

**A Woman's Pilgrimage to Herself through the Mother Complex:
A Jungian Reading of Selected Works by Sylvia Plath**

by

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted by Sarah Josie Pridgeon for the degree of Masters in English at the University of the Free State is my own, independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another University/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

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Summary

This dissertation critically analyses Sylvia Plath's late works according to Jungian analytical psychology. The conceptual framework includes underpinnings of John Bowlby's attachment theory as well as relevant tenets of second wave feminism from Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Judith Butler. Altogether, this theoretical scaffold enables critical and novel insight of the mother-complex and the effects this had on Plath's identity and her development as a woman. The tenet of this study, epitomic of Jungian theory, is that Plath sought 'attainment of self' through unifying the various archetypes within her psyche, portrayed in her work. The purpose of this study is to examine this hypothesis through her use of maternal symbolism of role models, archetypes and symbolism. The object of study within Plath's *oeuvre* is her late work, necessarily selected due to the timing of her confrontation and development as a woman; wife, poet and mother.

To summarise firstly the psychological facet of the study, there are certain archetypal and symbolic patterns and tendencies that can be seen in Plath's work. Analytical psychology theory has been used to trace connections between the mother complex and the dimensions of the psyche, in particular, the shadow, persona and animus. This also gives rich insight into the symbolism used and its relevant meaning in connection with the mother complex and identity development. Also, Plath's characteristic ambivalence as a woman and mother has been explained in terms of John Bowlby's attachment theory, which looks at the anxious-avoidant attachment and how the inability to form a secure base in infancy manifests in ambivalence and insecurity later on in life. This study then seeks to undercover these connections within a chronological lineage of first Plath's novel, then her late poems; the reason behind this is that Plath sought to unify the aspects of her psyche and this individuation can be seen in this development.

The second theoretical school applied in this study is that of second-wave feminism. Butler's concepts of 'gender performativity' which involve power and repetition for reinforcement, have been applied to show how Plath sought to overturn prescriptive gender characteristics. This was accompanied by Simone de Beauvoir's static construct of the 'eternal feminine' and the effects this has on a woman's identity, as well as the normative social expectancies of women in the 1950s. Betty Friedan's 'feminine mystique' fortifies the restrictions these static constructs had on a woman's 'attainment of self' (to use Jung's primary tenet) or self-actualisation, as well as the stunting of inherent potentialities.

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Abstract

Sylvia Plath's work pioneers woman's experience of herself, her identity, and the ample mental, psychic, emotional and physical phases of female development. Past scholarship has endeavoured to examine her work in terms of the father-daughter relationship, mostly within a Freudian 'oedipal' framework. Yet, to date no substantive study has sought to examine the inverse: the effects the mother-complex has had on her work and by implication, her identity and development as an individual, woman, poet and mother. To address this lacuna this study aims to examine the overlooked and highly significant effect the mother-complex has had on Plath's construction of her identity in her work using anomalous Jungian theory, which posits that above all individuals seek 'attainment of self', that is, to unify the various dimensions of their psyche and become whole. I aim to analyse the rich transformative archetypes and symbolism indicative of this personal quest which was augured by her confrontation of the mother-complex.

To ascertain the effects and examine such development, the apposite, selected texts for this study comprise the last phase of her works, her late poems (post-1961) and novel (*The Bell Jar*, 1963), which I have supplemented with her journals (*The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, 2000) and the correspondence she had with her mother (*Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*, 1975) to provide a thorough and all-inclusive investigation of this phenomenon. Plath's confrontation of the rudimentary mother-complex and identity construction evident in these texts manifests in the consequential search for role models, the thematic dichotomies of life/death, creation/destruction and perfectionism characteristic of Plath's work.

The theoretical framework used to ascertain this hypothesis includes previously unapplied and befitting Jungian theory, Bowlby's attachment theory as well as second-wave feminist theory. The foremost theoretical constructs, which highlight the effects the mother has on the daughter's psyche and psychic growth, emphasises the interconnected dimensions of the psyche using Jung's concepts of the mother-complex, shadow, persona, wise old woman and animus. Attachment theory demonstrates the preliminary nascence of this mother-complex. Alongside the analytical psychology and developmental models, aspects of second-wave feminism elucidate the impact that psycho-social factors have on identity development, and woman's inherent ambivalence, as modelled by the mother and other women. This includes Betty Friedan's 'feminine mystique' and how 1950s woman's potentialities were restricted

due to static professional and personal norms; Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the 'eternal feminine' and woman as Other and Judith Butler's 'gender performativity' which confines woman's capabilities and influence to restrictive gender norms.

Altogether this multi-faceted framework provides pertinent clarifications from a new angle for this hypothesis in connection with her mother Aurelia Plath, necessitating the impact of this on her life and work. This study, representative of one poet's quest to *cherchez la femme* which follows the inherent need for 'attainment of self', can be extrapolated to fit into a broader framework that addresses the customary mother-daughter relationship interconnected with woman's identity. The expansion of these two fundamentals, relative to all women on a (personal and) collective level, is addressed in the last chapter of this study. This challenges the existing conceptualisations thereof to create a new narrative that is conducive to and necessitates woman's multifarious needs, as an attempt to rewrite and recreate a unique trajectory for the development of the restrictive and prescriptive expectations established in woman's consciousness, symptomatic of culture, as well as the affinities and aspirations within the collective unconscious.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Although Sylvia Plath's life's work can be viewed as a meta-poem¹ or '*bildungspoese*' that portrays a process of individuation pursuing the attainment of self², she underwent two prominent creative leaps before her suicide on February 11th 1963. These breakthroughs were precipitated by the confrontation of her mother-complex as well as the use of the Jungian technique of 'active imagination'³. This pilgrimage was occluded by the dysfunctional, co-dependent mother-daughter relationship between Sylvia and Aurelia Plath which consequently disturbed Plath's development and construction of her identity as a woman, poet and mother.

The complexity of Plath's life and work has lent itself to studies in various disciplines such as suicidology (Gerisch, 1998; Jacobs et al, 2003), onomastics (Behrens, 2013), mood disorders (Miller, 2006) and existential depression (Webb, 2008: 6). Previous studies within the humanities have mostly focused on Plath's relationship with her father Otto Plath (Gentry, 2006) and his oedipal occupation in her life and works (Strangeways, 1996; Bloom, 2001) within a (limiting) Freudian framework (Mazarro, 1980: 163-164; Freedman, 1993: 154), which has not yet changed. Critics have noted the lack of research on the mother-daughter relationship lacuna (See Martin, 1973: 444) which has not yet been critically explored to date (Schwartz, 2013). Others have identified this need as a central drive in Plath's work, the attempted relegation of m/Other, the effects of s/mothering. This has negated Sylvia's mother, Aurelia's significant and shaping influence on Plath and her identity. Critic Rose (1991: 161) gestures towards this lacuna when making the theoretical connection between Carl Jung and Plath:

[I]n Jung's work individuation passes through the confrontation with the realm of the Terrible Mother. The figure is, again, one half of a dyad ... Confrontation with this Terrible Mother is a

¹ Husband and fellow poet Ted Hughes observes how Plath's *oeuvre* demonstrates that her "poems build up into one long poem. She forced a task on herself, and her poetry is the record of her progress in that task" (cited in Wagner, 2000: 18)

² Carl Jung viewed the 'attainment of self' as an ultimate goal or 'moral obligation' that very few people accomplish successfully in their lifespan. Similar to Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' and Viktor Frankl's existential 'search for meaning'; Jung believed this esoteric and largely Eastern inclination to look inward to individuate was sought by mostly writers and artists (*The Spirit of Man, Art and Literature*, 1966), eager to integrate their identity. This tenet of a search for unity and perfection is the basis of the study.

³ Significantly, a major turning point in Plath's work occurred in 1959; a second in October 1961. The breakthrough occurred when she unknowingly used a technique of Jung, initiated by reading and identifying with his case study in *Symbols of Transformations* (1912). Plath attests that she found "confirmations" of his mother images in her 'Mummy story' (2000: 514) whilst reading Paul Radin's archetypal *African Folktales* (1952) at the same time.

stage in a narrative whose objective is finally, in an act of violent sacrifice, to leave her – to leave her sexuality – behind.

This premise has not yet been extended further. Critics also agree Plath's life and works sought unity and perfection through self-discovery (Smith, 1972; Yorke, 1991; Dobbs, 1997). Hughes (1982: 90-91, emphasis added) posits of Plath's works retrospectively (in connection with her first breakthrough of 'Poem for a Birthday' in 1959) that "A Jungian might call the whole phase a classic case of the *alchemical individuation of the self*".

The conceptual framework of this study uses tenets of Jungian analytical psychology as well as underpinnings from second-wave feminist theory. The selected tenets and underpinnings combine to form an efficacious and applicable framework through which Plath's work will be explored. As such, this framework allows insight and understanding into the often overlooked and very powerful forces that operate consciously and unconsciously in Plath's work. These forces work through the various symbols, metaphors, female characters, speakers and other vehicles present in Plath's work. Additionally, Plath's inadvertent use of Jung's technique allowed her to access material from the unconscious which then spurred her to create and hone her individual style. Towards the end of her career Plath found parallels within her own work and Jung's theory. Plath also found Jung's interpretations of symbols, as well as his observations of the impact of the mother on the daughter's psyche, highly relevant to her own life. Given this theoretical pertinence, I will analyse Plath's work in connection with the following eminent Jungian concepts: complex, archetypes, the self, persona, personal and collective unconscious. As mentioned, the application of these concepts allows keen insight into the vigorous, yet equally abstract and subtle influences in Plath's work.

Within a feminist scope in Jungian analytical psychology the mother plays a critical role in the daughter's formulation of her own identity, behaviour, capacity for love and ability to relate to others (Briner, 1990). Correspondingly, concepts from two literary theorists involved in second-wave feminism will be used in addition to Jung's theory: Judith Butler's 'gender performativity' as well as the impact this has on notions of identity and Simone de Beauvoir's characterisation of woman as the Other, the mythical 'Eternal Feminine' who is constructed and idealized through ambivalence. This will be conjoined with Betty Friedan's 'the feminine mystique', given its congruency in chronology and focus with de Beauvoir. These feminist concepts combine to underscore the feminist perspective from which Plath's work can be read. Plath's work presents complex and often interwoven qualities, roles and ideals in women's

psyche. As such, the above feminist concepts work hand in hand with Jung's archetypes to shed light on their function.

