Standing Unearthed:
Construing a Persona Behind Plath's "I Am Vertical"[1]

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Auto-description does not typically start with people introducing themselves saying "I am vertical". From our human condition as bipeds we associate the upright position as the typical conscious human body situation. The sheer fact that someone mentions this detail about their personas, makes their individual experience of themselves no less than remarkable. With its title, Sylvia Plath's poem "I Am Vertical" invites the reader to investigate on the persona speaking behind its words. In order to study how the mention of body position contributes here to the reader's mental construction of this persona, I shall start from Cámara's definition of "lyrical subject" and move on to construe an integration mental space corresponding to the persona behind the poem. With this purpose I shall use Lakoff and Johnson's study on image-schemas, Sweetser and Ibarretxe's account of the way sensory experience influences conceptualisation, and Fauconnier's proposal of mental spaces.

"I am vertical" is a queer way for anyone to describe themselves. Of course everybody is vertical: notice the long human shape in our prototypical upright body position as bipeds. Being vertical also means being up, which—regarding humans—implies being conscious[2] (thus, having a rational mind). In the multiple ideas it evokes, the sentence "I am vertical" seems to be an awareness chant to human existence.

What happens, then, when a person would rather not be vertical? Would they be rejecting their human condition? This is one of the questions readers could ask themselves when coming across Plath's poem:

> I Am Vertical
>
> But I'd rather be horizontal.
>
> (title and line 1)

I. A Virtual Entity: The Lyrical Subject as a Mental Space

The perception of a *persona* behind the poem is nothing strange to our everyday cognitive interpretation of discourse. Every time we come across a text, we assume it must have been produced by *somebody* trying to communicate something or to *express himself or herself*. And poetry seems to be a *prototypical* case of subjective discourse, which makes readers have

the feeling that there is a *subject* speaking.

According to Cámara (2004), *lyrical subjects* can be described as "complex bundles of personality traits, conjured up in the reader's mind, which possess intrinsic properties that make them somehow attractive and, for that reason, part of the artistic creation." Cámara (2005) offers many different possibilities through which the lyrical subject is created in the readers' minds, including his C-schema. In this paper I shall not follow Cámara's account of the way lyrical subjects are construed, but it is interesting to linger in the Person Projection Theory basic idea, which I wholly agree with. Cámara conceives the lyrical subject as a mental construct invoked at the reader's end. The lyrical subject presents anthropomorphic features but is of a *virtual* nature.

From my own *integrational* perspective (Calderón, 2004, 2005), I believe that the illusory experience of a lyrical subject as a physical entity originates from the creation of a *mental space* (Fauconnier, 1994, 1997) to which the reader adds the SPEAKER-PERSONA label. The motor-sensory imagery the reader perceives from a poem, the barely objective notions suggested by the words, the conceptual metaphors evoked, together with our Long Term Memory experiential knowledge of human beings, all of that intermingle in a multi-connection holistic game that helps the reader construe the *persona* behind the words. Provided some discourse piece is a good transmission channel, the mental panorama the reader will construe following the text indicators should ideally be equivalent to the mental panorama in the lyrical subject's mind. Construing the way this lyrical subject sees him/herself and the world around, as well as the way (s)he reasons, acts or makes decisions, implies construing an idea or mental image of the lyrical subject. We construe mental images of lyrical subjects the same way we construe mental images of the persons around us. The only difference is that lyrical subjects exist only as long as readers conjure them up.

From my point of view, a lyrical subject is a virtual anthropomorphic construct consisting of a bundle of features. And by "features" I mean any information item that can be added and integrated into a mental space labelled SPEAKER-PERSONA, independently of whether it is possible or not to say what kind of person he/she seems to be.

