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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Neurotic Lyrical Subjects: Textual Indicators and Personality  
Traits

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## **Abstract**

In the present essay, I study the textual inscription of neurotic features in lyrical discourse. I want to see if it is possible to use neuroticism as a category of analysis when studying lyrical subjects. For this, I try to detect the textual indicators of neuroticism. Textual production of Sylvia Plath's and Alejandra Pizarnik's lyrical subject is analyzed on the basis of the theory of self-characterization. Direct and indirect techniques of self-characterization help me to explore how the reader constructs the lyrical subject. Eventually, the textual inscription of both lyrical subjects is put into comparison to show how it is possible to shed light on a theory based on textual indicators common to all neurotic lyrical subjects.

Key words: neuroticism, pragmatics, lyrical subject, personality traits, self-characterization, confessional poets.

## **Resumen**

En el presente ensayo me dedico a estudiar la inscripción textual de rasgos neuróticos en el discurso lírico. Pretendo dilucidar si es posible utilizar el neuroticismo como categoría de análisis para el estudio de sujetos líricos. De tal forma, resulta necesario detectar los posibles indicadores textuales del neuroticismo. La producción textual de los sujetos líricos de Sylvia Plath y Alejandra Pizarnik es analizada sobre la base de la teoría de la auto-caracterización. A su vez, las técnicas de auto-caracterización directas e indirectas me permiten explorar el proceso por el cual el lector construye al sujeto lírico. Finalmente, la inscripción textual de ambos sujetos líricos es comparada para demostrar que es posible aportar luz sobre una teoría sustentada en una serie de indicadores textuales comunes a cualquier sujeto lírico neurótico.

Palabras clave: neuroticismo, pragmática, sujeto lírico, rasgos de personalidad, auto-caracterización, poetas confesionales.



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## 1. Introduction

Alejandra Pizarnik asserts in “El deseo de la palabra” that “[o]tro es el lenguaje de los agonizantes” (269). It seems to me quite clear that a connection can be established between this statement and the fact that neurotic personality traits are common to both Sylvia Plath’s and Alejandra Pizarnik’s lyrical subject.

The method I propose consists in a multidisciplinary study that includes literature, linguistics, psychology and sociology as authoritative sources of study which can be applied to the study of literary theory, and more specifically to the lyrical subject. Lyrical subjects are anthropomorphic virtual entities that are built in the minds of readers but which are formerly shaped by writers. Therefore, I am going to make use of the theory of characterization because it enables me to explore the process by which the reader constructs the virtual entity formerly shaped by the writer.

In order to make explicit that process, it is necessary to detect the textual indicators associated with the personality traits of the two virtual entities. Accordingly, the present essay aims at providing the stepping-stone towards the discovery of the textual inscription of the personality traits of the so-called *neurotic lyrical subject*. The purpose of the essay, however, is to detect the textual indicators of the neurotic lyrical subjects of Plath and Pizarnik, in four poems, to see if it is possible to use neuroticism as a category of analysis for the study of lyrical subjects.

Plath’s poems, “Tulips” and “A Birthday Present”, belong to her last collection of poems, *Ariel* (1965), which was posthumously published. Pizarnik’s “Piedra fundamental” belongs to her last collection of poems, *El infierno musical* (1971), and “Hija del viento” belongs to *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958). The scholar Jeannine Dobbs links the two poems written by Plath saying that in “Tulips”, they are “[n]ot tulips but death [...] the gift she wants, as in ‘A Birthday Present’ (*Ariel*), but in both cases the irony is that the gift is life” (12). I focus on these two poems because they explore the lack of freedom and longing of it as well as the predisposition to search death. This predisposition is relevant because this essay will demonstrate that it is one of the foremost means to reach freedom amongst neurotic lyrical subjects. On the other hand, Pizarnik’s poems are ruled by a split of the self. I hypothesize that this split entails a lack of freedom and a distressing feeling of vulnerability.





## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Subject of Study: Lyrical Subject

The *lyrical subject* has been defined as “the person who speaks in the poem” (Cuddon 660). It is, in any case, a defining component of lyrical discourse. Through characterization, it is possible to detect different aspects concerning this anthropomorphic virtual entity (Cámara-Arenas, “(Auto-) caracterización” 36). On the contrary, the *empirical subject* or *private subject* is the real person behind the poem. For instance, Sylvia Plath is the empirical subject behind the acclaimed novel *The Bell Jar* (1963). Nevertheless, Plath’s lyrical subject cannot be called Sylvia Plath but it should be referred to as the first-person singular pronoun, “I”, that appears in her poetry in the same way Esther Greenwood appears as the first-person narrator of the aforementioned novel. This is linked to the fact that literary analysis covers those realms in which the voices speaking are the ones of the narrator within a novel (either omniscient or first-person narrator such as Esther Greenwood is) or the lyrical subject within a poem (Cuddon 660).

In the case of one of the two neurotic lyrical subjects that will be analyzed, there is a fragmentation of the self that affects the lyrical subject. This fragmentation is carried out in Pizarnik’s poems by means of two different processes: the alternation between first and second-person singular pronouns (representing both pronouns different halves of the same lyrical subject) and the transfiguration of the lyrical subject into a doll. It is important to mention that the issue of suicidal female poets splitting their lyrical subjects into two opposite selves has already been thoroughly studied by different scholars (Gilbert 451; Nicholson 113). Notwithstanding, this is not the major focus of this research but it is clearly relevant in terms of characterization.

What makes the lyrical subject, which Käte Hamburger refers to not as “the person who speaks” in the poem but as “the ‘I’ of the poem”, different from the subjects of narrative and drama is that it goes beyond in its communicative process. Expressiveness puts into question whether the lyrical subject is fictional, although this fictional aspect is self-evident in the case of the subjects of narrative and drama (157). Hence, she asserts that within lyrical discourse “el contenido de la enunciación no es el objeto de la

vivencia, sino la vivencia del objeto” (168). Timothy R. Austin claims that “it is widely held that lyric poetry functions by eliminating any gap that might otherwise separate the poet from the first-person voice speaking in the text” (5). Austin also holds that “[t]he very use of the first-person pronoun demands that we at least consider treating the poem as (or “as it were”) a private communication from some specific writer to us individuals” (3). Hence, the reader assumes, at first, that the person speaking in the poem is the person behind the poem.