Jung's insights facilitate understanding of the abstract interaction and operation of forces within Plath's work. On a concrete and fundamental level, however, child development theorist John Bowlby identified the significant effect that a child's first attachment with his/her primary caregiver has on his/her functioning. The first bond formed has a pivotal effect on the individual's later attachments with others throughout his/her life, due to its nascent inception. The ambivalent connection between mother and daughter can be seen to fall below the 'anxious-avoidant' type that Bowlby identified. As such, as a point of departure in the dynamic of the mother-daughter functioning, John Bowlby's attachment theory will be used to elucidate the complex attachment form between Sylvia and Aurelia Plath.

The dubious extent to which Plath's publications have been tampered with should always first be mentioned in any study of her, as well as the extent to which her biography is relevant. Her publications were altered by Aurelia Plath, Ted Hughes, his sister Olwyn Hughes and others (see the thorough investigations of Jacqueline Rose in 'The Archive' (1991: 65-113) and Judith Kroll (2007: xxi-xxxv)). It is also important to keep in mind that her work was not published as she intended. Thus, any reader makes use of 'compromised' material. These two factors can weaken/impair our reading of her work from Plath's intended representation. Given the excess of in-depth knowledge on Plath due to her meticulous and systematic diary publications, notwithstanding those of her family and friends/colleagues, this study uses Plath's biographical information only insofar as it is relevant to the topic for providing contextualisation. Studies tend to magnify her disreputable suicide and mental illness bouts as *cause célèbre* in the analysis of her work. This in turn also overshadows and distorts its value and essence. In the case of Plath, the biographic can rarely be separated from her literary work, and *vice versa*, given that it was the source of her material as a Post-Modern poet within the Confessional movement. This study makes use of her journals which she kept and sustained until her death because they provide both creative experimentation and disclosure of her mental processes. In these journals lie the nascent seeds of the fruits of her succeeding crucial turning points and ultimate breakthrough which were subsequently dispatched in her late poems.

This study critically analyses Plath's perfectionism, unitive urge and presentation of herself and other women in *The Bell Jar* (1963) as well as the post-novel portrayal of this in her late poems, written roughly in the last year and a half of her life. Therefore, to delineate the

perimeters, this study focuses on her ‘late poems’ only including those written days before her death. These were written using her newly attained ‘Ariel voice’ which developed the threads from *The Bell Jar* (1963) and augmented the daughter-come-mother’s experience of her identity. The selected poems comprise the “third and final phase of her work” (Bloom, 2001: 2) which sought to establish her identity as woman/wife/mother after the confrontation of her mother-complex. These chronological particulars are important as they present incremental development. The dynamic of the functioning of the mother-daughter relationship is extracted from *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (2000) and *Letters Home: Correspondence* (1975), as expressed through the mother and daughter’s point of view.

Lastly, the overall discussion of individuation and ‘attainment of self’ and the mother-daughter dyad will be situated in a broader collective level in Chapter 4 under Adrienne Rich’s notion of “ovarian texts” (O’Reilly, 2004) and Esté’s emphasis on storytelling. Women writers seek to introduce a matrilineal notion of female unity, a new heritage that embraces the Other and un-silences the self by telling stories, relating with others and creating mythologies. Through her writing Plath sought to challenge the customary static construction of woman’s identity, attesting to the validity and significance of woman’s experience by making her private experiences public: a re-visionist re-writing from the prevailing historical silence.

1.1 Brief history

Chapter 1 aims to briefly depict Plath's era, poetry movement, applicable theoretical tenets, life, personality and mother-daughter relationship before proceeding to an analysis of how these factors shaped her individuation in her novel and late poetry. Plath's life was outwardly traditional as a mother of two young children who worked *ad hoc* in the writing field and filled her time with domestic chores. This is an incomplete view given other influencing factors that moulded her later works and self.

Plath's plethora portrays a wide range of publications⁴ in genre across her lifetime. The genre as well as the concurrent thematic concerns therein indicate her preoccupations at different stages in her life and development, as well as her dynamism and eclecticism. Above all, her writings indicate an unerring desire to write, tell stories and to express and find herself in the process, as well as the important averment that Plath equated her self-worth with the reception of her work from a young age.

To give a brief history, Plath was born on October 27th 1932. Her first poem was published in *Boston Herald* newspaper in 1941 at the age of 8; after which writing became a priority in her life. Writing, academics and a resolute ambition for success and acceptance remained major drivers in Plath's life. She attempted speech at 6-8 weeks and documented her development and mental processes from her early teenage years in her diaries. Annually her mother placed a diary in Plath's Christmas sock which brought about the practice of writing in her diary throughout her life. This grew to become her collection of unabridged journals, first published in 1982. Her German mother taught English and married entomologist Otto Plath, professor of

⁴ List of publications:

Magazines: Seventeen, The Christian Monitor, Mademoiselle, Harper's Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, Granta, London Magazine, The New Yorker, Ladies' Home Journal, Sewanee Review, McCall's

Anthologies: *The Collected and Other Poems* (1960), *Ariel* (1965), *Crossing the Water* (1971), *Winter Trees* (1971), *The Collected Poems* (1981), *Selected Poems* (1985)

Novels: *The Bell Jar* (1963) published just before her suicide under pseudonym Victoria Lucas

Short stories: *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams: Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts* (1977)

Plays: *Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices* (1968)

Other: *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963* (1975), *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (1982), *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (2000)

Children's books: *The Red Book* (1976), *The It-Doesn't-Matter-Suit* (1996), *Collected Children's Stories* (2001), *Mrs. Cherry's Kitchen* (2001)

Plath wrote a short story in 1959 'The Mummy', which was lost (Stevenson, 1989:165).

Plath was working on another novel around the time of her death. This has not yet been located (Axelrod, 1985). There was apparently no obvious intention on Plath's behalf to publish the *Ariel* (1965) collection (Kendall, 2001:24).

(Ted Hughes (1982: 86) stated the he destroyed the parts of her journals that included descriptions he felt were harmful to his family and children).

German and biology. His death from diabetes in 1940 resulted in Aurelia having to take care of her two young children, Warren and Sylvia Plath.

Plath's upbringing and Aurelia's life choices are important because Plath inadvertently modelled many of Aurelia's; a pattern she sought to change towards the end of her life. Although the compromise of servitude on woman's behalf is not an anomaly even today, it is an impacting factor in Plath's construction of woman and her later struggle for identity given her mother's customary example. Aurelia sacrificed her personal career like many housewives of the early 20th century. She was an avid reader, educated and driven. She married her professor, rarely entertained guests or socialized (even though she greatly desired company), as she chose instead to type Otto Plath's notes for him and become a housewife. Aurelia's identity and sense of accomplishment revolved around Otto Plath and his work, she concedes to her own sacrifice for Otto Plath's career (1975: 12-13). She also concedes to raising her children according to his methods and against her own because she sought a "peaceful home" (1975: 13), even though he did not partake in the upbringing of Sylvia and 3-year younger brother Warren.

Warren was a sickly child. He contracted bronchial pneumonia and experienced intermittent allergies which absorbed much of Aurelia's time and effort. Aurelia's mother and friend Marion Freeman took care of Plath during the times when Warren was sickly, as well as after Otto Plath's death when Aurelia was occupied with paying the funeral costs and faced money problems. Aurelia was forced to work many jobs including that of a medical secretary and typist to support her family. She also taught shorthand to do this.

Aurelia's behaviour towards her husband created a standard for her children which they in turn replicated. They never saw Aurelia bereft or mourn for their father; she never cried in front of her children nor did she allow the children to attend his funeral. Plath was, as mentioned, frequently placed in the care of Aurelia's parents and other guardians when Warren was ill; so much so that she called her grandfather "daddy" (Plath, 1975: 22). Notably, this temperamental parenting was at a significant phase in her development where the alternating presence of role models most likely caused confusion during her pre-/adolescent years. This confusing intimacy with various guardians, related through on and off parenting, was problematic for Plath. For example, Plath shared a bedroom with her mother during her teenage years (a detail noted in *TBJ*) and at age 17 she moved out to study at Smith, an attempt at separating from her mother's "anxious self-sacrifice" (Stevenson, 1989: 18).

The aforementioned sketches the relevant socialising and influential factors of Plath's history on an external level. Internally, she was frequently troubled by mental and physical health. She suffered "cyclical winter depression" (Stevenson, 1989: 227), with a history of depression and mental illness beginning in her childhood years. She attempted suicide twice and succeeded with the third; she frequently entertained milder suicide ideation. For her first attempt on August 24th 1953 Plath swallowed Aurelia's sleeping pills and hid in the basement (another significant detail she chose to plot in *TBJ*); the second involved driving her car off the road in June 1962; in the third and final attempt she gassed herself in the oven of her apartment on 11th February 1963. The few lesser destructive acts, also selectively placed in *TBJ*, involve an attempt to drown herself, cut herself and engage in a temerarious skiing incident.

Throughout her education she thrived as a *wunderkind* with high standards and expectations. She had decided on a writing career at a very young age. She submitted 45 stories to *Seventeen* magazine by the age of 18 (Wagner, 2000: 38). She won numerous awards at her primary and secondary school and continued this high level of academic performance into her tertiary education. Her scholarship for Smith University provided her with an array of disciplines from which to choose, she elected subjects such as Latin, German and Chemistry for her B A at Smith College where she attained Honours *summa cum laude* for her thesis on Dostoevsky's 'The Double' in 1955. In 1953, the year of her admission at McLean Hospital, she travelled to New York to work for *Mademoiselle* fashion magazine, a disillusioning experience charted in *TBJ*. Later in 1955 she tied for 1st prize in the Glascock Poetry Contest, won Academy of American Poets Prize and the Etherl Corben Poetry Prize. These accomplishments show that her drive for perfectionism and excellence was part of her personality, which augurs her subsequent equation of the success of her labours with the value of herself as an individual. In 1956 she won a Second Fullbright year at Newman College, where she met Ted Hughes in February and wed on June 16th at St. George Martyr church in Bloomsbury. Thereafter they spent their honeymoon in Italy, accompanied by Aurelia. Upon returning to the US, she won the Bess Hokin poetry prize. She taught English at Smith College in 1958 after her final exams in 1957. These career and profession choices and accomplishments show her overarching need for success and undeterred drive for perfectionism.