The poem by Sylvia Plath I shall analyse below forces the reader to create an idea of the speaker behind the words.[3] In fact the structure "I am" introducing the title will undoubtedly make the reader create a virtual

subject that functions as referent for anything the poem may be telling. In light of cognitive linguistic findings on the way readers process discourse, I shall show some of the different and complementary steps that lead to the mental creation of the poem's virtual speaker.[4]

II. Reading "I Am Vertical" or Construing a Lyrical Subject

As we can see from the title, the poem's speaker starts her[5] discourse from an auto-descriptive stance. She provides one of her physical features in the title, through a clear-cut sentence ("I am vertical"), and expresses her disappointment at it in the first line ("but I'd rather be horizontal"). Nevertheless, the poem's lyrical subject will be construed all through the reading not by means of gathering information about her, but by creating spaces which integrate information regarding other entities. In fact, the subject seems to reject describing herself, since the following lines shift focus towards what she is *not*:

> *I am not* a tree with my root in the soil
> Sucking up minerals and motherly love
> So that each March I may gleam into leaf.
> *Nor am I* the beauty of a garden bed
> Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
> Unknowing I must soon unpetal.
>
> (ll.2-7, my italics)

To be able to construe the "speaker-persona" mental space, the reader will need to start from the initial auto-characterising basic space—the ME space including physical verticality ("I Am Vertical"), and disappointment and internal wish ("But I would rather be …"); and then move on to establish counterpart relations with the NOT-ME spaces the text invites us to create.

Although the "I am not" in the poem would apparently suggest inexistence, in fact giving information about something means conjuring it up in the reader's mind. Whatever the speaker explicitly negates in her discourse is created by the readers in their minds. Therefore, in order to understand the sentence "I am not a tree with my root in the soil", we necessarily must make up a mental space including information about trees, roots and soil. Thus we shall create at least two NOT-ME spaces: NOT-ME space 1 (NOT-ME S1) corresponding to lines 2-4; and NOT-ME S2

corresponding to lines 5-7, both of them including subspaces. Spaces NOT-ME S1 and NOT-ME S2 will be mutually interconnected, since they share the *not-Me* notion; this connection will drain all through the space net down to the final space, provided no other direction is suggested by the discourse.

According to Gestalt psychology[6], the human mind is holistic in nature, this means that any impression we perceive will be interpreted as part of a whole. Thus, since here two information items ("me" and "something different from *me*") show a *formal connection* in the shape of sentences ("I am not a tree"; "Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed"), they will become *conceptually associated*. Negating being a tree, then, does not mean having nothing to do with a tree. In fact, as we shall see, the base ME space will be lately evoked in tight association with NOT-ME spaces. But how these spaces become so mightily associated can be more precisely explained through other cognitive devices.

II.1. Mental space dynamics

If we take a look at the lines affected by each of these negations, there is a pronoun "I" indicating that the first person still belongs to both NOT-ME spaces:

> (NOT-ME S1)…not a tree with *my* root in the soil
> Sucking up minerals and motherly love
> So that each March *I* may gleam into leaf.
> (NOT-ME S2) Nor (…) the beauty of a garden bed
> Attracting *my* share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
> Unknowing *I* must soon unpetal.
>   (ll.2-7, my italics)

How is it possible that NOT-ME spaces can include the *I* element? The answer is in Fauconnier's proposal of item exclusiveness, which means that each item belonging to a particular space is *exclusive* to that space and does not take part in any other space. The Mental Space model assumes that any space is separate from the rest in the sense that each of its elements is exclusive to it, which implies having roles and values not necessarily shared by its counterparts in other spaces (Fauconnier, 1994). That an item belongs exclusively to one mental space is possible only because our minds

operate with *concepts* and not with *things*. Thus, in the Me space suggested by the title, *I* is assumed to be a "person" with some kind of "verticality" value; whereas in the NOT-ME subspaces suggested by lines 4 and 6-7, first *I* takes the role of "a tree" and the value of "gleaming into leaf each March" (in NOT-ME S1, l.4), and the role of "flowers", and the values of being "beautiful" and "temporary" (in NOT-ME S2, ll.6-7).

Nevertheless, all the *I* elements belonging to different spaces are linked to each other by a counterpart relation and respond to two principles: the *ID Principle* (Fauconnier, 1994:7; 1997:41), according to which whenever two elements are connected in some way, one of them can be accessed through the mentioning of the other; and the *Space Optimization Principle* (Fauconnier, 1994:91), according to which any information included in a space will drain down to later spaces. Thus, since all the *I* elements are linked by counterpart relations, whenever the word "I" appears in discourse it will create a new conceptual element that will include the complex bunch of ideas that have become associated to the word thanks to any coherent information present in previous spaces. As a consequence, when discourse guides us to the creation of a new space, and this space includes a new *I* item, the creation of this new *I* will drag with it all the information included in its *I* counterparts in previous spaces: "verticality" "wish of horizontality" "(not)-tree" "(not)-flowers" etc. The contrast between Me space and NOT-Me spaces is clearly suggested by lines 8-9, 10 and 11-13, which evoke a sequence of new mental spaces swayed by the word introducing line 8, "compared":

> Compared with me, a tree is immortal
> And a flower-head not tall, but more startling.
> And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.
>
> Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,
> The trees and flowers have been strewing their cool odors.
> I walk among them, but none of them is noticing.