For Hamburger, however, the lyrical subject is neither fictional nor autobiographical but *real* indeed. In this manner, she asserts that “el poema lírico es enunciación de realidad, es decir, enunciación de un sujeto enunciativo real que simplemente se comporta de diferente modo como sujeto lírico, y establece otro tipo de relación entre sujeto y objeto” (191). The complexity of this lyrical subject derives from the idea supported by Hamburger that experience is far more important than the objective reality within lyrical discourse. It is the empirical subject the one who creates the lyrical and this, together with the fact that expressiveness makes the lyrical subject different from the narrative and the dramatic subject, can make the reader assume that there can be a high level of likeness between the real and the artificial subject. Along these lines, the reader can say that both subjects (empirical and lyrical) can be similar but never equal.

Returning to the fact that experience is above objective reality, it could be argued that one of the aims of poetry is to impact the reader. The poem, being expressive, tries to communicate something and tends to make the reader feel something. Likewise, an astute reader is capable of finding a tendency defined by different patterns of behavior characterizing a set of personality traits of the person who is speaking in this peculiar communicative process. Readers are both active and passive since, even though they do not act as interlocutors, they try to make sense out of poetry.

Now, I propose that the reader of these two poets can perceive a neurotic tendency in their poetry. The way in which the lyrical subject behaves as the communicative process develops, even though it can be controlled by the empirical subject, shows a tendency as long as the person speaking in the poem is more or less coherent. Thusly, the neurotic tendency or neurotic personality trait perceived by an astute reader could be explained in a methodological way by means of textual indicators following what

Culpeper proposed: to enlighten the textual indicators that served the reader to deduce personality traits (1).

As a conclusion, the two following premises, extracted from Hamburger's work and used by Cámara-Arenas, should be taken into account when talking about the lyrical subject as a subject of study: 1) the lyrical subject is neither autobiographical nor fictional but *real* indeed, and as such it can be characterized by means of personality traits 2) subject, object and the experience of the subject regarding that object can be analyzed as long as the objects are similar to each other (“(Auto-) caracterización” 28).

## 2.2. Category of Study: Neuroticism

The NEO PI-R Professional Manual was developed on the basis of the five-factor model of personality, and as such it consists of five domains: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C). These five domains are essential “to understand personality at the broadest level” (McCrae and Costa 14). Furthermore, each of the five domains consists of six facet scales that “offer a more fine-grained analysis by measuring specific traits” (14). The six facets of N are the ones I will follow in order to organize my analysis.

McCrae and Costa assert that “[b]y describing the individual's standing on each of the five factors, we can provide a comprehensive sketch that summarizes his or her emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles” (14). Thus, for example, Esther Greenwood, the protagonist of Sylvia Plath's only novel *The Bell Jar*, stands as a neurotic claiming that “[i]f neurotic is wanting two mutually exclusive things at one and the same time, then [she is] neurotic as hell” (98). Neuroticism, however, is a little bit more complicated than that. It is characterized by “[t]he general tendency to experience negative affects such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust” (McCrae and Costa 14).

A profile of a neurotic lyrical subject could be drawn following the method to describe a villain used by Cámara-Arenas (“Villains in Our Mind” 16) on the basis of the work of McCrae and Costa. Thus, a lyrical subject who scores high in neuroticism could be described as follows:

N1. Anxiety: [neurotic lyrical subjects] “are apprehensive, fearful, prone to worry, nervous, tense, and jittery.”

N2. Angry Hostility: [they tend to] “experience anger and related states such as frustration and bitterness.”

N3. Depression: [neurotic lyrical subjects] “are prone to feelings of guilt, sadness, hopelessness, and loneliness.”

N4. Self-Consciousness: [they] “are uncomfortable around others, sensitive to ridicule, and prone to feelings of inferiority.”

N5. Impulsiveness: [they perceive] “[d]esires [...] as being so strong that the individual cannot resist them, although he or she may later regret the behaviour.”

N6. Vulnerability: [neurotic lyrical subjects] “feel unable to cope with stress, becoming dependent, hopeless, or panicked when facing emergency situations” (McCrae and Costa 16).

### 2.3. Procedure: *Verbalization* and *Textual Behavior*

The four poems will be analyzed on the basis of the textual inscription provided by the lyrical subjects, following what Cámara-Arenas proposed in “A Cognitive-Pragmatic Model of Self-Characterization” (107). Cámara-Arenas asserted that “an observer may attribute a trait to a character by considering either something she has said –a verbalization–, or considering something she has done –a certain behavior” (“Self-Characterization” 107). Thus, I am going to pay attention to two different self-characterization techniques. On the one hand, the *verbalization*, that is, what the lyrical subjects say in the text. In other words, the “direct definitions” (Pfister 307) and “explicit self-commentaries” (Rimmon-Kenan 59-60; Culpeper 172) that the lyrical subjects utter and which constitute techniques of active self-characterization.

On the other hand, the *verbal behavior*, what the lyrical subjects do in the text, refers to techniques of indirect self-characterization. This second type of techniques will be analyzed on the basis of the work of Searle and Vanderveken dealing with the semantical analysis of illocutionary verbs. What I am going to analyse, then, are “[t]he minimal units of human communication” which are called *illocutionary acts* and which consist of “an illocutionary force *F* and a propositional content *P*” (Searle and

Vanderveken 1). While the information provided by *F* always needs to be interpreted, the information provided by *P* does not.

Finally, active and passive techniques will be put into relation with the six different facets of neuroticism which McCrae and Costa propose in the *NEO PI-R Professional Manual*, which are anxiety, angry hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability.



### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. N1 – Anxiety

Turning to the previous presentation of how a neurotic lyrical subject would be, it is important to remind that, as for *anxiety*, neurotic lyrical subjects “are apprehensive, fearful, prone to worry, nervous, tense, and jittery” (Costa and McCrae 16).

##### 3.1.1. Plath

The question to begin with is whether Plath’s lyrical subject is using a direct technique to characterize herself. In the case of “Tulips” there is no direct definition. “Tulips” is a poem dominated by a strong desire for passivity as *P* of many of the fragments that are going to be explained show. In such a way, the lyrical subject’s anxiety can be inferred from the craving for passivity, even though it is not going to appear by means of verbalization but by means of negative illocutionary acts related to verbal behavior. Something similar is going to happen with “A Birthday Present” where N1–Anxiety is not the main neurotic facet.