Regarding Plath's mental illness, she diagnosed herself as a "victim of introspection" (Plath, 2000: 76) at age 18 when she began studying at Smith College, Massachusetts in 1950. In her years of tertiary education, she sought therapy from a psychiatrist at Smith University in 1956. Later on in 1953, she met Doctor Ruth Beutscher (characterised into Doctor Nolan in *TBJ*) at

McLean Hospital where she was admitted after her first suicide attempt. Beutscher and Plath maintained a therapeutic alliance until her death, corresponding through letters in which Plath often shared her writing drafts.

As a sensitive woman, her physical health was unstable as well. She suffered intermittent bouts of flu, especially towards the end of her life. She received insulin injections and underwent electro-convulsive therapy during her time at McLean Hospital. In her work she explores these somatic symptoms as well as emotions such as melancholy and aboulia. She incorporated her experiences with hospitals, medicine and psychiatry in her writing to express the invasion and exploitation of woman's body and mind under healthcare.

Among these maladies of the mind and body Plath also suffered specifically as a woman. She suffered a miscarriage, an appendectomy, temporary infertility and milk fever after second child Nicholas Farrar's birth. In her journals she frequently charted the influential effects her menstrual cycle, mood and emotions had on her mind and body. Although traumatic and debilitating, these womanly experiences provided her with material for her writing.

These details sketch a woman who was deeply affected by and in touch with her corporeality. Fundamentally, Jung (1953: 27) relates like maladies as manifestations of the daughter's deleterious connection to the mother as site of origin where "Resistance to the mother as uterus often manifests itself in menstrual disturbances, failure of conception, abhorrence of pregnancy, haemorrhages and excessive vomiting during pregnancy, miscarriages, and so on". Plath manifested many of these over her lifetime.

The last influencing factor in this brief sketch of the factors that shaped her includes her interest in esotericism. Ted Hughes introduced Plath to the esoteric to assist her in locating and cultivating her true voice. She practised such techniques as tarot readings, divination, Ouija boards, hypnotism, horoscopes and meditation to tap into the recesses of her unconscious mind. Critics wonder if this introduction was injurious to her life although they do not refute its impact on her work. For example, Materer (1991: 132) believes "Plath's occult studies were a stage in her poetic development and a source of her mature symbolism" whilst Alvarez (cited in Wagner, 2000: 20) ascribes Plath's preoccupation with the occult at Hughes' suggestion to her mental decline and consequent death. "But the ghouls she released were malign. They helped her write great poems, but they destroyed her marriage, they destroyed her". As a means to produce the poems she desired, Plath's method of using the occult assisted her chief goal already decided in childhood, to become a writer.

1.2 Sylvia and Aurelia Plath's relationship in *Letters Home: Correspondence (1975)* and *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath (2000)*

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.

They may not mean to, but they do.

They fill you with the faults they had

And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn

By fools in old-style hats and coats,

Who half the time were sappy-stern

And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.

It deepens like a coastal shelf.

Get out as early as you can,

And don't have any kids yourself.

Philip Larkin, 'This Be the Verse' (1974)

"... and my umbilical cord has never been cut clearly"

(Plath, 2000: 56)

"Throughout her prose and poetry, Sylvia fused parts of my life with hers"

(Aurelia Plath, 1975: 3)

From the periphery Sylvia and Aurelia Plath's relationship appears a positive and healthy one. A close reading of the selected material reveals the extent of the influence Aurelia had on Plath's life. The inextricable bond mother and daughter shared altered towards the end of Plath's life when she sought a discrete and independent identity. Whether the relationship was in reality a *folie à deux* or not, what this study holds important is that Plath perceived it to be, and this conscious belief infiltrated and moulded her poetry and prose. As this study hinges on the workings of the mother-daughter relationship, this section aims to sketch the mother's influence on Plath's life and works. This co-dependence manifested in Plath's need for love as well as her ambivalence towards other women and herself. There is also an undercurrent of power play between the personas and shadows of both women. These factors comprise a mother-complex.

Before examining the complex emotional bond in *Letters Home* (1975) and the theory explaining it, the following two premises in personality development postulate how this bond initially formed.

Jung (1953: 7721) counsels⁵ the problematic effects the “unlived life of a parent” has on the child where the child then unconsciously seeks to achieve the goals the parent failed to accomplish. The child then bears the burden the parent could not accomplish as well as the child’s own. In connection with this projected un-fulfilment Jung (1982: 129) also identifies the mother as most often the site of the “origin of disturbance”⁶ in the child’s psyche. Archetypes manifest such “disturbances” and develop throughout infancy to adulthood where, once activated by increasing like situations and feelings, rise from the unconscious to the personal conscious to form a complex⁷. These premises are evident in the similar domestic and career choices between both women as well as the mental disturbances that erupted in Plath’s life when she separated from her mother to attend Smith University.

The sequence of events leading up to and occurring after Plath’s death is an important indication of the power play between the voices and personas of mother and daughter. *The Bell Jar*’s (1963) publication was later followed by the publication of *Letters Home* (1975), then (the first edition of) *The Unabridged Journals* (1982). Plath began writing her autobiographical novel in March 1961, the first draft completed in August the same year with subsequent editing and proofreading until its publication by William Heinemann Ltd. on January 14th 1963. Published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, Plath had deliberately hidden the details of her novel from her mother. She did so knowing her depiction of her mother would be offensive to

⁵ For the full quote, Jung (1953: 77, 21) states “Neurotic states are often passed from generation to generation ... The children are infected indirectly through the attitude they instinctively adopt towards their parents’ state of mind: either they fight against it with unspoken protest ... or else they succumb to paralysing and compulsive imitation. In both cases they are obliged to do, to feel, and to live not as they want, but as their parents want. ... the children will have to suffer from the unlived life of their parents and the more they will be forced into fulfilling all the things the parents repressed and kept unconscious [Aurelia’s absence of mourning for Otto Plath’s death]”.

⁶ For the full quote, Jung (1982: 129) states “... the mother always plays a part in the origin of disturbance, especially in infantile neuroses or in neuroses whose aetiology undoubtedly dates back to early childhood. In any event, the child’s instincts are disturbed, and this constellates archetypes which, in their turn, produce fantasies that come between the child and its mother as an alien and often frightening element”.

⁷ The difference between the collective or transpersonal unconscious and the personal unconscious is that the collective unconscious contains inherited potential of primordial images and mythological motifs passed on from previous generations. Similar to a universal blueprint, the collective unconscious contains these archetypes as repressed from our shared ancestral past. It is also not influenced by the personal unconscious. On the other hand, the personal unconscious forms when archetypes combine with personal experience as kernels within the psyche on a micro, especial level. It is a storeroom of individual experiences and interactions and the interpretations thereof. The personal unconscious contains suppressed memories that are brought into consciousness through the complex’s activation, through a similar feeling or experience.

Aurelia. Aurelia was predictably affronted by her portrayal in the novel and retaliated by publishing *Letters Home* in 1975 to rectify her fictitious image after reading *TBJ* after Plath's death, which was later followed by the publication of Plath's journals in 1982 and a further revised publication of the journals in 2000.

These literary events indicate a power struggle. However, the power struggle also shows other underlying incentives and workings of the relationship. Plath needed to have her story told yet cover her identity at the same time, consequently Aurelia placed great importance on 'rectifying' her portrayal and having her own version/voice heard. This power play between mother and daughter shows an attempt to silence each other and voice themselves. *Letters Home* (1975) comprises the communication between mother and daughter mostly, as well as brother Warren and others. The correspondence served not only as a medium for communication, but also a reinforcement. The maintenance of this bond between mother and daughter occurred in a manner that disallowed growth in other spheres whilst reinforcing dependence and connection on the relationship itself. Rose notes this verbal dependence as "...an identification between mother and daughter at the level of the production of words ... she [Plath] cannot stop writing to her mother" (Rose, 2001: 82). Although *Letters Home* (1975) was published with the chief purpose of rectifying Aurelia's image in *TBJ*, what becomes apparent too is the extent to which mother and daughter relied upon and restored each other through their correspondence.

In light of the communication and overriding voice thereof, Aurelia edited the correspondence of *Letters Home* (1975) before its publication. She also removed "signs of hostility towards her [Plath's] mother, demanding autonomy and separation" (Rose, 2001: 78). In doing so Aurelia moulded her own presentation of herself. Rose believes the omission was "designed to establish a positive image of the relationship between Plath and her mother reads instead as repetition of, or participation in, the psychic defences or barriers of Sylvia Plath herself" (2001: 79), which resulted in "...an ironic situation where the more the letters assert the exclusive, inviolable intimacy of the mother-daughter relationship, the more the same intimacy, by the very fact of publication, is undermined" (Rose, 2001: 81).

Yet Aurelia's introductory note in *Letters Home* (1975: 31) fortifies a different image of mother and daughter:

We were critical of our verbal and written expression, for we shared a love of words and considered them as a tool used to achieve precise expression, a necessity for accuracy in describing our emotions, as well as for mutual understanding.

If we further examine Aurelia's (1975: 32, emphasis added) depiction of their relationship:

Between Sylvia and me there existed – as between my own mother and me – a sort of *psychic osmosis* which, at times, was very wonderful and comforting; at other times an unwelcome invasion of privacy. Both Sylvia and I were more at ease in writing words of appreciation, admiration, and love than in expressing these emotions verbally...

Concurring with biographers and critics that have read between the lines, both the prodigious impact and influence Aurelia had on Plath's identity are evident:

Letters Home can be seen as one long projection of the “desired image” (the *required* image) of herself [Sylvia Plath] as Eve – wife, mother, homemaker, protector of the wholesome, the good, and the holy, an identity that both her upbringing and her own instinctive physical being had fiercely aspired to. (Stevenson, 1989: 262, original emphasis).