(ll.8-13)

But by no means is discourse form (i.e. lexicon and grammar) the only responsible for the comparison and contrast relations that are relentlessly being established between the space elements. In fact, there is

other information also invoked by the poem, information of a *sensory* or *experiential* kind, which plays a crucial role in the space creation; since it gives some *concrete* support for other more abstract ideas.

II.2. The vertical and horizontal axes

Besides lexical repetition, counterpart relation between spaces is here basically grounded on *image mapping* (Lakoff and Turner, 1987; Johnson,1987). The fact that the title and first line draw attention to the image-schematic shape of the lyrical subject gives reasons to think the rest of the elements evoked will be observed in the same light. Thus, we can create counterpart relations based on the VERTICALITY image-schema[7] between *I* and *a tree* or *I* and *a flower*. However, whereas there is image mapping between *I* and *plants* in general, discourse grammar and vocabulary suggest *contrast* relations between them ("Compared with me, a tree is immortal/ And a flower-head not tall, but more startling", ll.8-9).

A frame shift (Coulson, 2001) is forced when reading lines 14-15. It is interesting that explicit resemblance relations between *I* and *plants* should occur exactly when the VERTICAL value is erased from a new ME mental space, which clearly displays a HORIZONTAL image-schema associated to the *sleeping* activity:

Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping
I must most perfectly resemble them.

Image mapping based on HORIZONTALITY occurs firstly between the speaker's wish ("I'd rather be horizontal", l.1), the *soil* and the *garden bed* (this last one is at odds with the VERTICALITY image displayed by each individual flower). Later HORIZONTALITY is emphasised through the sleeping activity—*soil* and the *sleeping I* becoming counterparts to each other through image-mapping. Eventually, lines 17-18 introduce a new element that joins the horizontality sequence: *sky*.

It is more natural to me, lying down.
Then the sky and I are in open conversation.

Soil, *I* (sleeping, lying down) and *sky* become associated through image mapping. This connection based on image-schema evokes a more extended

conceptual connection supported by a basic metaphor: the DYING IS SLEEPING metaphor. In order for the DYING IS SLEEPING metaphor to be properly appreciated in lines 17-18, it is necessary that the reader perceive the counterpart relation between "sky" (in a the *physical world* mental space) and "heaven" (in the *spiritual world* mental space)—an equivalence that is typical of occidental religious cultures. Thus, adopting a horizontal position parallel with the sky, that is, being able to talk with the sky suggests having some contact with spiritual life. Lying down in the soil (as suggested by line 20) in open conversation with the spiritual dimension invokes religious ideas of after death existence. The DYING IS SLEEPING metaphor can be traced through the discourse—especially as line 19 introduces the adverb "finally," which hints at the idea of not waking up again, and line 20 invokes ideas of body burial in the soil.

> And I shall be useful when I lie down finally;
> Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me. (ll.19-20)

Lines 19-20 suggest that the reason why the woman speaking wants to be horizontal—i.e. to die—does not seem to be her longing for transcendental existence in the terms settled by occidental beliefs. Let us consider some other information that facilitates the reader's perception of the speaker's yearning in this regard.

II.3. Sensory information

Besides the conflict suggested by the constant use of *orientational* or *body position* image-schemas, there is other motor-sensory information that helps the readers construe their perception of the speaker in Plath's poem: namely the sensory images invoked. At this point I shall mention the traditional distinction between *higher* and *lower* sensory domains, improved by Sweetser's (1990) and Ibarretxe's (1997) theory of the way human beings conceptualise information through sensory experience. According to these authors, human beings associate higher differentiated domains (sight and ear) with intellect and objectivity, and lower non differentiated domains (touch, taste and smell) with emotion and subjectivity.