Verbal behavior is going to be discussed on the basis of the relation between anxiety and negative illocutionary acts as it was previously inferred. The following stanza (1) is presented wholly in order to give a context to the last line that is the one I am hugely interested in:

(1)  
Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.  
The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me  
Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,  
And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow  
Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,  
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.  
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen. (“Tulips”)

*P* is clearly negative in this case. As for *F*, what makes the speech act here discussed an *assertive* is the fact that it expresses what the speaker believes to be the case (Searle and Vanderveken 182). She complains about the fact that the tulips in the room are eating

her oxygen. She is complaining about this and not only stating it because “to complain about *P* is to assert that *P* with the additional sincerity condition that one is dissatisfied with *P* and the additional preparatory condition that the state of affairs that *P* is bad” (Searle and Vanderveken 191). In these lines, the lyrical subject knows that the fact that the tulips are presumably eating her oxygen is not positive and she is worried. Nevertheless, due to passivity this looks more like a depressive statement than an anxious one. She is characterizing herself as someone who is feeling anxious due to what is happening. She is also vulnerable but at a later stage it will be further developed the interrelation between facets like N1–Anxiety and N4–Self-consciousness, as it can be deduced in the instance provided above, or N1–Anxiety and N6–Vulnerability.

The following fragment (2) illustrates, as well, the verbal behavior related to anxiety that will characterize the lyrical subject of Plath’s poems:

(2)

The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.

The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;

They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,

And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes

Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me. (“Tulips”)

*F* of the second line is different to the one of the surrounding speech acts. It is, however, an ambiguous speech act. Then, two possibilities should be considered: 1) the lyrical subject is trying to direct the hearer to help her 2) the lyrical subject is expressing her discontent because, due to the influence of N6–Vulnerability, she does not think it is possible to find a solution. In this second case proposed, the speech act would be under the command of an *expressive* illocutionary force. Thus, the “I” of the poem would be complaining by means of this statement. In the rest of the lines she seems tense and nervous because of the personification of both the walls and the tulips, but in this one in particular she is worried. Furthermore, according to this second reading, she is expressing her discontent by means of a complaint which does not try to reach a solution. She thinks that nothing can be done and that is why the speech act itself is an expressive and not an assertive, as they are the rest of the lines in the fragment. In the case of this fragment (2) both N1–Anxiety, by means of previously mentioned traits, and N6–Vulnerability, by means of the panicking trait, appear. Then, vulnerability is important to understand this reasoning and it is crucial to think about the particular use



of the modal verb “should”. The lyrical subject is vulnerable but more than vulnerable she is anxious and fearful because she is “aware of her heart [that] opens and closes” and that is the complete opposite of what she wants. That is why she overtly complains. Nevertheless, the other reading here proposed could make someone think of the line discussed as a warning made by means of a *directive*, since she believes the tulips to be dangerous. The lyrical subject could be expressing her discontent by means of a warning but also trying to make the hearer solve her problem since she is not able to do it by herself. One way or another, she is vulnerable and consequently anxious about the fact that a solution to her problem is not found.

Finally, (3) can be regarded as a whole speech act even though it extends along three different stanzas. Anxiety in “A Birthday Present” comes hand in hand with N5–Impulsiveness and the wish for the birthday present:

(3)

Let it not come by the mail, finger by finger.

Let it not come by word of mouth, I should be sixty

By the time the whole of it was delivered, and too numb to use it.

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil. (“A Birthday Present”)

The lyrical voice is jittery in this speech act where she tries to get what she wants from the hearer within the poem. Hence, she is trying to achieve the *directive* illocutionary point by dint of persistence, insisting, which can be deduced by the anaphoric repetitions of the first two lines or the place in the last line. Thereupon, nervousness triggers insistence in impulsive subjects who need to fulfil their wishes in any event.

### 3.1.2. Pizarnik

Before starting to discuss how Pizarnik’s fragment (4) illustrates the direct characterization of her lyrical subject as an anxious subject, it is important to understand one of the lines of “Piedra fundamental”, the one that prays “[e]ste decir y decirse no es grato.” In this line, she is the one who is speaking and she is characterizing herself as a disgraceful person. Along these lines, the notion of the fragmentation of the self can be introduced with the help of some of the lines of the aforementioned fragment:

(4)

No es esto, tal vez, lo que quiero decir. Este decir y decirse no es grato. No puedo hablar con mi voz sino con mis voces. También este poema es posible que sea una trampa, un escenario más. (“Piedra fundamental”)

What the lyrical subject is doing, making reference to this “speaking and speaking to (oneself)”, is evidencing the fact that within the poem she is both speaker and hearer. The lyrical subject is split in two and that is why she cannot speak with “her voice but with her voices.”

On that account, she is not calling herself disgraceful for making poetry that revolves around her but for having two selves. She is characterizing herself, at the same time, as incapable of writing poetry without recurring to her lower self. In short, “the boundaries of the self [are] a source of unremitting anxiety” in Pizarnik’s poems (Nicholson 117). Thus, this “I” within the poem, which in the particular case of Pizarnik’s lyrical subject is, more often than not, both first-person and second-person singular, is fearful, worried and nervous at the same time. Besides, she is skeptical and pessimistic as can be seen from the last line, where she is making a negative guess. The only statement the lyrical subject is not doubtful about is the one that is a negative expressive speech act: “Este decir y decirse no es grato.” She is not doubtful because she is deploring herself and her actions for the reason that they are supposedly unpleasant. Deploring is a “strong expression of sorrow, or discontent [that] seems to carry with it the implication that someone is responsible for the thing deplored” (Searle and Vanderveken 214). To put it in other words, deploring makes reference to the fact that *P* is presupposed as bad, and besides *P* is the consequence of someone’s actions, in this case the lyrical subject. Conjointly, she is tense and worried not only about her actions but also about the uncertainty of what she is doing; ergo, she is anxious.

### 3.2. N2 – Angry Hostility

According to the presentation of the neurotic lyrical subject and the issue of *angry hostility*, neurotic lyrical subjects tend to “experience anger and related states such as frustration and bitterness” (Costa and McCrae 16).

### 3.2.1. Plath

Angry hostility can be perceived more clearly in “A Birthday Present” than in “Tulips”, mainly because this angry hostility is related to N1–Anxiety but more clearly to N5–Impulsiveness. The lyrical subject’s unsatisfied craving for the birthday present elevates her irritable mood. Besides, Plath’s lyrical subject is excitable, something that is common to N1 and N5, that derives into a rough response as can be seen in (5):

(5)

Can you not see I do not mind what it is.

Can you not give it to me? (“A Birthday Present”)

From this kind of response where the lyrical subject gets angry, it changes to a tender and persuasive one as can be seen in (6):

(6)

I will only take it and go aside quietly.

You will not even hear me opening it, no paper crackle,

No falling ribbons, no scream at the end.