As well as the relationship's nascence and the consequential need for perfection and achievement it fortified:

Aurelia's own studies were forced to one side. Her ambition she transferred to her clever daughter: early letters between the two, when Sylvia was as young as seven, show the cycle of achievement (by Sylvia) and praise (from her mother) that appeared to rule the poet's life. The need for achievement, for seeming perfection, was in conflict with a darker self, a conflict revealed most clearly if one reads her Journals, streaked with black self-doubt, alongside *Letters Home*, the correspondence with her mother, which shows a jaunty, praiseworthy self ... a duality. (Wagner, 2000: 36).

This explains the thematic focus present in Plath's work regarding identity construction as well as the undercurrent of ambivalence towards her mother and the act of mothering itself.

The “psychic osmosis” Aurelia attests to is very different from the portrayal of their relationship in Plath's journals. A reading of these journals shows firstly Plath's keen awareness of her own mental processes; and secondly her fluid articulation thereof. She expressed and explored this conflict and the resultant emotions and mental processes descriptively in her journals. The journals indicate that her two poetic breakthroughs are precipitated and assisted by her separation from her mother. At this point Plath's belabour in her journals (see Plath, 2000: 429-450), or “ten page diatribe” against the “Dark Mother. The

Mummy. Mother of Shadows” (2000: 512) documents her confrontation with her mother-complex after a meeting with her therapist Ruth Beutscher. The journals also indicate her method of coping where writing was an outlet for her suppressed emotional turmoil: “Writing is a religious act: it is an ordering, a reforming, a relearning and reliving of people and the world as they are and as they might be” (Plath, 1975: 436). After identifying Aurelia as a “beacon of terrible warning” (Plath, 2000: 422), she continues to analyse and understand her feelings of ambivalence and the extreme emotional influence between mother and daughter, from “So how do I express my hate for my mother? In my deepest emotions I think of her as an enemy... I tried to murder myself ... I’d kill her, so I killed myself” (Plath, 2000: 433), to “She wants to be me: she wanted me to be her” (Plath, 2000: 433). Plath used her journals, as well as her poetry, to understand and work through her mother-complex.

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As mentioned above, *TUJ* presents a stark contrast to the mother-daughter relationship presented in *LH*. These two texts markedly illustrate Jung’s concepts of the persona and shadow archetypes; *LH* depicts the persona of both women while *TUJ* the shadow of Plath. The archetypes enacted in these texts are not false; neither are they holistic. *LH* illustrates a loving, warm yet synthetic exterior which sustained but reinforced the social masks that they presented therein. As such, the loyal and adoring “Sivvy” was only the side of Plath that she chose to show her mother (the duality of this phenomenon is explained briefly below in Bowlby’s ‘ambivalent-attachment’ type).

To explain the theory behind this concept, the persona⁸ archetype is the ‘desired’ image one adorns for others. It is the adaptive archetype of personal presentation that allows one to connect with and relate to others, which therefore mediates inner and outer life. It is not entirely a façade as it is derived from an existing aspect of the individual him/herself. Nevertheless, the persona becomes problematic when it is overused at the cost of other archetypes (shadow, anima/animus, self) which in turn creates imbalance in the individual’s psyche.

Documented in *LH*, Plath identified with her mother on a superficial level. This incomplete portrayal via her correspondence with Aurelia as mother, caregiver, origin and creator in turn

⁸ Jung (1982: 91) defines this as “The persona is a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the nature of the true individual”. He also discusses the necessity of the persona’s function which is to connect with other people as well as the danger of making use of only one singular aspect of the psyche at cost of the other.

created problems with Plath's identity as a woman. Jungian psychoanalyst Susan Schwartz (2013: 344) identifies the negative impact this had on her individuation as "Sylvia Plath constructed many veils and guises and forestalled anyone from knowing who she really was, despite a lifelong quest to discover herself", while husband Ted Hughes (Plath, 1982: xii) remarks that the imbalance of Plath's "many masks" is present "both in her personal life and in her writings". The fortification of Plath's persona, the incomplete presentation of the 'doting daughter' image, shadowed other facets of her personality. This imbalance could have added to the prevailing ambivalence in her life and works.

It is clear that Plath equated her ability as a writer (and the reception thereof) with motherly love. Motherly love was fraught with ambivalence. The ambivalence, oscillating between murderous impulses and feelings of guilt, is replicated in Plath's poems where the speaker is a mother (such as 1962 poems 'Morning Song', 'Event' and 'Contusion'). Of this, critic Jeannine Dobbs (1977) asserts: "It is apparent from her life and letters that her commitment to writing was total and unwavering and that her commitment to domesticity, especially motherhood, was ambivalent", while Phillips (1973: 138) notices "Plath's attitude toward her mother is tempered ... by an unconscious feeling of rivalry and resentment". Confronted with like situations later on in life when she herself became a mother she perpetuated the conflicting mixture she experienced herself earlier on as a recipient. Mother is compartmentalised as rival, confidante, friend, carer, mother who expands to represent women in general, mother who Plath in turn became when she had her children.

Although Plath's ambivalence is self-evident, this observation can be extended firstly to the primordial mother and secondly in connection with attachment, memory, separation and security of the psyche which prevents unity. This "irresolvable ambivalence towards the maternal figure" (Park, 2002: 468-469, 478) is indicative of

[A] deep and inner crisis, which suggests that a much deeper strain exists within the mother and daughter relationship than is experienced by her adolescent companions, is pervasive throughout Plath's poetry. The subtle, psychic tension in her poems shows how the anxiety of separation from the mother always conflicts with the reparative drive. In Plath's poems, traumatic memory, such as the memory of separation from the loved object, is not repressed but repetitively evoked as the poem's constitutive part ... Plath reveals her ambivalence toward the archaic, primordial, maternal object intensely: Her poems present an oscillation between fear of separation and resentment about attachments to a lost-loved object, the mother.

A simple explanation for the subtle yet complex psychic tension manifested in this ambivalent attachment can be briefly explained by turning to John Bowlby's theory of maternal attachment. Essentially, Bowlby emphasises the role a mother plays in the child's ability to form attachments as she provides the primary base for security and protection. Also, her behaviour directly influences the stability of the already instilled base which the child predictably patterns throughout his/her life (ideally, at this stage, a child has a secure and safe enough base with his/her mother and begins using his/her agency to individuate, later embracing the world autonomously on his/her own esteem). Thus, the child's individuation will be directly affected by how this base was initially established and further fortified by the behaviour the mother modelled afterwards. In connection with Plath's father's death, of which the mother never outwardly mourned, Bowlby (1988: 106) asserts that the lack of grief displayed by a parent for a loved one teaches a child that grieving him/herself is unacceptable. A consequence of this inadvertent lesson about coping with grief is that the child then learns to suppress such natural feelings and display affection and adoration instead. This, in connection with the abovementioned "living the un-lived life of a parent" Jung referred to shows that "[in] conformity with his [her] mother's wishes, [s/]he [sic] admits to consciousness only feelings of love and gratitude towards her [the mother, as seen in *Letters Home*] and shuts away every feeling of anger [seen in *TUJ*] [s/]he [sic] may have against her ... and preventing him [her] [sic] ... [from] having his [sic] own life" (Bowlby, 1988: 107). The child unconsciously acquiesces to the parent's (lack of) display of grief and in turn neglects his/her own mourning process (which could most likely form a pattern with mourning processes in general). This learned coping skill and the coupled emotional and communicative consequences as split and incomplete are evident in the correspondence between Aurelia and Plath. The type of attachment here is 'anxious-resistance attachment' also known as 'ambivalent attachment'. Its pattern is as follows:

Proximity seeking contact maintaining are [sic] strong in the reunion episodes, and also more likely to occur in the pre-separation episodes. Resistant behaviour is particularly conspicuous. The mixture of seeking and yet resisting contact and interaction has an unmistakably angry quality and indeed an angry tone may characterize behaviour even in pre-separation episodes. (Smolden, 2013: 198, cited in Cassidy and Marvin, 1992).

Ambivalence then, in Plath's case, becomes problematic for her identity and individuation due to the unstable base formed earlier on. As such, many critics view her quest as supplemented

by a search for love. She internalised that love was the conditional reward, a proviso, for hard work and success.

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After Plath's death, Aurelia confessed she is "haunted" by Plath's poem 'Elm' (Art Documentaries, 2014):

I am inhabited by a cry.
Nightly it flaps out
Looking, with its hooks, for something to love.

Sylvia Plath, 'Elm', 1962

In addition to the marked ambivalence, Plath's late poems are concerned with love while conversely the absence of love in *TBJ* is marked. Plath structured *Ariel* to begin on the word "spring" and end with "love". This placement could intimate at what she would have liked to achieve in her own life. However, like the inconsistent and contingent nature of the above explanation of Bowlby's ambivalence, love is depicted in Plath's work as it is perceived: elusive, conditional and labile.

Love did not stand on its own. As mentioned, love was equated with and conditional to success. Plath confesses "an infusion of fear that successlessness [sic] means no approval from my mother: and approval, with mother, has been equated for me with love" (2000: 448). This intense need noted by critics (Horner, 2006: 465; Yorke, 1991: 54-55) was sourced in the approval from her mother, as Plath perceived anything less than perfect achievement to be unworthy of love. This desire is evident in *TBJ*, for example, which in this light tracks Esther's search for a surrogate mother where, she puts feelers out to other women throughout the novel in an attempt to connect with them and form attachments. Also, oftentimes Plath's poems end on a note of ominous doom instead of ideally achieving some sort of resolution or denouement. This almost standard conclusion of the future possibilities of connection as fateful and closed show Plath's pessimistic view on motherly love as the "source of her suffering" (Rich, 1972: 19), due to "... Plath's infantile fear that love, whether given or received, is totally possessive and consuming" (McClave, 1980: 463). Plath's attempts to unify her psyche can then be seen as driven also by the need for love, as love also implied completeness and approval.

