificial, here bees are "domesticated" yet still wild, reflecting Haraway's critique of anthropocentrism and her concept of companion species, in which human identity is formed through interconnectedness with non-human others.

### **The Bee Suit as the Cyborg Manifesto:**

The speaker eventual wearing of the beekeeper suit or outfit

I am the magician's girl who does not flinch  
(Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 11)

This can be interpreted as a proto-cyborg moment. Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* imagines the cyborg as a figure of boundary dissolution, especially between human and machine. The beekeeper suit functions as a technological interface enabling an interaction with another species, transforming the speaker into an entity which is neither entirely human nor completely alien. In this way, Plath's speaker emerges as a liminal figure—no longer entirely herself nor fully absorbed by the collective, neither woman nor animal, neither organic nor mechanical. The bee suit both protects and alienates, displaying the cyborg's paradoxical liberation and entrapment.

### **Posthuman Subjectivity and Gender:**

Haraway highlights the conventional humanist concepts of subjectivity which are shaped by gender and inherently exclusionary. Plath's speaker frequently reflected as a stand-in for Plath herself in which speaker undergoes an identity crisis shaped by societal expectations of femininity:

I am exhausted, I am exhausted-- (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 11)

Her anxiety arises from being placed in a role not of her own choice, which is echoing Haraway's critique of fixed or static identities. The community's imposition mirrors how biopower (in Foucault's sense) operates on gendered bodies—especially women's bodies—in medical, reproductive, and ecological contexts.

### **Rosi Braidotti ideas of *Becoming-Other* and *Nomadic Subjectivity*:**

In *The Posthuman* (2013), Rosi Braidotti critiques the liberal humanist ideal of the autonomous, rational, male subject. She replaces it with a posthuman subject that is embodied, entangled in networks of relations and engaged in a continual process of transformation and becoming other. Plath's speaker undergoes this very process of embodied transformation and entanglement within shifting relational identities

Now they are giving me a  
fashionable white straw  
Italian hat (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5).

Her identity becomes unsettled through symbolic initiation into the bee community structure. This line depicts a shift in the speaker's integration into a group. She has given a 'fashionable white straw Italian hat' which could be part of the beekeeping attire. The poem unfolds a posthuman rite of passage through which the speaker becomes-animal, becomes-insect, becomes-other. This aligns with Braidotti's notion of "becoming-inhuman":

And a black veil that molds to  
my face, they are making me  
one of them (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

Here the black veil suggests close fit that obscures her features. The action of being dressed in the same gear as the others symbolizes her assimilation into the group, losing her identity and becoming "one of them". Here, the speaker submits to a role not self-chosen, evoking Braidotti's





concept of nomadic subject—a fluid self-navigating multiple modes of identification and power. The loss of agency is part of this posthuman drift away from the centralized human ego.

### **Cary Wolfe's theory of Animality, Exposure, and Biopolitics:**

In *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010), Cary Wolfe advocates for a theory of subjectivity that challenges the idea of human exceptionalism. He critiques how humanist thought marginalizes those seen as less-than-human—animals, women, the disabled—by defining the human in contrast to them.

Plath's imagery of exposure and vulnerability—the speaker's nakedness, her “chicken-neck” fragility—evokes Wolfe's ideas on animality and the biopolitical control of bodies. The exposed state to that of a “chicken neck” seen typically as bare and defenseless, this metaphor emphasizes her feelings of being unprotected and possibly unloved or uncared for. The terms “Does nobody love me?” suggest a deep isolation and longing for care

I am nude as a chicken neck; does  
nobody love me? (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2)

Building on the idea of Foucault and Agamben, Wolfe views the animal as the figure through which bare life is exposed or revealed. Plath's speaker is rendered into bare life which is often stripped, observed, and handled by the collective. The ritualistic structure of the bee meeting functions as a moment of biopolitical control, in which the individual subject is absorbed into a community that operates according to rules beyond her understanding which resembles like a hive, or a colony.

### **Posthuman Entanglement with Nonhuman Others:**

The bees in Plath's poem represent more than mere insects; they symbolize an alternative, nonhuman social structure in which the speaker is being forced to enter.