Image-schemas, and especially those of the positioned body, are typically connected with *sight*. Thus introducing the poem like this, "I Am

Vertical / But I'd rather be horizontal" (title, l.1), means placing the sight domain to the front. The first stanza, which suggests the conflict as regards entity resemblance, is conceptually based on body positions (verticality and horizontality), and remarkably nearly all the other sensory images suggested here correspond to the sight domain:

> I am not a tree with my root in the soil
> Sucking up minerals and motherly love
> So that each March I may *gleam into leaf.*
> Nor am I the *beauty of a garden bed*
> Attracting my share of Ahs and *spectacularly painted,*
> Unknowing I must soon *unpetal.*
> Compared with me, a tree is immortal
> And a flower-head not *tall,* but more *startling.*
> And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

> (ll.2-10, my italics)

There are only two images corresponding to non-sight domains: first, the interesting *taste* image "sucking up," in which the adverb "up" reinforces the VERTICALITY (*sight*) image-schema[8]; and second, the onomatopoeic "Ahs", which is an *ear* image and therefore corresponds to the *intellectual differentiated* level as well. Considering the facts that 1) this stanza introduces some conflict at work in the lyrical subject, 2) that most of the images suggested are from some higher domain, and 3) that higher domains are typically connected with intellect, it is possible to conclude that the speaker is dealing with the conflict in a differentiated objective manner. Nevertheless there is something in that taste image (and line 2) that could make the reader think this is not wholly differentiated discourse.

At first the second stanza introduces new sight images: "Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars, The trees and flowers strewing…" (ll.11-12); but soon when reading further into line 12, the initial sight image suggested by the word "strewing", which itself activates HORIZONTALITY notions, turns into multi-domain synaesthesia including lower sensory domains: "strewing (*sight*) their cool (*touch*) odors (*smell*)". The invocation of both lower and higher sensory stimuli at this stage implies that, from the speaker's point of view, plant existence can be *perceived* in various

sensory forms. This is particularly interesting when, in line 13, the speaker manifests her own *imperceptible* existence: "I walk among them, but none of them are noticing" (l.13).

Up to this point, and from a purely sensory point of view, there is no further information about the *persona* speaking. The only sensory information the reader has been provided with is her VERTICAL appearance. Thus, whereas plant life is perceptible through different senses provoking demonstrations of praise (l.6), the speaker's life is not; which implies that the gap between both existences broadens as far as resemblance conditions are concerned.

The following lines (14-18) are less emotional in the sense that lower sensory images disappear, and body position image-schemas play a crucial role in space construction. At this stage discourse is perceived as more intellectual due to the facts that, on the one hand, the sight domain is again taken to the front (basically through the HORIZONTALITY image-schema) and, on the other, these lines include a lexicon associated with mental activities:

> Sometimes I *think* that when I am SLEEPING
> I must most perfectly resemble them –
> *Thoughts* gone dim.
> It is more natural to me, LYING DOWN.
> Then the sky and I are in open *conversation*.
>
> (ll.14-18, my emphasis: HORIZONTALITY in upper case, mental activity in italics)

The fluctuating relevance of one or the other domains at different stages in the discourse, implies the speaker seems not to be able to make some clear choice between her intellectual and emotional experiences, at least not to this point. However, notice in her last words the lower sensory image suggested by the verb "touch": this tactile image eventually calls for a still latent emotional concern, and suggests the speaker's need to be perceptible.

> And I shall be useful when I lie down finally;
> Then the trees may *touch* me for once, and the flowers have time for

me.

<div align="right">(ll.19-20, my italics)</div>

II.4. Basic conceptual metaphors

Let's go back to the question: Why does the speaker want "to be horizontal"? or, Is there any further meaning hidden in the horizontal body position besides that of *dying*? We seem to be approaching an answer, now that we have reached the final lines:

I Am Vertical

But I would rather be horizontal.
…
And I shall be useful when I lie down finally;
Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me.

<div align="right">(title, ll.1; 19-20)</div>

In order that the reader will understand the speaker's wish, it is necessary for him/her to establish unexpected connections between the *I* speaking and the *vegetable* entities invoked. I consider these connections as unexpected because the kind of counterpart relation the reader is incited to create is constantly fluctuating between opposite concepts—first, I am vertical the same way a tree is vertical, then, I'd rather be horizontal in order to resemble trees. But actually the real connection the reader (and therefore the speaker) is performing has to do with a more abstract concept, which is that of "life."