At this point in the discussion it is fitting to explain the primary theoretical crux of this study, the mother-complex. It is fair to conclude that Plath had both mother and father complexes⁹. However, applying Jungian theory extends a unique perspective of Plath's oedipal 'father poems' which then sees the father's influence on her psyche as secondary to the mother's. This is in particular reference to 'Daddy', the melittology-orientated¹⁰ 'bee poems' ('The Beekeeper's Daughter'), and the incestuous oedipal undercurrent ('Full Fathom Five') because scholarship focuses on Plath's connection with her father and has subsequently overlooked the pivotal and more significant connection with her mother. Within the category of mother-complexes in *Aspects of the Feminine* (1982), Jung (132-137) discusses four types: 'Hypertrophy of the Maternal Element', 'Overdevelopment of Eros', 'Identity with the Mother' and 'Resistance to the Mother'. 'Overdevelopment of Eros' illuminates the previous focal point in scholarship of the father cathexis rather as a displacement; the primary mother cathexis having been previously overlooked. 'Overdevelopment of the Eros' is "induced in a daughter by a mother":

As a substitute, an overdeveloped Eros results, and this almost invariably leads to an unconscious incestuous relationship with the father. The intensified Eros places an abnormal emphasis on the personality of others. Jealousy of the mother and the desire to outdo her become leitmotifs of subsequent undertakings, which are often disastrous. (Jung, 1982: 133).

Therefore, the primary view in scholarship of Plath's oedipal complex can then be seen as symptomatic of a larger underlying *identification with the mother*.

In addition, although Plath's fictitious characters and personas share traits with all four types of mother-complexes mentioned above, specifically in connection with the mother the 'Identity with the Mother' type is most suitable. This complex type is characterised by projection¹¹ onto the mother, the overt "mask of complete loyalty and devotion" (seen in *Letters Home*) driven by the latent unconscious wish to "tyrannize over her [the mother]" where the daughter feels "often visibly sucked dry from her mother" (Jung, 1982: 136) (See, for example, the "Touching and sucking" the speaker in 'Medusa' relays, in Chapter 3.1). This is most readily depicted in

⁹ A mother complex in the daughter manifests in either atrophy or hypertrophy "either unduly stimulates or else inhibits the feminine instinct" (Jung, 1982: 131).

¹⁰ Otto Plath studied bees and was known among his contemporaries as the "Binenkönig", bee king (Plath, 1975: 9).

¹¹ Importantly, Jung regards projection in a different light to Freud. Jung asserts that projection is not necessarily negative - instead it is a necessary and inevitable unconscious process that occurs upon its activation during interaction with a similar personality. Projection is most visible then in connection with the 'shadow' archetype, that is, those personality traits that are left in the 'dark' to favour the persona, ego or social mask. The shadow is repressed by the conscious mind Jung explains that projection.

TBJ and developed further in the later poems. It would seem, given the above discussion that Plath came to terms not only with the mother-complex but also with her own shadow. As Briner (2010: 115) states, “To deal with the maternal heritage demands a ruthless honesty in facing the shadow”. The mother-complex and the shadow are inseparable.

The shadow, another significant facet of the psyche, is an archetype that is repressed by the conscious mind and often overpowered by its complementary, the persona. Similar to the dark or ‘evil’ side depicted in Victorian literature characters such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1891) the shadowed facet of the personality cannot be suppressed forever and eventually surfaces in, for example, the “hypertrophy” mentioned above by Jung. Harking back to Jung’s premise that the psyche seeks unification, a hypertrophic shadow poses an occlusion to the individuation process. Most pronounced in *TUJ*, as well as the potent vexations in the *Ariel* (1965) poems, the shadow archetype¹² embodies all that the individual despises in other people because that which an individual despises in others is a reflection of those traits which the individual despises in him/herself. As the strongest and therefore most potentially dangerous archetype, the shadow is also the source of creativity, vitality and spontaneity (it has a dual capacity, equally good and evil). It contains all the repressed unacceptable (social) urges and desires, and projection of the shadow is inevitable.

Before moving onto the next subchapter, I will examine Plath’s earlier poem ‘Stillborn’ as it best illustrates the ambivalence, love, attachment/separation, perfectionism and archetypes discussed above. Written in 1960 before both her poetic breakthroughs and *TBJ*, it illustrates the complex and elucidates the contemporaneous poignant connection between mother, perfectionism and communication that shaped Plath’s relationships and her writing.

‘Stillborn’

These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis.

They grew their toes and fingers well enough,

Their little foreheads bulged with concentration.

If they missed out on walking about like people

It wasn't for any lack of mother-love.

¹² Of the shadow, Jung (1974: 284) states “Like the anima, it appears either in projection on suitable persons, or personified ... [the shadow] personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself [sic] and yet is always upon him directly or indirectly – for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies”.

O I cannot explain what happened to them!
 They are proper in shape and number and every part.
 They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!
 They smile and smile and smile at me.
 And still the lungs won't fill and the heart won't start.

They are not pigs, they are not even fish,
 Though they have a piggy and a fishy air --
 It would be better if they were alive, and that's what they were.
 But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,
 And they stupidly stare and do not speak of her.

'Stillborn' essentially monitors the speaker's reflection of her poetic craftsmanship. The poem clearly separates the two subjects' boundaries of speaker/mother/artist and hearer/child/poem. The poems are personified as infants or children; the tone is of distant disillusionment and frustration. Presumably the mother, the speaker bemoans her failure at the lifelessness of her poems ("they do not live: it's a sad diagnosis"). It becomes apparent this "sad diagnosis" is more a failure of her ability to perform as an artist/mother than anything else, they are not part of her body. There is no real attachment between mother and poems, and doubtedly ever was, because she regards them without sentimentality, as would a doctor making a sterile diagnosis. She scans their appearance noting the technical details of "toes and fingers", bulging "foreheads", "lungs" and "heart" where such possible synecdoche indicates the failure to establish a complete identity. Their body parts are regarded as impractical appendages. She feels responsible for their disappointing materialisation yet she speaks of them with detachment. Notably, this same *sang-froid* tone echoes the protagonist's outlook in *TBJ*. She reflects with disdain the failed outcome which "wasn't for any lack of motherly-love". In doing so she identifies the exact ingredient missing from their creation.

'Mother' is mentioned in the first and last stanzas. Mother initially renounces responsibility for the poems/children's poor appearance then betrays this initial aloof outlook by stating "their mother [is] near dead with distraction". Although she verbally relinquishes responsibility for their internal malformation, she is nonetheless distracted and distressed by their ineffectiveness as she feels this to be a direct reflection of her mothering abilities. Like the lifeless loss of an abortion or miscarriage, she reflects what could have been in the third stanza, correcting herself

before becoming sentimental (“But they are dead”) and betraying her torment by the consequential inability to form a loving attachment with them (“And they stupidly stare”).

The speaker also projects her perfectionistic outlook which is unfulfilled. Formally and aesthetically they are acceptable – “proper in shape and number and every part”. The factor missing from perfectionism in ‘Stillborn’ is life, but it is also love. The speaker cannot love that which she has failed to give life to, their weak construction reflects poorly on her, thus she cannot accept her role in their making. As such, the speaker attempts to reconcile their image as “pigs” and “fish”, which they are not. The yearning for the life which they do not possess is disclosed strongly in the use of tenses “It would be better” and “they were” “alive” as opposed to when the speaker examines them in present tense “They are proper”, “They sit so nicely”.

Communication occurs kinaesthetically, almost on a pre-symbolic level through the eyes that “stupidly stare and do not speak of her”. These “eyes” of the children could also be the “eyes”/ I’s of the speaker as she sees in herself a failed child. The eyes then speak a language that is not verbal and thence intangible to the speaker. The speaker shifts to third person in the fourth line of the last stanza. Mother/artist and child/art are irreconcilable although the latter was birthed/created from the former. The sterility of this separation is reinforced through the lack of colour, the closed form and mechanical structure of the poem, punctuated by few intermittent exclamations of despondency (“what happened to them!”, “They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!”).

Jung believes the child symbolises innocence and the self. The child symbol can be seen to stand for a landmark in the individuation process. Therefore, one could infer the speaker sees herself as a failure in the eyes of her creator, failing to meet the motherly standards for communication and perfectionism. Plath inverts the symbol of the child, traditionally one of innocence and birth, to one of death and shame.

This discussion of the mother daughter dyad of Plath and Aurelia illustrates the internalisation and replication of the conception of womanhood. Love, ambivalence, attachment and separation activate to form a complex.

1.3 Scriptotherapy, Confessional Poetry, Jungian Analytical Psychology

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked ...

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and
 subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of
 the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of
 suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,
 and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol
 electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy
 pingpong and amnesia ...

Allen Ginsberg, 'Howl' (1956)

"Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious. The unconscious is there to feed it little images, little symbols, the answers, the insights I know not of. In therapy, one seeks to hide sometimes."

Anne Sexton (Maio, 2005: 70)

This chapter discusses the role and relevance of confessional poetry, Jungian analytical psychology and scriptotherapy in Plath's life and works.

Writers Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, W.D. Snodgrass, Sylvia Plath and husband Ted Hughes formed what is now known as the 'confessional movement' in the 1950s. In 1959 Snodgrass and Lowell's anthologies, *Heart's Needle* and *Life Studies*, were published concurrently, creating a new subgenre of writing within the modern genre. Yet Plath's anthology *Ariel* (1965) published posthumously, brought her to the foreground of this movement as the pioneer of confession and mythologisation of the self as art. Plath is seen as the most famous writer of this movement.

This poetry disallows a purist approach and invites a psychoanalytical one due to the highly personal and taboo subject matter of the poems. Characteristically most of the writers suffered from mental illness, had troubled interpersonal (specifically parental) relationships and underwent hospitalisation or committed suicide.

Robert Phillips (1973: 16) lists the characteristics of post-modern confessional poetry as follows:

It is highly subjective.

It is an expression of personality, not an escape from it.

It is therapeutic and/or purgative.

Its emotional content is personal rather than impersonal.

It is most often narrative.

It portrays unbalanced, afflicted, or alienated protagonists.

It employs irony and understatement for detachment.

It uses the self as a poetic symbol around which is woven a personal mythology.

There are no barriers of subject matter.

There are no barriers between the reader and the poet.

The poetry is written in the open language of ordinary speech.

It is written in open forms.

It displays moral courage.

It is anti-establishment in content, with alienation a common theme.

Personal failure is also a favorite theme, as is mental illness.

The poet strives for personalization. (If totally successful, the personal is expressed so intimately we can all identify and empathize.)