I do not think you credit me with this discretion. (“A Birthday Present”)

However, only the last line of (6) could be considered a direct self-characterization where the lyrical subject is trying to characterize herself as someone discrete. Notwithstanding, the way in which she tries to convince the hearer shows that she is irritable and moody. She is characterizing herself through what she says but instead of achieving the trait she is referring to, she is characterized as someone irritable, tense and moody which are essential traits of angry hostility.

As for verbal behavior, there is only one instance within “Tulips”:

(7)

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.

Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe

Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby. (“Tulips”)

In the first line of (7), the lyrical subject directly complains, expressing her dissatisfaction with the presence of a bouquet of flowers someone brought her. She is complaining because of the vulnerability and the stress coming from the presence of

these flowers. Hence, the lyrical subject's rude behavior, criticizing the birthday present, characterizes her as a hostile subject who goes against the politeness principle. She is angry at the tulips but also at the person who brought them because he must have known what her reaction would be. However, it all depends on who the hearer is, whether the reader or the person within the poem who brought the flowers. If the lyrical subject is talking to the person within the poem, she would be asking for help. Nonetheless, the lyrical subject within "Tulips" does not seem to have a direct communication with the people within the poem, but with the reader who cannot do anything to help her with the exception of listening to the complaint of a neurotic lyrical subject who is not resolute enough to look for a change.

In "A Birthday Present", however, there is an explicit communication between the speaker and the hearer within the poem, even though the only one who speaks is the lyrical subject. Once again, the neurotic hostile trait is easily perceived in this unilateral communication and reflected in (8):

(8)

You are silver-suited for the occasion. O adding machine —

Is it impossible for you to let something go and have it go whole?

Must you stamp each piece in purple,

Must you kill what you can? ("A Birthday Present")

This fragment is composed by a bunch of expressive speech acts uttered by the lyrical subject. Many of them are uttered as questions, rhetorical questions in fact, which do not attempt to get an answer but to judge the hearer. Thus, the questions become assertions. In contrast to what was said about "Tulips", here the lyrical subject is active and fully engaged in the unilateral conversation. It is the hearer within the poem who the lyrical subject holds accountable for all her problems. The lyrical subject is angry at him and she is both criticizing and accusing him because "when one accuses, one assigns responsibility to some other agent, who is usually [...] the hearer" (Searle and Vanderveken 190). Furthermore, "[t]o criticize someone or something is to assert that a certain state of affairs that has to do with him or it is bad while expressing disapproval of him or it" (Searle and Vanderveken 190). That is the reason why the lyrical subject's verbal behavior constructs her as a hostile subject. She is verbally attacking another

human being. She is not blaming him because blaming “can be done privately in one’s thoughts [while] accusing requires a public speech performance” (Searle and Vanderveken 190).

Turning back to (5) and (6), the interrelation between N2–Angry Hostility and N5–Impulsiveness, appears. In (5), for instance, the lyrical subject is impatiently waiting to get what she wants from the hearer. The lyrical subject uses different modest pleas aiming at reaching the directive illocutionary point. In other words, she is modestly commanding the hearer to give her the present. And, it is due to the intensity of her craving that she achieves a strengthened illocutionary point (Searle and Vanderveken 204). However, the false modesty of the pleas collides with the angry hostility introduced in the last line of (6). The rhetorical questions intensify the already hostile nature of the speech acts. Furthermore, she continues to criticize the hearer for not understanding her not only in (5) but also in the last line of (6) where she is using a veiled form of assertion to tell him that he neither knows her nor understands her. That is what makes her angry and it is the basis of the tense relationship between the speaker and the hearer. To sum up, in the end two different sides of the neurotic profile overlap, characterizing the lyrical subject here presented as unable to control cravings, on the one hand, and irritable and hostile, on the other hand.

### 3.2.2. Pizarnik

In Pizarnik’s poems, angry hostility is not so important since they are other facets the ones that prevail. Consequently, no instances of direct self-characterization related to verbalization can be found.

Despite this fact, verbal behavior will be analyzed in order to show that even if it is minimal there is still angry hostility in Pizarnik’s poems. Then, in the case of (9), it is important to take into account what could be called “self-questioning”:

(9)

Las muñecas desventradas por mis antiguas manos de muñeca, la  
desilusión al encontrar pura estopa (pura estopa tu memoria): el padre,  
que tuvo que ser Tiresias, flota en el río. *Pero tú, ¿por qué te dejaste  
asesinar escuchando cuentos de álamos nevados?* (“Piedra fundamental”; my italics)

The asking self is self-characterizing, both herself and the other, asking her one deploring question. She is overtly deploring what the other did since readers attend to a “strong expression of sorrow, or discontent [which] seems to carry with it the implication that someone is responsible for the thing deplored” (Searle and Vanderveken 214). *P*, carried out by one of the selves, is bad and she is the one to blame since the responsibility lies in her hands. In short, the lyrical subject is angry at the hearer. That is the reason why Pizarnik’s lyrical subject utters a rhetorical question, as Plath’s lyrical subject did, criticizing the hearer and her actions. However, the speaker and the hearer, in this case, are the same due to the fragmentation of the self.

Eventually, the questioning of this lyrical subject, the doppelganger of Pizarnik’s lyrical subject, is self-attributing the trait of irritable and excitable (related to N2–Angry Hostility) while the one that is being questioned is characterized as weak and hopeless (related to N3–Depression) as well as inefficient and irrational (related to N6–Vulnerability). Thus, different spectra of the same neurotic subject are uncovered at the same time.

### 3.2. N3 – Depression

Neurotic lyrical subjects dealing with depression “are prone to feelings of guilt, sadness, hopelessness, and loneliness” (Costa and McCrae 16).

#### 3.3.1. Plath

Traces of a direct depressive characterization of Plath’s lyrical subject are not hard to find, both in “Tulips” and in “A Birthday Present”. Nevertheless, due to the explicitness of the direct characterization, verbal behavior related to depression is going to be discussed more deeply.

As for verbalization, in “Tulips”, Plath’s lyrical subject gives glimpses of a direct characterization of herself as a depressive entity using statements like (10) and (11), which introduce the notion of hopelessness and some kind of guilt, or the metaphor introduced in (12), which is related to a certain feeling of loneliness but more clearly to hopelessness. Statements like (10) and (11) have been already studied by Gilbert and

they have been defined as “recurrent self-defining statements”, which are common in Plath but also in other confessional poets (446):

(10)

I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions. (“Tulips”)

(11)

Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage—” (“Tulips”)

(12)

I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat  
Stubbornly hanging on to my name and address. (“Tulips”)

Furthermore, the tendency to experience sadness of this subject is reinforced by these depressive statements which make the speaker underestimate herself and leads her to a position of inner submission.