It is because discourse makes the reader perceive plants as living entities that he/she understands the hidden wish in the poem. In fact it is not the VERTICAL or HORIZONTAL image-schemas that are at the base of the connections, since they constantly fluctuate, but the "life" concept, which is permanent all through the discourse in both spaces (ME and NOT-ME/ PLANT):

•   Regarding ME space, it is typically understood that when a person is speaking he or she must be alive, therefore the lyrical subject

is a living entity.
• 	Regarding NOT-ME/PLANT space, there are some words in the poem that suggest the living dimension of these entities through their active stances, as in lines 3 (the tree's "sucking") and 10 (the flower's "daring").

Here we have the first basic conceptual metaphor working at the base of the speaker's thoughts: the PEOPLE ARE PLANTS metaphor, which the reader may later be willing to accept as the motor of the GREAT CHAIN OF LIVING metaphor (Lakoff & Turner, 1987: 166-181) applied to the poem, as we shall see below.

• 	The PEOPLE ARE PLANTS metaphor works in the shape of A PERSON'S VALUE IS EQUAL TO A PLANT'S VALUE—the speaker is using a traditional counterpart relation based on the "beauty" value (and typically associated to women) when she says in lines 5-6:

Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed
Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,

• 	But it also works in the shape of A PERSON'S LIFELINE IS EQUAL TO A PLANT'S LIFELINE as suggested in line 8:

Compared with me, a tree is immortal

However, whereas the lyrical subject claims to wish a tree's apparent immortality, discourse incites to activate a second basic metaphor and a third one, both of them suggesting the speaker's longing for dying. These are the LYING IS DYING and the DYING IS SLEEPING metaphors. Now, how is it possible for a person to long for life and death at the same time? In fact this is not a very unusual wish, especially when considered from a mystic point of view. Thus, the Spanish Saint John of the Cross said in one of his poems:

Vivo sin vivir en mí
y de tal manera espero
que muero porque no muero.[9]

From a cognitive linguistic point of view, this paradox can be explained, first, through the creation of two different spaces for the horizontal axis:

one corresponding to body decay (death), and another one corresponding to after death existence; and second, through the space exclusiveness hypothesis. But as regards Sylvia Plath, I do not think the poem has to do exactly with any religious longing—although it seems to be suggested by lines 17-18—but with the speaker being appreciated by others. In fact the poem suggests information of a different sort supporting the equation DYING IS LIVING. At this stage we must go back to the first stanza and consider again the discourse display of sensory images.

III. Integrating the Lyrical Subject

I have already mentioned the appearance of a single taste-touch image in the first stanza, where the higher domain images are prevailing. Let us consider this lower domain image in the fragment where it occurs:

I am not a tree with my root in the soil
Sucking up minerals and motherly love
So that each March I may gleam into leaf.
(ll.2-4)

As I have already said, the adverb accompanying the action verb "up" keeps the VERTICALITY image-schema in mind. Both the orientational axes game and the visual impressions suggested by line 4 are the dominant features at this stage of discourse and to the end of the first stanza. However, line 4 invites the reader to activate figurative thought strategies in order that he/she can get at some coherent interpretation of the words "root in the soil sucking up minerals and motherly love." Here there is further intention than just telling the way trees get their nourishment: the action of "sucking up" involves not just the mineral natural objects through which plants are fed, but also something unphysical ("love") that is made physical in some way by the presence of the adjective "motherly". This is a clear case of idiosyncratic metaphoric expression activating a more basic conceptual metaphor, one that is present in many cultures: the SOIL IS MOTHER metaphor.

The fact that this metaphor is called for at the beginning of the poem should not be seen just in terms of beautiful ornamentation, but contributes to the creation of NOT-ME/PLANT mental space favouring connections with ME space. Through the trees' contact with motherly love the reader will integrate some *human dimension* in NOT-ME/PLANT space that will become

counterpart to the human dimension in Me space, since the speaker is construed by the reader as an anthropomorphic being. Besides this, the act of sucking itself is here rapidly associated to a baby's nutrition action, which includes physical and emotional nourishment (food and love) and intimate physical contact with the mother; at the same time the blending of human and non human structures in not-Me/plant space activates the people are plants metaphor.