The subject matter includes previously unexplored topics *in extremis*, a poignant change in focus from the previous realist, naturalist and Victorian periods. Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) was initially banned from public release due to its incestuous and outspoken content. In this movement fellow writer Anne Sexton's style made use of ordinary speech for her raw and explicit subject matter (such as menstruation, incest, masturbation) whilst Plath proved more eclectic and Eastern by mythologising her vision. Her egocentric poetry encouraged and permitted women to express themselves by validating their own experiences and introducing them as relevant to society. Phillips (1973: 3) classifies Lowell as the 'father' of the group and Walt Whitman the "great-grandfather". Essentially, this movement "sanctioned and sanctified the perilous journey Sylvia Plath wanted to make" (Smith, 1972: 335).

While confession isn't uncommon and has always been sourced in writing, these poets sought to expose the secret, sacred and private truths which echo a (religious) communion. This can also be said of the ritual of writing and the shamanistic performance engaged in the delivery of

these poems. This is because confessional poets often performed their poems by reading them out loud to an audience.

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Although the era was highly influenced by Freud's introspection among other theory, analytical psychology offers a different and valuable theoretical perspective in literature, this applies more specifically to poetry, given its highly concentrated symbolism and patterning. Sharing resonance with other fields like psychoanalysis, existentialism, depth psychology and occult psychology, analytical psychology emphasises the impact of the integral shaping importance of the unconscious mind on an individual's psyche. As such, analytical psychology is anti-reductive and anti-causal. It stresses an individual's need for actualisation through integrating the various parts the psyche and aims at the attainment of wholeness. The fundamental aspects of the collective and personal unconscious, archetypes, symbolism and personality offer an in-depth reading of poetry and a new unexplored depth of understanding.

In connection with Plath who "personalised the mythical and mythologized the personal" (Debata, 2013: 191), analytical psychology can explain the myth-making in connection with identity. Plath's use of highly concentrated and patterned symbols can be viewed chronologically as a development of myth, story-telling and the bringing forth of unconscious ideas. Yorke (1991: 51) states:

Retaining a narrative structure, her [Plath's] poetry is none the less open to an endless proliferation of mythic interpretations. It is a writing which allows the often terrifying memories, dreams, fantasies, and condensed, highly symbolic images of the unconscious mind to 'break through' to consciousness.

Likewise, in connection with Jungian analysis and Plath's work, husband Ted Hughes views her work as a positive, creative and individuating process which not only echoes but also implements Jung's methods. To extend his assertion from the introduction stating her work is an "alchemical individuation of the self", Hughes (1982: 90-91) adds,

This interpretation would not tie up every loose end but it would make positive meaning of the details of the poetic imagery ... Above all, perhaps, it would help to confirm a truth – that the process was, in fact, a natural and positive process, if not the most positive and healing of all involuntary responses to the damage of life: a process of self-salvation – a resurrection of her deepest spiritual vitality against the odds of her fate. And the Jungian interpretation would fit the extraordinary outcome too: the birth of her creative self.

Hughes reiterates how Plath's use of Jungian methods sought to continuously unearth the "creative self". Anne Sexton and other poets of the time used such methods, where the speaker acts as a conduit for not only their own voice and issues but also the collective preoccupations of the time. Kroll's (2001) study *Chapters in a Mythology* indicates that the symbolism in Plath's poems combines to form a mythic panorama of her life, in connection with her 'Moon Muse'. Kroll also discusses Robert Graves' influence in Plath's work, where she incorporated *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth* (1948). The goddesses discussed therein were displayed in Plath's home in an astrology book encompassing muses such as Diana, Isis, Luna, Hecate, and Prosperina (2001: 41-42). This is also indicative of Plath's use of 'participation technique' in her symbolic references, anchoring her afflatus to symbolism.

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Scriptotherapy, narrative therapy or writing therapy pertains to writing that has a therapeutic effect on the writer. Writing therapy is very much like any other therapy which is ideally perjurative and cathartic and subsequently replenishes the individual's psyche. This subfield of therapy comprises two opposing camps supporting the premise that writing alleviates (Pennebaker, 1996, 1999, 1997) or conversely exacerbates (Kaufman, 2001, 2002) the psyche. For example, Kaufman's (2007) research indicated that writers predictably have a shorter life span in comparison to other writing professions. Poets have a shorter lifespan and female poets the shortest. However, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999: 1243) attest that "the act of constructing stories is a natural human process that helps individuals to understand their experiences and themselves", believing that story-telling enables closure.

Importantly, both research camps take Plath as a subject. Kaufman (2001) coined the latter unfavourable effect as the eponymous 'Sylvia Plath effect'. In connection with Plath, the negative/adverse effect can be applied to writers in general. Plath affirmed in an interview with Peter Orr (1966) that "The typewriter is an extension of my body", similarly Sexton was instructed by a priest that "God is in your typewriter" after which she deemed poetry to be "salvation, as a worthy goal itself" (Middlebrook, 1991, xxiii).

As discussed, writing was a priority in Plath's life. This study also shows that the act of writing was also a means of receiving love and approval from her mother and achieving the attainment of self. Although nothing occurs in isolation, this could also be another reason why writing didn't heal but rather harmed her. She was only unconsciously aware of this occlusion and was

not able to find solace as she did not physically communicate this mother-complex with her mother.

Although writing provided relief for Plath at times, this *vis a tergo* also provided solace for those who read her poetry, specifically women, more specifically women who suffered as women somatically. Her poems were requested by patients and doctors alike (Moraski, 2009: 78-19) who identified with the specifically female experiences she described in her poetry. Although she did not formally call herself a feminist, Plath wrote many poems on the topic of tulips and poppies, like the flowering and fruition of a woman's body. She wrote 'The Ravaged Face' after meeting with Beutscher, 'Tulips', 'Poppies in October' and other poems while convalescing in hospital after an appendectomy, shortly after a miscarriage. These poems speak of the largely inevitable suffering of a woman.

Above all, rumination plays a large part in writing therapy. Discussed in 'Emotional Expression and Physical Health: Revising Traumatic Memories or Fostering Self-regulation?' (Greenberg *et al.*, 1996: 588) rumination is stasis. The catch 22 of rumination is that by dwelling upon a topic (Jung's 'active imagination'), the subject invokes an abundance of images, associations and insights. However, in doing so, the subject also relives the topic (or feeling, situation) and arrests his/her ability to progress. Although the poet needs to dwell on a topic and create a symbol as vessel to mediate this, the poet needs also to gain closure and move forward. The mother and father complexes in Plath's writing indicate a pattern of preoccupation with a complex, a reliving and reincarnating of a distressing figure.

In concluding this discussion of writing in Plath's work, Alvarez (1971: 53) states in his essay on Plath that "For the artist himself [sic] art is not necessarily therapeutic; he [sic] is not automatically relieved of his [sic] fantasies by expressing them ... the act of formal expression may simply make the dredged-up material more readily available to them".

Chapter 2: The Bell Jar's 'fig tree'

"I cannot ignore this murderous self ... Its biggest weapon is and has been the image of myself as perfect success in writing, teaching and living." (Plath, 2000: 618)

"She had to be the perfect housewife, the perfectly beautifully groomed wife, the perfect housewife. She also had to be the most brilliant poet of her generation...." (Art Documentaries, 2014)

This chapter proceeds to analyse *TBJ* within the perspective of the mother-daughter relationship as well as the growth of the daughter. This entails an analysis of the era and factors surrounding the text for background information; the trope of the titular bell jar and other significant motifs; identification and the attachments formed/terminated with impressionable female characters and lastly the essential role played by electrotherapy, suicide and pathology in the protagonist's development and rebirth. *TBJ* can be seen as a search for both a (surrogate) mother and the true, reborn self.

To give a brief background of the plot and structure of *TBJ*, the following summarises the narrative as taken from Rose (1991: 185-186):

A young college girl from New England, with a bestselling novelist as her benefactress, wins a competition to be the guest editor of New York 'intellectual fashion magazine'. During her time there, she interviews famous novelists, reads piles of manuscripts, talks to the editor (who has lunches with short story writers for *The New Yorker*), and gets picked up with her friend by a famous disc jockey who takes them back to his apartment and gives them a round-up of the week's Top Ten. She then attends a banquet held for the guest editors by another women's magazine, *Ladies' Day* ('the big women's magazine that features lush double-page spreads of technicolor meals, with a different theme and locale each month'), where she and all the other guest editors, are afflicted with food poisoning. Sitting in the cinema later that afternoon watching the premiere of a technicolor football romance, in which all the girls wear dresses 'like something out of *Gone with the Wind*', she becomes violently, and almost fatally, sick. Horrified at the possibility of adverse publicity, *Ladies' Day* sends, by way of apology, twelve copies, one for each of the guest editors, of *The Thirty Best Short Stories of the Year*. During the rest of her time in New York, she tries and fails to lose her virginity and, on a separate occasion, is almost raped. *The Thirty Best Short Stories* is the only thing, apart from a plastic sunglasses case and a gift of two dozen avocado pears, that she keeps when, having cast her entire wardrobe to the winds

(literally), she leaves New York at the end of her assignment and returns home. Failing to get a place on a short story summer course, she slips into a depression, tries to write a novel and gives up, tries – and fails – to read *Finnegan's Wake*. The only things she can bear to read are local scandal sheets: 'SUICIDE SAVED FROM SEVEN-STOREY LEDGE' 'STARLET SUCCUMBS AFTER SIXTY-EIGHT-HOUR COMA' (she complains that *The Christian Science Monitor*, which 'treated suicides and sex crimes and aeroplane crashes as if they didn't exist', was the only thing she ever saw in the home). Recovering in hospital after a suicide attempt of her own, she then discovers herself as the subject of this very form of writing in a set of clippings presented to her by an old friend admitted to the same hospital: 'SCHOLARSHIP GIRL MISSING. MOTHER WORRIED'... 'GIRL FOUND ALIVE' (the same friend also discovers a picture of her in a magazine which she denies is her). The hospital is a private one, paid for by her benefactress, the bestselling novelist, who drives her there, as if she were something of a film star, in a Cadillac. She is finally helped (saved) by a woman psychiatrist who looks like a cross between her mother and Myrna Loy.