Discussing the verbal behavior related to depression in Plath’s poems, it is meaningful to illustrate it with instances like:

(13)

I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way. (“A Birthday Present”)

What can be found in (13) is a hopelessness (related to N3–Depression) combined with certain impulsiveness (N5) that leads the lyrical subject to leave behind the lack of confidence, typical of depression, and to replace it with a certainty in suicidal thoughts. These suicidal thoughts are expressed by means of strong assertive speech acts, as it is the case of (13), through which the subject admits a negative *P* which is related to her. Besides, the already strong assertive *F* is reinforced by the adverbial “any possible way”. However, before these strong suicidal statements take place some tender depressive thoughts can be seen as in fragment (14):

(14)

I didn’t want any flowers, I only wanted  
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.  
How free it is, you have no idea how free—  
The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,  
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.  
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them  
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet. (“Tulips”)

The wish for death begins with this fragment, which is always reinforced by past events and feelings. In this fragment, the lyrical subject is remembering. She asserts, by means of a claim, what she wanted in the past. Next, her thinking comes to the present and expresses, praising, what she feels in regards to the previous claim and exactly in regards to what she really wanted. In the last two lines, the death wish is introduced in the present. Hence, there is a kind of sequence: “negative assertive (of the past)” followed by “positive and opposite expressive (of the present)” and ends up with a “negative assertive (of the present)”. This could be one of the possible ways in which a depressive thought works.

Along this research, I have discussed the interrelation between the different facets of neuroticism. In the case of the current N3–Depression its relation with N5–Impulsiveness has already been detected, but not the possible relation to N2–Angry Hostility, which in fact is not overtly expressed. The main feature of fragment (15) is the hopelessness felt by the lyrical subject, but tense relationship between hearer and speaker is still present.

(15)

I do not want much of a present, anyway, this year.

After all I am alive only by accident. (“A Birthday Present”)

Going back to deeper thoughts it is relevant to recall the last stanzas of “A Birthday Present” (16):

(16)

*If it were death*

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes.

I would know you were serious.

*There would be a nobility then, there would be a birthday.*

And the knife not carve, but enter

Pure and clean as the cry of a baby,

And the universe slide from my side. (“A Birthday Present”; my italics)

Significantly, *P* is presented here by means of the different parts of a conditional structure and the possibility presented in the conditional would be welcomed. This is paradoxical since welcoming is defined by Searle and Vanderveken (216) as “an



expression of pleasure or good feeling about the presence or arrival of someone” whilst this research is mainly discussing speech acts with negative *P*. She is only willing to accept the birthday present and to express approbation, praising for instance, where *P* should also be good, if it is what she desires: death.

### 3.3.2. Pizarnik

In the case of Pizarnik, there are not many clear examples of self-characterization about depression but there are fragments which aim at the more direct, by means of verbalization, than at the indirect self-characterization, by means of verbal behavior. This may be because the principal textual inscription of depression lies in the negative *P*. In “Hija del viento”, for example, one of the two selves says to the other (17):

(17)  
Pero tú alimentas al miedo  
y a la soledad  
como a dos animales pequeños  
perdidos en el desierto.

With this, the feeling of loneliness is introduced and directly attributed to the self. Another instance of verbalization, which can be understood as either a continuous or temporary assessment, is the second sentence in (18):

(18)  
No puedo hablar para nada decir. Por eso nos perdemos, yo y el  
poema, en la tentativa inútil de transcribir relaciones ardientes. (“Piedra fundamental”)

The “I” of the poem and the poem are lost every time they meet for transcribing sentiments. They become hopeless and guilty because they are not capable of achieving what they try, every time they meet. At the same time, loneliness is introduced once again because, even though she personifies the poem, the only real entity is the lyrical subject which is directly describing herself as lonely, hopeless, guilty and incapable. The next fragment (19) that is presented as a question and that, according to the fragmentation of the self, could be made by one of the two selves to the other, reinforces the idea that she is lost and incapable:

(19)

¿A dónde la conduce esta escritura? A lo negro, a lo estéril, a lo fragmentado. (“Piedra fundamental”)

It can be said that this depressive state comes before the lyrical subject gets angry as it happens in (9). In (18) and (19) she is dissatisfied but she is not angry as she is in (9). Thus, verbal behavior can be seen in previous examples. For instance in (18) where the first sentence is a complaint, whose *P* is bad, uttered by the speaker for expressing dissatisfaction.

Eventually, one of the most important instances of direct depressive self-characterization is the one illustrated by the last stanza of “Hija del viento”:

(20)

Pero hace tanta soledad  
que las palabras se suicidan (“Hija del viento”)

In regards to verbalization, the *F* is the one of an expressive while *P* is considered bad and someone responsible for *P* (Searle and Vanderveken 214). This means that it is highly possible that the lyrical subject is discontent with *P* and deploring *P* because she feels that the person who is responsible for it is herself (“the one who feeds loneliness”). Furthermore, the absence of period at the end of the sentence could also be considered a textual indicator of depression.

### 3.4. N4 – Self-Consciousness

According to the presentation of the neurotic lyrical subjects and the issue of self-consciousness, neurotic lyrical subjects “are uncomfortable around others, sensitive to ridicule, and prone to feelings of inferiority” (Costa and McCrae 16).

#### 3.4.1. Plath

Self-consciousness is really important when analyzing the characterization of Plath’s lyrical subject. One instance of the direct self-characterization is presented in (1). Direct self-characterization appears in sentences like the fourth one, where she is

giving a direct description where *P* is always negative. She presents herself in a negative manner, with a voice between defensive and anxious. Another important sentence is the first one where both the confidence on the negative aspect and the defensive position, due to a sense of ridicule, appear characterizing the self as someone who is self-conscious. However, Plath's lyrical subject is an aggressive self-conscious subject as it is going to be explained below.

Before starting to talk about indirect self-characterization, it is relevant to mention one fragment, (21), that will be further explained in the last section of the analysis dealing with N6–Vulnerability:

(21)  
Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley  
I watched my teaset, my bureaus of linen, my books  
Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head. (“Tulips”)

Here, a sense of ridicule (“scare and bare”) is added to an emergency situation where the lyrical subject is vulnerable (“I watched [...] and the water went over my head”). She becomes more vulnerable because of the influence of self-consciousness.