When we read on to the end of the poem, we again come across physical contact between plants and an entity including the human dimension, but this time it is the speaker herself who is involved:

> And I shall be useful when I lie down finally;
> Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me. (ll.19-20)

In this final space very different input information is at work. As long as discourse unfolds, the reader has activated many different conceptual structures which have proven to be necessary in order to make out meaning: among them, the verticality and horizontality image-schemas and the people are plants, dying is sleeping and lying is dying conceptual metaphors. Together with these conceptual structures, the reader has dragged along other information about *plants* -such as the tree's long life, the flowers' beauty, the way they feed from soil …- and about *human life* -how it initially depends on the cares of a mother or how people are often buried in soil when dead. This already-known information has been used by the reader in order to construe mental spaces following discourse guidelines, so as to complete them and establish manifold counterpart dynamic relations between spaces. Also sensory experience has played a central role since discourse fluctuates form intellectual to emotional perspectives which seem to lead to no definite choice. In order that the reader may construe a final integrated mental space, all the information invoked will drain down to this final *blend* (Fauconnier & Turner 2001, 2002).

The last integration space answers to the resemblance question between the main entities (the *speaker* and *plants*). The resemblance connection is finally not grounded on similar body positions (i.e. verticality), but on intimate physical contact in such a way that speaker and plants share the core of life—the same way mothers and babies share life. The fact that the speaker chooses the soil is mother metaphor integrates a feminine dimension in the lyrical subject that adds up to the women are flowers

basic metaphor also at work. This is basically why I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun throughout this paper to refer to the speaker behind the poem.

This intimate physical contact with plants the speaker yearns for does not serve only to one direction (child-plant profiting from mother-speaker). Actually discourse directions incite the reader to think it is more the other way round: because plants need soil, plants care for it; thus when the speaker dies and turns soil, she will become "useful" (l.19) and, therefore, she will profit from the plants' care for her. This second profiting occurs in both the physical and conceptual dimensions. Line 20 suggests lower sensory experience (*touch*) but also abstract notions (*time*), which seems to imply the speaker's emotions and intellect work together for the same idea.

> Then the trees may *touch me* for once, and the flowers *have time for me*. (l.20, my italics)

The SPEAKER-SOIL-MOTHER equivalence means not necessarily that the lyrical subject wants to become a mother, but it seems to suggest that the speaker wants to become noticed and to feel alive. The multiple space connections give place to a new conceptual equivalence, LIVING IS BEING NOTICED, which—provided that in order to become noticed, one must die—contradicts the equation HUMAN EXISTENCE IS LIVING. This new metaphor will also be included in the SPEAKER-PERSONA mental space; in my view this metaphor is actually the core idea monitoring the whole space dynamics from the speaker's perspective.

Does then the subject mean that she is renouncing her human existence? In my opinion this is far from what she really intends to express. Her embracing human existence—instead of rejecting it—can be justified at least in two different ways, which lead to two different readings of the poem and at least to one mental creation of a complex multidimensional speaker. The first is grounded on the metaphoric nature of poetic discourse; and the second on the reader's invocation of ideas related with human transcendence.

First, we should go back to the PEOPLE ARE PLANTS and especially to the GREAT CHAIN metaphors.[10] Through the GREAT CHAIN metaphor, any particular situation involving human or non-human beings will tend to be considered as a metaphor for some equivalent situation involving human beings. This is what happens when we come across a proverb or a story

with a moral, but also what we tend to do when reading a poem. Plath's poem invites the reader to create a conceptual structure where subject, soil and plants blend into a new space articulated through the mother-child relation. Since human beings are the highest entity in the GREAT CHAIN, it is to be typically expected that a space which so intensely integrates human dimensions will be perceived by the reader as dealing with a purely human situation. Plants will be probably understood as a metaphor for other human beings involved in the subject's life and the plants' disregarding stance as a metaphor for other people's behaviour towards her. Although I find translation and paraphrasing inappropriate when dealing with poetry, I dare paraphrase the starting lines now in a new light: in my view, when the speaker says "I am vertical but I would rather be horizontal" she hints at something roughly like "I am living unnoticed but I'd rather die and be noticed, then I'll feel alive."