They are leading me to the shorn grove, the circle of hives.  
(Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

This is not merely a physical displacement—it marks a shift in ontology. The circle of hives forms a nonhuman polity into which the speaker is drawn into, resonating with Wolfe's and Braidotti's emphasis on posthumanist idea on relationality over autonomy.

### **Interspecies Entanglement in *The Bee Meeting*:**

#### **1. The Human Subject among Bees**

Plath begins the poem with the speaker surrounded by a strange gathering:

Who are these people at the bridge to meet me?  
They are the villagers—  
The rector, the midwife, the sexton, the agent for bees  
(Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 1)

The presence of the agent for bees hints immediately at an interspecies dynamic. The bees are not passive background creatures; they are social agents, part of a shared ritual and community. This aligns with Haraway's concept of “becoming with”—the idea that humans and nonhumans co-create one another through shared histories and material practices. In this moment, the human world (villagers, medical-religious figures) and the bee world (hives, the agent) are fused into a single interspecies collective. The poem stages a breakdown of categories—nature and culture, human and animal.



### **Ritual, Hybridization, and the Hive as Social Machine:**

The “bee meeting” functions like a hybrid ritual, a symbolic moment of transformation where the speaker is inducted into a nonhuman community. The lines:

They are leading me to the shorn grove, the circle of hives.  
(Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

This suggests a sacred, shared space, evoking both natural and human social rituals. The hives are not just settings—they are actants, nodes in an interspecies social structure.

Haraway's emphasis on companion species (beings that shape one another's lives through proximity, interaction, and labor) is central here.

Now, I am milkweed silk; the  
bees will not notice (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2).

The “milkweed silk” is a transformation in the speaker's appearance to something more natural and inconspicuous which implies that she merges in with her surroundings in which the bees will not perceive her as a threat or an outsider. The bees are not symbolic others—they are co-actors in a multispecies drama, and the human becomes vulnerable, permeable, even bee-like in her initiation.

### **Bee Suit as Interface: Human-Insect Hybridization:**

One of the most powerful moments of hybridization is when the speaker describes herself in relation to the beekeeper suit:

I am the magician's girl who does not flinch.  
(Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 11)

While the speaker has not yet donned the bee suit in this poem (that occurs later in *The Arrival of the Bee Box*), the presence of protective gear, veils, and communal roles suggests a technologically mediated interspecies interface.

The bee suit can be read, with Haraway, as a cyborgian garment—a machine-like shell that allows human and insect to interact. Haraway's cyborg is not just human-machine; it is also human-animal-technology—a hybrid subject that transcends species lines. The bee suit mediates intimacy and distance, cooperation and protection, echoing Haraway's view of interspecies contact zones.

### **Vulnerability and Interspecies Ethics:**

The speaker's vulnerability—her nudity, her fear—is essential to Haraway's ethics of response-ability: a call for attuned, situated ways of coexisting with other species. Plath's speaker says:

I am nude as a chicken neck; does  
nobody love me? (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2).

Her exposure signals a loss of power, but also a potential for ethical becoming-with. Haraway stresses that interspecies relations must involve ‘response-ability’—a capacity to respond to be affected and to care across difference.

A gullible head untouched by  
their animosity (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 8).



The term “gullible head” about cow parsley implies an innocent or naïve appearance. The speaker hopes to appear harmless and unassuming to the bees, untouched by any hostility or “animosity” they might show. This line conveys a message of vulnerability and a desire for peaceful coexistence with the natural world, even in a potentially threatening situation. In this poem, the human does not dominate the nonhuman. Instead, she is unmade and remade by encounter with bees, entering a collective space of mutual risk, recognition, and transformation.

### **Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Insect (Braidotti):**

Rosi Braidotti, in *The Posthuman* (2013) and *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), introduces the concept of “becoming-animal”—a critical strategy for de-centering the human and exploring the fluid, processual nature of subjectivity. Plath’s speaker moves through a psychic and symbolic transformation, her subjectivity dismantled as she is absorbed into the bee-world.