On the other hand, N4's verbal behavior works hand in hand with N2–Angry hostility. In the first line of fragment (1), she complains because she is watched now, what is uncomfortable for her, and she gets angry at those who watch her. In the fourth line, she says directly how she sees herself as was previously explained. And, in the last line, she confesses the wish performed in the past with a consequence in the present: she has now no face because she wanted “to efface herself”.

The last instance of self-characterization, which could be considered direct even though it is not the lyrical subject herself who says it, it is the one made by means of the voice of an object. In this peculiar fragment (22), even the image the birthday present has of the lyrical subject is negative:

(22)  
‘Is this the one I am to appear for,  
Is this the elect one, the one with black eye-pits and a scar? (“A Birthday Present”)

The voice within the poem highlights two physical traits. In this way, the lyrical subject is being characterized. It is said that she has “black eye-pits” and “a scar”. These two

elements are not extraneous to the neurotic realm. The black eye-pits can be a symptom of a behavior coming from vulnerability and anxiety or even impulsiveness. The scar could be metaphorical and could make reference to someone that is broken and consequently hopeless and depressed.

#### 3.4.2. Pizarnik

Self-consciousness cannot be found in those poems of Pizarnik here presented while all the other facets can. Besides, N4–Self-consciousness is not only Pizarnik’s least common facet but also the only facet that is not explicit in the collections of poems to which the two poems analyzed belong to.

#### 3.5. N5 – Impulsiveness

Those neurotic subjects among whose personality traits impulsiveness can be found perceive “[d]esires [...] as being so strong that the individual cannot resist them, although he or she may later regret the behavior” (Costa and McCrae 16).

##### 3.5.1. Plath

In the case of Plath’s lyrical subject, there are no instances of verbalized direct self-characterization related to impulsiveness.

As for verbal behavior, it is interesting that there are no traits of impulsiveness in Plath’s “Tulips”, where it would be reasonable as a consequence of the panic produced by the presence of the tulips. In spite of all this, the craving she has “to be utterly empty” related to N3–depression could be considered impulsive. There are, however, many instances of impulsive verbal behavior in “A Birthday Present”. The first instance (23) shows how the lyrical subject tries, by means of a directive, to get what she wants because her hearer is the only one who can give it to her:

(23)

There is one thing I want today, and only you can give it to me. (“A Birthday Present”)

The lyrical subject is uttering a more humble directive speech act, which can be considered a plea due to the stronger desire of what is proposed by *P* (Searle and Vanderveken 204). Thus, “beg”, “supplicate” and “implore” are illocutionary verbs which, due to the intensity of the desire they express, can be related to N5–Impulsiveness and the personality traits that derive from it.

The constant use of interrogative statements and anaphoric repetitions are the two predominant formal aspects which bring to life the repetitive trait of an unfinished impulsive process as can be seen in (24):

(24)

What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?

It is shimmering, has it breasts, has it edges?

I am sure it is unique, I am sure it is just what I want. (“A Birthday Present”)

Different instances of assertive speech acts, showing what the lyrical subject believes to be the present she desires, appear. In relation to the previously discussed humbler speech act, it is relevant to explain that impulsive lyrical subjects tend to beg for what they desire as in (6). Besides, they try to minimize their pleas, using particles like “only” and “even”, in order to persuade their hearers.

Apart from all this begging, there are fragments in which the verbal behavior indirectly characterizes the lyrical subject as an impulsive subject with all those desperate personality traits arising from it, such as hastiness or self-centeredness as can be seen in (25) or (13):

(25)

But it shimmers, it does not stop, and I think it wants me.

I would not mind if it was bones, or a pearl button. (“A Birthday Present”)

As for the illocutionary logic behind them, fragment (26) is based on an assertive, the first line, plus the later expressive, the second line, while (13) is only one powerful assertive speech act. Fragment (13) is an admission where the phrase “any possible way” reinforces the already powerful assertive *F*.

### 3.5.2. Pizarnik

In the case of Pizarnik, however, there is one instance of verbalized direct self-characterization related to impulsiveness, which appears in (26):

(26)

Sus ojos eran la entrada del templo, para mí, que *soy errante*, que amo y muero. Y hubiese cantado hasta hacerme una con la noche, hasta deshacerme desnuda en la entrada del tiempo. (“Piedra fundamental”; italics mine)

The lyrical subject is presented as willing to do anything in order to fulfill her craving and that is the reason why she is unable to land somewhere and that she calls herself a wanderer. The second part of the fragment should be analyzed in relation to verbal behavior.

The second half of fragment (26) is ruled by an insistence on a past event. The lyrical subject insists that she was willing to fall apart to fulfil her craving. Persistence serves to achieve the illocutionary point as can be seen with the repetition and ellipsis of the verbal phrase or the use of the polyptoton (“hacerme” y “deshacerme”). The task, however, was not accomplished probably due to certain inability that could be in relation to other neurotic facets as N6–Vulnerability, because what follows are different statements about a strong feeling of vulnerability. Hence, thank to this fragment, it could be said that some facets can be blocked by others, reminding at the same time that some facets have a higher degree of strength depending on the poets and on the way they build up their lyrical subjects.

Staying on the subject of verbal behavior, it is important to talk of (27):

(27)

Tú lloras debajo de tu llanto,  
tú abres el cofre de tus deseos  
y eres más rica que la noche. (“Hija del viento”)

The fragment can be divided by the comma into two different segments. On the one hand, there are the negative particles (“lloras” and “llanto”) which make up the hyperbole. On the other hand, in the second segment there is a kind of contraposition, introduced by means of an expressive speech act near to a boast. N5–Impulsiveness appears as a consequence of the distress and the craving is such that the lyrical subject

does not hesitate to open the metaphorical “cofre de sus deseos”. Thus, the second segment looks now positive, however, it is only a coping mechanism used by the lyrical subject. The fragmentation of the self is transcendental in regards to N5–Impulsiveness since the lyrical subject is both speaker and hearer and she uses the coping mechanism mentioned to turn things around, trying to show how unfortunate she is.

In the following stanza (28) there is a clear hopelessness again that confirms what has been explained up to this point:

(28)

Yo quería que mis dedos de muñeca penetraran en las teclas. Yo no quería rozar, como una araña, el teclado. Yo quería hundirme, clavarme, fijarme, petrificarme. Yo quería entrar en el teclado para entrar adentro de la música para tener una patria [...] (“Piedra fundamental”)

In this fragment there is repetition (“Yo quería”) that emphasizes the impulsiveness of the action committed by the subject. The speech acts that compose the fragment are assertive speech acts that show this particular use: to admit or to confess. The action was carried out but it is not as bad as she wants the reader to think. *P* is perceived as bad by her but not by the reader, and that is the reason why it is perceived as a confession from her point of view and as an admission from the reader’s point of view. Searle and Vanderveken (189) assert that the *P* of an admission is bad while the *P* of a confession is “usually *very* bad”. Furthermore, the *P* of these two assertives is “in some way connected to the speaker”. I propose that the main difference between admit and confess is that someone confesses something very bad carried out by him/her in the past. That is why Searle and Vanderveken claim that “whenever one confesses one admits, but not all admissions are confessions” (189).