Yet, our imperfect sentence regarding the speaker's personality should also include some notions about her special tendency to ponder life after death and/or spiritual life—in other words, her belief that her human existence will hopefully transcend her body in the form she possesses (a human form which, interestingly, the reader has nor been given any clue about). As I have already shown above, the speaker's expectations as regards after death existence are suggested through the invocation of basic metaphors concerning ancient and occidental beliefs—THE SOIL-MOTHER and HEAVEN-SKY equivalences—and the recovering of Long Term Memory information about the BURIAL schema.

IV. Coda

As I was reading other poems, I came across one by Seamus Heaney that drew my attention, since it seemed to be a perfect further development of Plath's poem. Seamus Heaney wrote it in memory of his mother, and the poem has apparently nothing to do with Plath's. Nevertheless, I shall include it here in the feeling that Plath's lyrical subject would have liked others to think of her in these terms.

The Wishing Tree[11]

I thought of her as the wishing tree that died
And saw it lifted, root and branch, to heaven,
Trailing a shower of all that had been driven

> Need by need by need into its hale
> Sap-wood and bark: coin and pin and nail
> Came streaming from it like a comet-trail
>
> New minted and dissolved. I had a vision
> Of an airy branch-head rising through damp cloud,
> Of turned-up faces where the tree had stood.

Notes

[1] Sylvia Plath. 1981. *Collected Poems*. Edited with an introduction by Ted Hughes. London: Faber and Faber.

[2] 'Humans and most other mammals sleep lying down and stand up when they awaken' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:15). According to Cognitive Linguistics, this observation leads humans to make a conceptual connection between the standing position and the fact of being conscious, which originates the CONSCIOUS IS UP conceptual metaphor. In this article I shall use a cognitive linguistics approach, which will be explained as long as discourse unfolds.

[3] Sylvia Plath's development of her lyrical subjects is extremely interesting from a cognitive point of view, since her subjects are often complex women in pain always introduced with exquisite taste. For a further example see Calderón & Cámara (2006). The work analyses Plath's last poem "Edge" from a cognitive poetic perspective.

[4] For more works on cognitive linguistics affecting poetic analysis, see Margaret Freeman (1995, 1997, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2005, 2007), Gavins & Steen (2003), Semino & Culpeper (2002).

[5] The feminine pronoun will be used all through this article to refer to the speaker or *lyrical subject* in Plath's "I Am, Vertical". I believe in the fictional nature of poetry, which means that the speaker is an individual entity separate from the poem's author, and that there is no necessary correspondence between the author's and the lyrical subject's sex. However, I sense there is a female voice speaking in Plath's poem, I shall try to justify this impression along the discourse.

[6] For an explanation of how gestalt principles are assumed by Cognitive Linguistics, see Ungerer & Schmid (1996) especially pages 33-41. Gestalt principles are assumed by the Blending Theory designers, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2001, 2002) and by Reuven Tsur in his Cognitive Poetics (1998).

[7] In order to explain the importance of embodied imaginative understanding, Mark Johnson (1987:xiv) mentions the VERTICALITY schema, which (in his words), "emerges from our tendency to employ an up-down orientation in picking our meaningful structures of our experience. We grasp this structure of verticality repeatedly in thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as *perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright*, the activity of climbing stairs, forming a mental image of a flag-pole, measuring our children's heights and experiencing the level of water rising in the bathtub. The VERTICALITY schema is the abstract structure of these VERTICALITY experiences, images and perceptions" (my italics)

[8] Actually the ascending movement is meant to be perceived through tactile experience. However Brooks discovered that visual images can be originated from tactile experience. Following Brooks, Mark Johnson (1987:25) postulates that "image schemata transcend any specific sense modality, though they involve operations that are analogous to special manipulation, orientation, and movement".

[9] From "Coplas del alma que pena por ver a Dios" (Asún, 1996:20-21).

[10] According to Lakoff and Turner (1987:172-173) " The schemas that characterize our knowledge about people are separate from our schemas that characterize our knowledge of the physical world. The Great chain allows us to link such disparate schemas … Such common structure defines new conceptual categories in which the human and the nonhuman are seen as instances of the same thing".

[11] Seamus Heaney. 1987. *The Haw Lantern*. London: Faber and Faber, 36.

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