I am nude as a chicken neck; does  
nobody love me? (Sylvia Plath’s *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2)

This is a moment of bare life (Agamben), but also a moment of becoming-other, as Braidotti would frame it. Her nudity signals the shedding of humanist protections—gendered, social, and epistemological. The speaker is not merely vulnerable; she is in flux, traversing boundaries between species, gender roles, and psychic states. For Braidotti, this is “nomadic subjectivity”—a kind of posthuman ethics that thrives on instability, interconnection, and multiplicity. The speaker is not losing herself in the hive; she is being re-formed as a relational subject, hybridized and entangled.

### **Animality, Biopolitics, and Bare Life (Wolfe):**

Cary Wolfe, in *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), examines how the notion of “human” is historically shaped by excluding animals and “bare life.” He critiques humanism for defining humanity through control and rationality which marginalize those who fall outside those norms—women, animals, the disabled individual.

In *The Bee Meeting*, the speaker is depicting as animal-like, biologically exposed and emotionally unsettled. Her body is reduced to something vulnerable, subject to regulation and control

They are the villagers—  
The rector, the midwife, the sexton,  
the agent for bees (Sylvia Plath’s *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 1).

The involvement of figures representing the state, church and medical suggests a biopolitical apparatus, in the Foucauldian sense, highlighting mechanisms of power that regulate life and bodily autonomy. The speaker is being drawn into a system that manages life itself—reproductive, social and ecological dimension. The bees, too, belong of this managed nature, yet they remain semi-autonomous and collectively powerful. Wolfe’s critique of humanism echoes here the poem reveals the boundaries between human and animal collapses exposing the illusion of human mastery. The speaker’s experience in the bee meeting dramatizes the loss of species privilege.

### **Decentering of Human Control and Technological Domination with Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Cary Wolfe”**

To analyze the decentering of human control and technological domination in *The Bee Meeting* by Sylvia Plath using Donna Haraway’s posthumanist theory, we must rethink the human not as master or controller of the natural world (or technology), but as a participant in complex,





multispecies networks where agency is distributed and relational. Haraway's critiques of anthropocentrism and domination—especially in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) and *When Species Meet* (2008)—offer a powerful framework to read Plath's poem not just as a psychological or confessional piece, but as a proto-posthuman meditation on the limits of human sovereignty, the fragility of bodily agency, and the technological mediation of interspecies relationships.

### **Human Control is Fragile, Not Absolute:**

In the opening line of *The Bee Meeting*, Plath's speaker is passively drawn into a ritualistic event she does not control or understand:

They are leading me to the shorn grove,  
the circle of hives (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

This passivity subverts the classical humanist narrative where the human is the autonomous actor. Instead, the speaker is acted upon, led by others—both human and nonhuman—into a ritual space shaped by systems beyond her control.

they are making me one of them (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

This line showcases her assimilation into the group as losing her identity to become 'one of them'. Haraway argues against the fantasy of human mastery over nature. In *When Species Meet*, she writes:

To be one is always to become with many

In this context, the poem dramatizes how the speaker's identity and actions are co-constructed with bees, villagers, and ritual. The human is not master of the bees; she is being reoriented into their system, drawn into a multispecies choreography. Her sense of agency erodes as she becomes part of a larger ecological and symbolic network.

### **Beekeeping Technology: Not Domination but Mediation:**

Beekeeping as a human-controlled practice is reframed in Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, as ambiguous, vulnerable, and hybrid. While *The Bee Meeting* does not yet show the speaker donning a bee suit (that comes in *Stings*), the imagery of veiling and protection is implied.

Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* challenges the idea that technology equates human's mastery. Instead, she views technology not as a weapon of control but as an interface. The beekeeper's veil, gloves, and hives are not tools of dominance—they are technological mediators that permit fragile coexistence. In *The Bee Meeting*, the beekeeper figure is not heroic or in command. The bees are still dangerous, autonomous, and collectively intelligent. The speaker is not the controller but the one who is being transformed through her contact with this nonhuman world.

### **Bees as Nonhuman Agents, Not Objects:**

Plath's bees are not background figures; they are central nonhuman agents that shape the speaker's experience. For Haraway, nonhuman creatures are not passive objects for human use, but companion species—relational beings that co-shape human identity and action. In *The Bee Meeting*, the speaker's interaction with bees is ritualistic, almost religious, with the hives positioned in a sacred circle:

The circle of hives (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5).