In these last two fragments, (27) and (28), Pizarnik’s lyrical subject does not show any kind of regret once the impulsive act is carried out. However, these impulsive acts are usually restricted either by the hopelessness, as in the case of the first one, or by the vulnerability of someone who seems to be cursed. A certain degree of regret can only be glimpsed in fragment (28), once she presented something innocent as dreadful. In this case, by admitting it, she attributes that negative characteristic to her craving.

### 3.6. N6 – Vulnerability

Neurotic lyrical subjects, who are considered vulnerable, “feel unable to cope with stress, becoming dependent, hopeless, or panicked when facing emergency situations” (Costa and McCrae 16).

#### 3.6.1. Plath

At the very beginning of (21), an instance of verbalized self-characterization can be found. However, it is important to bear in mind that this particular trait is temporary and common to the specific situation that is being told. A stressful situation is presented and within that stressful situation the lyrical subject is presented “[s]cared and bare”. *Scared* is the first adjective, which already informs us about her mental state in the past, but after scared, *bare* is introduced. *Scared* was a negative adjective from the very beginning, however, *bare* is not. Being introduced by a negative adjective and surrounded by verbs with a negative polarity makes the adjective negative itself. This negative connotation given to the second adjective, which is highly related to N4–Self-consciousness, characterizes the lyrical subject as someone vulnerable who does not display resistance. She becomes hopeless facing this situation due to the fact that she is both scared and bare.

The close relation between N1–Angry Hostility and N6–Vulnerability becomes evident in “Tulips”. However, it is not something exclusive to this poem. The following fragments, (29) and (30), extracted from “A Birthday Present”, will serve to illustrate the verbal behavior related to vulnerability as well as those personality traits common to both N1 and N6, as they are anxiety or the lack of self-confidence:

(29)

If you only knew how the veils were killing my days.

To you they are only transparencies, clear air. (“A Birthday Present”)

(30)

It stands at my window, big as the sky.

It breathes from my sheets, the cold dead centre

Where split lives congeal and stiffen to history. (“A Birthday Present”)



In (29) she is complaining about the fact that she feels vulnerable in regards to the veils while her hearer is not. She is expressing her discontent and characterizing herself as vulnerable, noticing that the veils are responsible for her state and not the hearer. On the other hand, in (30), she is talking of what she believes to be the cause of her vulnerability. In this way, it is important to bear in mind the adjectives: the “birthday present” is *big* which is supposed to let her in a position of inferiority. Besides, it is personified and “breathes from [her] sheets” what makes her anxious. In both instances assertive speech acts building up a complaint can be found. In the expressive sense, according to Searle and Vanderveken, “to complain that *P* is simply to express dissatisfaction that *P*” (191) while in the assertive the speaker asserts that *P* is bad and that she is dissatisfied with *P* as it is the case of the majority of lines of both instances.

Furthermore, the last two sentences of (31) are relevant since they explain why she panics when the tulips appear at her sight and she feels that she cannot do anything with the exception of expressing her disgust, uttering a complaint (in the assertive sense):

(31)  
Before they came the air was calm enough,  
Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.  
Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.  
Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river  
Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.  
They concentrate my attention, that was happy  
Playing and resting without committing itself. (“Tulips”)

The tulips as well as the birthday present are life, which she rejects because she only wants “to lie with [her] hands turned up and be utterly empty” (as can be seen in 14). She is dissatisfied with them and they are considered negative because they are impeding her to reach what she desires. She is asking for death because she cannot bear life as it is since she feels vulnerable and, consequently, unhappy.

### 3.6.2. Pizarnik

As for verbalization, the active characterization introduced in (32), related to the notion of the fragmentation of the self, is necessary to understand vulnerability in the realm of Pizarnik’s lyrical subject:

(32)

algo en mí no se abandona a la cascada de cenizas que me arrasa  
dentro de mí con ella que es yo, conmigo que soy ella y que soy yo,  
indeciblemente distinta de ella. (“Piedra fundamental”)

She is not directly defining herself as someone vulnerable. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the small glimpse of hope that can be perceived in this fragment, she is showing how one of the two selves feels vulnerable as opposed to the other self who is related to the “cascada de cenizas” and the verb “arrasar”. Pizarnik’s lyrical subject is once again characterizing both selves at the same time. However, in spite of the fact that both are needed in order to understand this complex lyrical subject, most of the times, the one I am highly interested in is the one who suffers the consequence of the actions of the lower self. The lower self makes the other vulnerable but also impulsive because “it is this *Doppelgänger* of a second self which, generating the woman’s uneasiness with male myths of femininity, gives energy as well as complexity to her struggle toward self-definition” (Gilbert 451).

As for verbal behavior, in (33), she is facing an emergency situation, and as an immediate consequence, she becomes dependent of “un nombre” that she repeats non-stop:

(33)

Estaba abrazada al suelo, diciendo un nombre. Creí que me había  
muerto y que la muerte era decir un nombre sin cesar. (“Piedra fundamental”)

Hopelessness is also present in the way she accepts death and tries to deal with it. She is confused and perplexed, which are traits of vulnerability. Besides, by uttering this fragment she is admitting that she panicked in a stressful situation. In this particular example, she is distancing herself in the present from herself in the past. Nevertheless, *P* is bad and connected to her. She characterizes herself, then, by means of presenting one situation that has already occurred and showing how this affects her vision of the present. This does not mean that now she is less vulnerable since she is still doubtful and insecure but overall anxious and inefficient as can be seen in (34) and (35):

(34)

Presencias inquietantes,  
gestos de figuras que se aparecen vivientes por obra de un lenguaje  
activo que las alude,

signos que insinúan terrores insolubles. (“Piedra fundamental”)

(35)

Han venido  
a incendiar la edad del sueño.  
Un adiós es tu vida.  
Pero tú te abrazas  
como la serpiente loca de movimiento  
que sólo se halla a sí misma  
porque no hay nadie. (“Hija del viento”)

In (35), there is a new sequence of speech acts, differentiated by the three different sentences, where both selves interact: 1) to assure – “something bad is going to happen” 2) to remind – “you are cursed” 3) to state – “the reaction”. The last speech act reflects the actual behaviour of the vulnerable lyrical subject who is neither efficient nor alert. The negative aspect of this sequence lays on the interactions between one half self which undermines and attacks the other half.