TBJ charts Esther's *rite de passage*, the protagonist's endeavour towards her maturation and enlightenment. The setting moves from New York, to mother Mrs Greenwood's house to an asylum. The narrative is normative in that it follows the presentation of a crisis, followed by attempts to overcome obstacles and thereafter seek a resolution, much like the 'Hero's Journey' Joseph Campbell (1949) discusses in connection with comparative mythology. *TBJ* handles many issues pertinent to a young woman's development such as poverty, marriage, courting, frivolous (New York) parties. Yet through these frivolities she makes the significant changes and adaptations necessary for adulthood: she finds her footing in the continuous unerring situations where she needs to choose between conformity or individuality. She begins to acknowledge and use her own agency (that is, she acts instead of being acted upon) and she develops individual preferences and tastes. This is a major concern for the protagonist because she does not know who she is and therefore cannot know what she wants. She is frozen in an impasse because she is ill-equipped to make her own *choices*.

TBJ documents Esther's search for herself as an attempt to resolve her existential crisis. Yet the beginning, like the end of the novel, ends on a note of ambivalence and uncertainty much like the style in many of the poems which I will examine in Chapter 3. This in turn not only leaves unclear whether Esther did indeed attain an identity and sense of self or not, it also contradicts the above assertion that enlightenment is gained. This resolution will be discussed further in 2.1. However, since the quest does not have any overt antagonists (although Mrs Greenwood poses a threat to Esther's development) the quest lies *within* the protagonist's

attainment of self, or an identity, as she herself is largely unsure what it is in her which obstructs her development. The beginning and end of the novel are significant because they indicate that Esther follows the seasonal pattern of creation and destruction herself, the seasons then depict her psychic landscape as she echoes their mood and symbolism.

Further to the topic of introducing the narrative and its direction towards self-discovery and unity, before moving onto the second chapter, I will turn to the symbolism of the start and end point: summer and winter. On the topic of seasons, which parallel the rebirth of the protagonist, Jung (1974: 6) elucidates the symbolism as:

All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's [sic] consciousness by way of projection - that is, mirrored in the events of nature.

The seasons are thus symbolic projections (projection in the Jungian sense, as discussed in Chapter 1) and as such, objective correlatives, of Esther's psychic landscape; the seasonal depiction of Esther's fruition, flowering, blooming and (symbolic) death is followed by a cyclical rebirth. The seasonal/transitional state of summer however is tinged with pathos. Summer is ideally a time of light, expression, colours, life, freedom, vitality and passion. Yet Esther's engagement in the parties, dances and new career experiences are muted by her lack of internal adaptation, her anxiety.

The exposition begins in summer; the resolution occurs in winter. The first-speaker narrator initiates her tale as follows: "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York" (Plath, 1963: 1). Thus the novel begins on unequal footing with the introduction of summer and the electrocution which creates Esther's unsettled indecisiveness. In the setup it is apparent that Esther is directionless and without agency. There is a sense of stasis and hopelessness in her subsequent retrospective reflection ("I knew something was wrong with me that summer" (2). She introduces her morbid preoccupation with the Rosenbergs which is then followed by her aimless squandering and current consumerist, materialistic lifestyle of spending money on clothes she neither wants nor needs, compounding the empty inadequacy she feels. Further, as the novel progresses, she notes she was happiest "the summer before my father died" (70) at age nine. It becomes evident that Esther is incomplete and fragmented, she has a compelling desire for unity and wholeness but she neither knows how nor has the means to attain it. She is in an overwrought state of

incommunicado. In other words, she makes it known that she yearns to transition from separate and abject to reconciled and unified. This is a dark and insidious inverse of what summer essentially symbolises but it is also an example of Plath's private mythology¹³, where her symbolism must be analysed further than the typically overt connotations and associations to be fully understood.

The novel ends in winter¹⁴ ("A fresh fall of snow blanketed the asylum grounds ... The heart of winter!" (Plath, 1963: 226)). After Joan's suicide and funeral, the narrative closes with Esther's entrance to her interview to leave the asylum. Here, she admits "I had hoped, at my departure, I would feel sure and knowledgeable about everything that lay ahead – after all, I had been 'analyzed'. Instead, all I could see were question marks" (Plath, 1963: 233), leaving the reader unsure of whether she does indeed marry or is even discharged from the asylum. Yet, the winter nonetheless closes the cyclic increment (year) of her quest and proceeds in the opening of a new season. Winter is a season of dormancy necessary for rejuvenation and rebirth. It is also a time for contemplation, hermitage, convalescence and recovery. As a plot device, the closing of winter is accompanied by the closing of past despair, pain and death of the old person(ality) and birth of the new. Although still ambivalent, hope is instilled when Esther walks herself into the interview (using her own agency) and the future becomes open and subject to change, unlike the stark contrast of summer where she is in apathetic limbo, sealed in the past.

Before moving onto the first chapter I will briefly relate the tone with the mindset of the protagonist and her mother. The lengthy stream-of-consciousness sentences infer the idea that the lack of control the speaker has of herself and her situations does not perturb her.

¹³ In Plath's poems, summer is portrayed as an obscure, ominous time. It is not necessarily that that which proceeds summer is evil and menacing, rather that summer reaffirms the uncertainty of the future which in turn unsettles the speaker. For example, in poem 'Winter Landscape, with Rooks' "Last summer's reeds are all engraved in ice"; in 'Dream with Claim-Diggers' (1956) "all summer/ Tanged by melting tar"; 'Child's Park Stones' (1958) warns about "Stones that take the whole summer to lose"; in 'Poem for a Birthday' (1959) "Overhead the old umbrellas of summer/ With like pathless hands. There is little shelter". Lastly in 'Frog Autumn' (1958) and 'Mystic' (1963), the uncertainty of summer is equated with the mother and the maternal "Summer grows old, cold-blooded mother", and "In the fetid wombs of black air under pines in summer".

¹⁴ In opposition to summer, winter generally holds promise of hope, reconciliation and abundance. For example, in 'Prologue to Spring' "The winter landscape hangs in balance now"; in 'Spinster' (1956) "How she longed for winter then! Scrupulously austere in its order"; in 'Mayflower' (1957) "Throughout black winter the red haws withstood/ Assault of snow-flawed winds from the dour skies"; in 'Tulips' (1961) "The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here/ Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in./ I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly". Lastly, Plath's posthumously published anthology *Winter Trees* (1971), written before her last poems which are the object of this study, includes a collection of poems which essentially show development in a movement from active to passive, a confrontation of problems pertinent to women.

Throughout the novel this undeterred nonchalance is striking as it is deceptively coupled with humour and a cavalier outlook. This is often accomplished through self-criticism or the mockery of consumerism, capitalism and patriarchy. The severity and absurdity of many situations she finds herself in however betray Esther's apparent and enduring *sang froid*. Situations such as her near rape, admission into hospitals, suicidal attempts and acts are downplayed by her construction thereof using cynical, deft humour and irony. This deceptive slip is also apparent in parts of the novel that portray the slippage and defragmentation of her psyche, such as her severe depression and schizoid episodes, which are often presented through inconsistent situations and her inability to recognise or make sense of forms (words, people, but mostly herself, her face/identity). The times when Esther positively shows emotion, expresses herself (however unconstructively) and uses her agency is when Mrs Greenwood enters the plot.

The exposition, conclusion and tone point to the thematic concern of the protagonist's lack of agency, inability to make choices (which is mostly due to ambivalence), rebirth of the self and conflict with the mother.

2.1 1950s perfectionism, the hero archetype and the pilgrimage

Before proceeding to an analysis of the metaphors and vectors or catalysts for rebirth, I will briefly discuss the text in connection with the 1950s era, Plath's characteristic perfectionism, the hero archetype and *TBJ* as a pilgrimage and *bildungsroman* that ends in enlightenment.

To place the discourse of *TBJ* within a historical perspective - it was written in the 1950/60s with the concerns of a white, middle- (although she frequently remarks on her "poverty") class female's point of view. Plath's difficulty in forming attachments and her ambivalence with her concept of self and career choices were largely and adversely affected by 1950s patriarchy and culture, conditions which she saw as her mother and other women to perpetuate. To elucidate the environment, central concerns and influences present in Esther's consciousness, I will most fittingly begin with the famous 'talk at Smith' to show how the young minds of her generation were shaped. This speech served to interpolate the blueprint of marriage, servitude and the primary purpose of women as childrearers and child bearers. This speech was given two years after Plath's attempted suicide tracked in *TBJ* (the novel was written in 1961) which highlights the importance of tertiary education and achievement. Hughes (Wagner, 2000: 46) calls this time of her life (the time of Stevenson's speech) Plath's "alpha career".

The commencement address was given by Adlai Stevenson to Plath and other female students at Smith College, Massachusetts, in order to prepare them for their studies ahead and life thereafter. It is ironic that the essence of the speech subverts education by reinstating the oppressive (foreign) ideologies it apparently strives to defeat. Education for a woman then was mostly a redundant interim before marriage.

Stevenson (1955) states in the introduction of her speech “Its [free society’s] bedrock is the concept of man as an end in himself” and continues the importance of keeping one’s husband as a “Western man”. She proceeds to present a resolution to the crisis (recalling the post- World War 2 concerns relevant at the time, the upheaval on America) by stating “And here’s where you come in: to restore valid, meaningful purpose to life in your home” after which she continues to create an atmosphere of distrust and paranoia of foreigners and foreign (individual) worldviews. The “homework” or rather mindset she assigns to the listeners is “part of your job is to keep him Western”, of which they can “do in the living-room with a baby on [their] lap or in the kitchen with a can opener in [their] hand”. She ends her speech stating the importance of “what you have learned and can learn will fit you for the primary task of making homes and whole human beings in whom the rational values of freedom, tolerance, charity and free inquiry can take root”.

The eloquence of this speech disguises the underlying message to follow Western, Christian and patriarchal praxes and essentially to learn to serve one’s husband and birth children. This speech presents the servitude Plath struggled with because she felt conflicted to conform to the subservient lifestyle and mindset of her colleagues and friends, as well as her mother. With regard to Smith education and its connection with Aurelia, Stevenson (1989: 24) explains, “Smith girls, educated for careers but prepared for marriage, were unquestionably valuable on the nuptial market, trained to elevate their husbands with precisely the kind of perfect services Aurelia Plath had provided for her spouse after their marriage in 1932”.