This spatial arrangement mirrors Haraway's idea of the "contact zone"—spaces where species meet, interact, and influence each other. The bees represent a nonhuman collective intelligence, an

alternative framework of society, and a challenge to anthropocentric values of hierarchy and individualism.

### **The Cyborg is Not in Control—It is Entangled:**

Haraway's cyborg is a hybrid entity which is simultaneously human, machine and animal. Importantly the cyborg does not represent control (as in dystopian science fiction), but instead serves as a metaphor for entanglement, interdependence, and boundary dissolution. In Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, the speaker undergoes a cyborgian transformation. She is increasingly entangled with technology (beekeeping tools), animal life (bees), and collective rituals. The boundaries between self and other, human and nonhuman, natural and artificial start to dissolve or blur.

By the end of the sequence, the speaker no longer dominates the bees, but is instead reshaped by her relationship with them. This is central idea to Haraway's theory on the displacement of human control which is in fact not a tragedy, but an ethical and ontological opportunity to become-with others.

Examining the decentering of human control and technological domination in Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting* through the lens of Rosi Braidotti and Cary Wolfe deepens our understanding of the poem as a critique of anthropocentric power structures. Plath's speaker is drawn into a ritual as she neither fully understands nor controls embodying a posthuman subject no longer defined by the autonomous, sovereign individual of liberal humanism, but she emerges as a vulnerable, materially embedded, and relational subject, deeply entangled with both technology and nonhuman others.

### **The Breakdown of Human Mastery (Wolfe):**

Cary Wolfe, in *What Is Posthumanism?*, argues that the humanist tradition depends on excluding or controlling what is considered nonhuman—particularly animals, machines, and vulnerable bodies. In Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, the speaker is thrown into a space where this control collapses

They are leading me to the shorn grove,  
the circle of hives (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5)

The speaker is not directing this process but she is acted upon, and exposed to a system where human dominance is illusory. The villagers, hives, bees, and ritual depict biopolitical control shaping life through bodily exposure and collective action. Yet the speaker is neither master nor manager where she is submerged in a complex assemblage that reveals Wolfe's fundamental challenge to the notion of autonomous, rational humanist subject. The bees in this poem are not passive objects in which they are part of a socio-ecological apparatus or network that resists control.

### **Nomadic Subjectivity and Becoming-Insect (Braidotti):**

Rosi Braidotti's posthuman theory of "nomadic subjectivity"—a fluid, shifting, relational self that emerges through "becoming-other", including becoming-animal or becoming-insect. Plath's speaker is in a constant state of ontological disorientation. Her loss of control is not just situational—it reflects a deep shift in subjectivity:

I am nude as a chicken neck; does  
nobody love me? (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2)

This raw exposure, bordering on dehumanization, is not a fall from grace but a passage into a new mode of being—what Braidotti would call "affirmative becoming". Through this, the subject becomes more attuned to her environment, her dependencies, and her own materiality.





Braidotti's "becoming-insect" is especially suitable here. Plath's speaker is increasingly absorbed into the collective logic of the hive, a symbol of non-individual, distributed intelligence. She is no longer a centered ego, but a body in flux, pulled into interspecies and technological entanglement.

### **Political Implications: Biopolitics and the Managed Body:**

Plath's speaker is positioned at the convergence of ritual, medicine, reproduction, and death, represented by the surrounding villagers:

The rector, the midwife, the sexton,  
the agent for bees (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 1).

This recalls Foucault's biopolitics, which both Wolfe and Braidotti also engage with the idea that life itself becomes a site of regulation and governance. The speaker's body is under surveillance, managed and interpreted not as an autonomous subject but as a form of life to be shaped. Wolfe critiques this apparatus or network for excluding animality and bodily vulnerability from full political recognition. Plath's speaker is stripped and exposed, undergoes this exclusion but also suggest the potential for moving beyond it.