In (36) the lyrical subject is directly talking of the fragmentation of the self, and more specifically of the lower self that is trying to overcome her:

(36)

Una vibración de los cimientos, un trepidar de los fundamentos,  
drenan y barrenan,  
y he sabido dónde se aposenta aquello tan otro que es yo, que  
espera que me calle para tomar posesión de mí y drenar y barrenar los  
cimientos, los fundamentos,  
aquello que me es adverso desde mí, conspira, toma posesión de mi  
terreno baldío,  
no,  
he de hacer algo,  
no,  
no he de hacer nada, (“Piedra fundamental”)

While this is done by different assertives, first, admitting what she had found, and second, suggesting what she thinks to be the case at the moment in relation to what has been previously revealed. At the end of the fragment, the commissive speech acts catch all the attention. Both commissive speech acts are introduced by the negative particle “no” which shows the opposition to the situation presented where the lyrical subject is

defenseless. Words become the only way of resistance, but even words at the end work against her. That is the case of the second commissive speech act (“no he de hacer nada”) which leads to a certain feeling of hopelessness. Thus, apart from reflecting N6–Vulnerability, this fragment is also reflecting N3–Depression. She tries to be self-confident but at the end she is pessimistic. Being she “speaking and speaking to [oneself]”, as it has already been explained in this essay, with the commissive illocutionary point she is trying to assure herself to take action first and next not to take action since she, herself, has doubts.

#### 4. Results

The main textual indicators used in the essay are, on the one hand, the propositional content (*P*) and the illocutionary force (*F*) of the different illocutionary acts, and on the other hand, the figures of speech helping the reader to construct the lyrical subject as a neurotic lyrical subject.

*P* of the vast majority of the illocutionary acts discussed throughout the essay is negative, excepting when the lyrical subject is speaking of something bad as if it was good (e.g. death). N3–Depression and N4–Self-consciousness are two facets whose main textual indicator is a highly negative *P*. Besides, the direct self-characterization of the lyrical subjects is marked by the use of assertives with truly negative *P*.

Neuroticism, as it has already been explained, is characterized by “[t]he general tendency to experience negative affects such as fear, sadness, embarrassment, anger, guilt, and disgust” (McCrae and Costa 14). Some facets seem to have their own particular illocutionary acts and verbs (e.g. “criticize” or “accuse” regarding N2– Angry Hostility or “beg” regarding N5–Self-consciousness). Besides, verbs such as “admit”, “complain” or “deplore” are now verbs not only related to negative *P* but also to neuroticism. It is crucial to bear in mind that confessional poets have common topics but different worries and interests.

As for the figures of speech, repetition becomes the main textual indicator of neuroticism. Repetition, in its many variants, works within facets like N1–Anxiety, N2–Angry Hostility or N5–Impulsiveness helping the reader to construct the lyrical subject as a neurotic entity. Impatience comes hand in hand with repetition. Accordingly, an effective way to transmit anxiety is to use figures of speech as plocé in the same way that an effective way to transmit angry hostility is to go against the politeness principle. The use of rhetorical questions, which are veiled forms of assertion and can be recriminatory illocutionary acts, is one of the principal textual indicators of N2–Angry Hostility. Besides, another textual indicator of N2 lies on the fact that the majority of related speech acts are hearer-directed, hence, the lyrical subject needs to be angry at someone even though that someone is herself as in the case of Pizarnik. Repetitive questioning can also lead the reader to think of an anxious or self-conscious subject. Nevertheless, the repetition of the first-person singular pronoun and the use of

“recurrent self-defining statements” are not textual indicators of neuroticism but intrinsic textual indicators of confessional poetry.

Eventually, I would suggest that the use of silence as a potential textual indicator, which could not be included in the essay, should be taken into account for future research on the matter.

## 5. Conclusion

The textual indicators of Plath and Pizarnik's neurotic lyrical subjects of the four poems analyzed have been detected by means of the active and passive techniques of self-characterization. Similarities and differences have arisen as a direct consequence of the comparison of both lyrical subjects. It is possible, then, to prove the existence of certain personality traits reflected in the textual inscription here analyzed but, however, this is only the stepping-stone towards a unifying theory of the so-called *neurotic lyrical subject* and its defining personality traits and textual indicators.

In this paper, only two female poets and two poems written by each are deeply analyzed. Further research is needed in order to see the way in which other neurotic lyrical subjects perform. Besides, it would be also interesting to see if there is any kind of difference between the performance of female and male poets or between the performances of non-coetaneous authors, since the two poets here presented are coetaneous even though they did not live under the same social circumstances. I can say, however, that the method here proposed on the basis of the work of McCrae and Costa, on the one side (dealing with psychology and sociology), and the work of Searle and Vanderveken, on the other side (dealing with linguistics), and applied to the study of literary texts and lyrical subjects, on the basis of some of the principle techniques of characterization, works. Through the method proposed it is possible to state if one lyrical subject can be considered neurotic or not. Thus, it can be used in order to explicitly reveal those personality traits that can be perceived by astute readers of these confessional poets. Besides, the method can be used to analyze one subject in depth or in order to carry out a comparative study as the one I personally carried out.

Something that was not proposed but which is important to mention is the fact that it is impossible to determine all the textual indicators of neuroticism and the neurotic lyrical subject. That is the reason why the analysis included in this essay is fundamentally descriptive and not prescriptive, since it is impossible to build up a theory concerning the textual indicators and the personality traits of the neurotic lyrical subject even if the complete work of the two authors would be analyzed. It would still be a comparative analysis of those two lyrical subjects. This proves that further research on the matter is required and that each neurotic lyrical subject is going to have certain

characteristics and a certain way of achieving the label of neurotic lyrical subject by means of different textual indicators.

Nonetheless, something that goes beyond the limits of this research is the continuity and persistence of a neurotic lyrical subject. In the words of Susan Bassnett, discussing Pizarnik's poetry, she claims: "[l]ike Plath's poetry, her works – her seven collections of poems [...] can be seen, indeed need to be seen, as a unified whole rather than as a series of separate entities" (37). This does not only give a reason to future investigation on the matter but it also explains why I chose two poems, in the case of Pizarnik, which are so distant in time.



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## Appendix

The four poems discussed throughout the essay are attached in the accompanying CD-ROOM.