### **The Hive as Posthuman Community:**

In Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, the hive functions as far more than a poetic image or metaphor for traditional womanhood, domesticity, or ritualized social roles. When viewed through the lens of posthuman theory particularly the frameworks of Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Cary Wolfe—the hive emerges as a posthuman community: a space where agency is distributed, interspecies entanglement where the boundaries of human subjects dissolve with nonhuman and technological actors. This posthuman community challenges classical humanist ideals of individuality, mastery, and species superiority. Instead, the hive operates as a relational, multispecies, material network which aligns with Haraway's terms, "contact zone" and Braidotti's "nomadic" assemblage where the self is in process, exposed, and transformed.

### **Hive as a Contact Zone (Donna Haraway):**

Haraway's theory of companion species and interspecies entanglement—developed in *When Species Meet*—emphasizes that humans do not act in isolation, but always "become with" other species. The hive in *The Bee Meeting* functions as "contact zone", where human and nonhuman subjectivities converge or entangle

They are leading me to the shorn grove,  
the circle of hives (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 5).

This "circle of hives" is not only symbolic—it is material, ritualistic, and social formation. This poem encounters between the human and non-human actors- speaker, the villagers, and the bees which unfolds in a zone where the boundaries between nature and culture dissolve. The bees are not passive symbols but co-actors in the scene. The villagers include an "agent for bees," signifying an institutional acknowledgement of their agency. In Haraway's notions, the hive is not controlled by humans but also cohabited, requiring attention, translation, and mutual risk.

### **Becoming-Insect: Hive as Nomadic Assemblage (Rosi Braidotti):**

In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti develops the idea of becoming-animal and nomadic subjectivity as a means to move beyond the Cartesian, disembodied human subject. Plath's speaker experiences radical disoriented in the poem, losing her individuality and merging into a collective organism— a phenomenon we might describe as a hive mind:



I am nude as a chicken neck,  
 does nobody love me? (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 2).

Here, the speaker's loss of individuality is not merely a response to trauma—it reflects a posthuman transformation. Her body is subjected to expose, observe, and process within a collective ritual space. Her identity dissolves into a post-anthropocentric community which includes humans, bees, and symbolic structures. For Braidotti, this is a key feature of posthuman ethics wherein the affirmative dissolution of the self into ecological and social multiplicities. The hive is a nomadic assemblage wherein it becomes fluid, horizontal and non-hierarchical. It disrupts binary oppositions of human and animal, individual and collective, subject and object but it supports networked existence. The speaker instead of controlling over the hive, the speaker is transformed by it but it is becoming a material component in its system.

### **Biopolitics and Species Vulnerability (Cary Wolfe):**

For Cary Wolfe, posthumanism involves recognizing how liberal humanist subjectivity is constructed through exclusions—especially of animals and those deemed outside rational, self-mastering norms. In *What is Posthumanism?*, Wolfe critiques the biopolitical governance of life and the assumption of human exceptionalism.

In *The Bee Meeting*, the hive is existed within a surveillance network of human figures—the rector, the midwife, the sexton—who represent control over birth, death, and knowledge. The speaker, however, is not in control:

Is it some operational that is taking place  
 It is the surgeon my neighbors are waiting for,  
 This apparition in a green helmet,  
 Shining gloves and a white suit (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 6).

In this line, the speaker wonders if the gathering of villagers is for some operation implying invasive. The word 'apparition' gives the description of the person whom the speaker is observing. A 'green helmet' could be part of the beekeeping attire. The hive is a community where human vulnerability is exposed and shared. The speaker is no longer protected by the social or symbolic systems that typically ground identity. In Wolfe's terms, she is reduced to bare life, but in doing so, she emerges with the bees in their shared precarity and in their non-sovereign existence. The hive therefore becomes a community of shared exposure instead of one based hierarchical control. Wolfe might contend that acknowledging animal subjectivity and interdependence which demands an ethical shift. The hive represents this transformation by displacing human authority and emphasizing on interspecies being-in-common, even in danger and instability.

### **The Hive as a Technologically Mediated Zone:**

In *The Bee Meeting*, beekeeping itself involves tools, rituals, and hybrid spaces. To all three theorists, technology is not about domination, but about mediation, interface, and dependency. The hive is not "natural" but a human intervention into animal behavior but it resists full control. The bees remain partially wild, collective yet autonomous.

The white hive is snug as a virgin,  
 Sealing off her brood cells, her  
 honey, and quietly humming (Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*, Stanza 7).

The hive is personified and compared to a virgin implying purity, seclusion and perhaps untouched entity. The term 'snug' suggests that hive is secured and comfortable, a symbol place





of safety. The hive functions as a boundary object- an illusion of technology allowing for relation while signaling the limits of human authority. The hive signifies protective entity as it 'quietly humming' adds a sense of calm and industriousness. On the contrary, the hive offers a vision of relational subjectivity, interspecies ethics and de-centered embodiment. It is a space where the human is no longer the central actor, but one among many, learning to become-with, to become-insect, and to inhabit a posthuman ethics of exposure and entanglement.

### Conclusion:

Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting* emerges as a powerful poetic exploration of posthuman entanglement, where the traditional humanist subject—autonomous, sovereign, and centered—is decisively decentered and reconfigured. Through the theoretical framework of Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Cary Wolfe, the poem moves beyond its confessional and symbolic interpretations to articulate a profound interrogation of human exceptionalism, a reflection on technological mediation and an exploration of multispecies relationality. Haraway's notion of the "contact zone" in which the hive emerges as a multispecies space of co-becoming, where humans and bees engage in a fragile, mediated coexistence that resists hierarchical control. This challenges anthropocentric frameworks by positioning the bee colony as a posthuman community with distributed agency and collective intelligence.

Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity and becoming-animal reveals the speaker's transformation from a bounded individual to a fluid, relational entity. The poem dramatizes the painful yet necessary dissolution of fixed identity into a networked assemblage which is "becoming-insect" that opens new ethical and existential possibilities beyond humanist boundaries. At the same time, Wolfe's intervention in biopolitical and animal studies highlights the shared vulnerability and exposure of the human body within regulatory systems designed not only to manage human life but to control animal life as well. Through its ritualized setting, the poem portrays a posthumanist subject of authority and the collective presence of the bees which embedded in techno-material and biopolitical assemblages that destabilize notion of mastery and invite new forms of ethical responsibility.

, these theories invite *The Bee Meeting* to be understood not only as a narrative of personal crisis or feminine subjectivity but as a visionary reflection on the limits of human control, the porous boundaries between species, and the potential for multispecies solidarity. The hive, then, is more than a metaphor; it function as a posthuman commons—a dynamic space of entangled life, technological interface and ethical reorientation. In adopting this posthuman framework, Plath's poem challenges readers to rethink the human centrality in a world increasingly marked by interdependence, hybridity, and vulnerability—a provocation that speaks urgently to the contemporary ecological and technological challenges.

### References

- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press, 2007.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.
- Lewis Luck, Jessica. "Exploring the 'Mind of the Hive': Embodied Cognition in Sylvia Plath's Bee Poems." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 26, no. 2, Fall 2007, pp. 287–308. Project MUSE, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/232419>.
- Plath, Sylvia. "The Bee Meeting." *The Collected Poems*, edited by Ted Hughes, Harper & Row, 1981, pp. 212–14.





- Pohl, Rebecca, and Christien Garcia. *An Analysis of Donna Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto*. Macat Library, 28 Sept. 2018.
- "Bee Meeting by Sylvia Plath / Line by Line Analysis – SpunkyNotes." *SpunkyNotes*, <https://spunkynotes.com>.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Zarevich, Emily. "Sylvia Plath's Fascination with Bees." *JSTOR Daily*, 15 Oct. 2023, <https://daily.jstor.org/sylvia-plaths-fascination-with-bees/>.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

**Article Received:** 15/06/2025

**Article Accepted:** 26/06/2025

**Published Online:** 27/06/2025

**To Cite the Article:** Sangma, Windha. "Exploring Plath and the Posthuman: Agency, Posthuman Subjectivity and Embodied Entanglements in Sylvia Plath's *The Bee Meeting*." *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol. - VI, Issue-1, June, 2025, 216-227. [www.literarycognizance.com](http://www.literarycognizance.com)