The individuality Plath sought was deterred by her need to conform and sacrifice her values in doing so. This conflict is presented in the beginning of *TBJ* (1963: 2) where Esther looks to her peers for confirmation of herself and confesses: “I was supposed to be having the time of my life. I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls... Only I wasn’t steering anything, not even myself”. The conformity Stevenson highlights is precisely the conflict Esther is concerned with, becoming and growing into the self versus following the crowd;

steering or being steered. Esther's need for individuality and voice was in fact not so much a unique problem as much as it was symptomatic of the culture of her time.

This trial was not exclusive to Plath, or Esther, although in *TBJ* Esther does see herself as sole sufferer in her overwhelming depression and disagreement with conformity. Notably, this view changes and with it Esther's character development ensues to the point where she is able to look outside herself and relate empathically to other women. At the end of the novel she is able to identify the suffering of other women in connection with the conflicted mindset of the 'bell jar' in which she felt stifled, alienated and withheld, "What was there about us, in Belsize, so different from the girls playing bridge and gossiping and studying in the college to which I would return? Those girls, too, sat under bell jars of a sort" (1963: 227). She was also able to reach out to Doctor Nolan and confide her insecurities, frustrations of double standards and her mother-complex. In this sense the novel sought to expose the vicarious and self-less lives women were taught to live and accept, and challenge the norms in 1950s society. Likewise, Jungian individuation begins with the availing of complexes developed in life and ends in the realisation and confrontation thereof, where the individual moves from separate to whole.

Fellow writers also found this 1950s 'problem with no name' to impact their sense of self, mental and emotional health. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), published 8 days after Plath's death discusses Stevenson's speech and its ramifications on the psyche of women. Friedan herself was a student of Smith College and in this text she creates an eloquent exhortation to change the way women see and are seen within society. For further depiction, Plath's contemporary Adrienne Rich (1972: 22) describes the environment:

...middle-class women were making careers of domestic perfection, working to send their husbands through to professional schools, then retiring to raise large families ... Life was extremely private; women were isolated from each other by the loyalties of marriage ... women didn't really talk to each other much in the fifties – not about their secret emptiness, their frustrations.

This 'emptiness' is sustained in contemporary writer Susanna Kaysen's novel as her journey parallels Plath's. Writer of *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) Kaysen was also admitted to McLean Hospital in 1967 for similar reason: attempted suicide, conflict with female role models and self-definition. Such mental disease among Kaysen, Plath and Sexton, among many others, point to question whether the disease was not in fact a symptom of society rather than the mind. Kaysen received the diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder characterised by the 'emptiness' typical of 'the problem with no name' Friedan discusses. Kaysen's depression is

attributed to her personality disorder, arguably a label for the collective struggles women faced in the patriarchal world. She lists the symptoms of her diagnosis as: “Emptiness and boredom. What an understatement. What I felt was complete desolation. Desolation, despair, and depression” (1993: 157). Her title, like *The Bell Jar*, implies a state of stasis. At the end of Kaysen’s novel she identifies her disrupted psyche in a painting and reflects “Interrupted at her music: as my life had been ... What life can recover from that?” (1993: 167). This presents a holistic depiction of the stifling conditions of the 1950s experienced by contemporary female writers.

The aforementioned stifling conditions of woman’s choice in the 1950s was significantly exacerbated by Plath’s perfectionism. Perfection presents an occlusion for self-growth, an unsettling paradox of accepting oneself as is whilst simultaneously seeking improvement. As discussed in Chapter 1, Plath’s intolerant standard for nothing-but excellence in her achievements was possibly instigated by the need for the positive reception and attention of her mother. Critics note the perfectionism (Shaw, 1973; Dobbs, 1977) and the issues it caused. Alvarez (1971: 45) views the need for perfectionism in Plath’s cooking, horse-riding, raising children, where “... everything had to be done well and to the fullest”. Wagner (2000: 7-8) relates this need to Plath’s individuation as a woman “Plath was a woman of her generation, determined to ‘have it all’... Plath wanted artistic fulfilment, yes, but she wanted to be able to combine that with being the perfect wife and mother” and then further comments on how this consistency damaged her sense of self and ability to make choices “... she could not find a balance between her self-doubt, her suspicion, her fears, and the image of the perfect self, wife, mother, writer, she chose to present to the world” (2000: 154). Plath fought to excel in every area of her life including those which she could not subvert, such as the society in which she lived.

Moreover, perfectionism in the novel is both creative and destructive. It compels Esther to excel academically yet it also made academics her anchor. This proved problematic when her application for her writing course was not accepted, as she was informed by her mother after her brief internship at *Ladies’ Day*, she had no other sources in which she had invested. In this case, perfectionism served as a catalyst in the sequence of events leading up to her suicide attempts. As Buell (1976: 197) outlines: “Behind [Esther’s] drive to success was a more-than-worldly drive to self-perfection: perfection both in her experience of all (particularly the extremes) in life and in the invulnerability of an attained mastery of that experience”. The

protagonist's hamartia is perfectionism, and the novel ends where Esther is at the end of a journey and has to make a choice as to where to go from there.

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After discussing the issue of choice as influenced greatly by the option and stigma of choices available for women at the time *TBJ* was written, the second part of this section analyses Esther the protagonist in connection with the hero archetype. After this I will move on to discuss the pilgrimage as a *bildungsroman* to postulate whether these occlusions were overcome.

To initiate a discussion of Esther as protagonist, I will turn to Joseph Campbell's definition of the hero archetype as clarification. Notably, Campbell followed the teachings of Jung's archetypes and tenets for individuation. Campbell (1949: 14) explains the hero archetype as follows:

The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore ... is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed.

This fits the image of Esther or rather Plath as “contemporary soul-searcher” (Bruenig, 2015: 54), as through Esther she tells the story of her experience of sickness in society, mental processes, rebirth and transfiguration (adaptation). The central concerns of identity and making decisions indicate that Esther is incomplete and fragile to begin with, and the narrative follows a trajectory of continuous looking inward and frantic searching to gain wholeness. After confronting multiple situations that provide a platform for growth, Esther achieves a sense of self and unity. This unity, in connection with the hero archetype and the education and enlightenment of *TBJ* as a *bildungsroman*, provides Joseph Campbell who followed Jung's archetypal teachings, with the ‘hero archetype’.

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TBJ serves as a *bildungsroman* of the protagonist's pilgrimage. The underlying need to find and establish an identity is explored through the situations and characters she encounters on this journey. This journey can be described as a ‘*monomyth*’ and seen in terms of an esoteric

archetypal transformation, which is also explained in connection with the tarot as ‘The Hero’s Journey’.

To turn again to Campbell to define this pilgrimage, he states: “The standard path of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (Campbell, 1949: 23). Esther introduces herself as distended, she is separate from society, her mother, her friends and ultimately herself. Initially, she is, like the ‘fool’ card in tarot: naïve, innocent, without shape, unworldly and inexperienced, ready to begin a life journey. Her initiation involves rituals of suicidal ideation and acts (discussed in 2.4) as well as the transformation from girl to woman, a sexual education. Her return to society, family and the world at large post admission to the asylum is when she is equipped through her experiences to carry on the next stage of her life. This ‘return’ Jung (1974: 39) describes as “illumination, or higher consciousness, by means of which the initial situation is overcome on a higher level”, which Esther indeed achieved.

This pilgrimage is essentially aimed at establishing an identity. Kendall (2001: 53) views the novel as a “searching for and shedding of identity”; Rose (1991: 185) a “type of pilgrim’s process (peregrination)”; (Uroff, 1977) as “plotted to establish two primary themes: that of Greenwood’s developing identity, or lack of it; and that of her battle against submission to the authority of both older people and, more pertinently, of men”. Yet many critics argue as to whether Esther indeed achieved the “illumination” of “higher consciousness” Jung speaks of above. This is particularly unclear due to the tyre metaphor used at the end of the novel. The tyre as an analogy for Esther’s psyche, is, after the initiative rituals “patched, retreaded and approved for the road” (1963: 232). The attempt of enlightenment as failure is the concurrent view among many critics.

Uroff (1977) highlights the question as to whether Esther indeed adhered to authority, conformity or whether she located and actualised herself. Many view this search for identity as a failed attempt where the need for marriage subverts the sense of self, whereby becoming a mother is the only chosen solution. Bonds (1990) states that “Esther’s sense of identity as a woman is predicated on finding “the right man””, Kendall (2001: 56, 60) believes Esther “remains as faceless at the end of the novel as at the beginning”, where the only certainty is that her “destination is motherhood”.

To return to Campbell's stage of the 'return' from the heroic quest (synonymous with Jung's illumination of the aim that a pilgrimage should ultimately reach) I want to highlight that the ending is ambiguous because identity is a continuously constructed concept. Esther's future is not fateful, it is fluid and adaptive. Adaptability is essentially the conformity Esther struggles to achieve, within the boundaries of individuality. This implies that her initial inability to cope with her surrounding relationships and attachments arrested her internal development which results in her mental stagnation. The attainment of a sense of self is predicated on Esther's ability to adapt to her environment in order to cope, as identity is not a static concept. Identity is constantly constructed, rearranged and realigned, and this is what Esther learns at the end of the novel.

Esther conquers more goals than she acknowledges in *TBJ*. Although the larger, empowering conquests are provided or guided by Doctor Nolan, whose character presents the archetypal Wise Old (Wo)Man, Esther does learn to achieve small victories of her own. Given her own list of inadequacies (1963: 70-71) including cooking, shorthand, dancing, and learning other languages, and elsewhere (72) her desire to ski; by the end of the novel she had achieved two of these and had outgrown her need to achieve the rest. She finds a surrogate mother in Doctor Nolan, liberates herself sexually (enabled through Nolan's referral to have a diaphragm fitted) and begins to see other women as similar to herself, and her situation as relative.

TBJ documents the sexual, physical, educational and psychological maturation and education of protagonist Esther Greenwood. As a coming-of-age narrative, a *bildungsroman* is defined as "a novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood or adolescence to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist realizes his or her place and role in the world" (Murfin and Ray, 2009: 39). A *bildungsroman*, as heroic quest interrelated with the idea of a pilgrimage, then seeks salvation and redemption. Although Esther's is predominantly a psychological journey, the overt conquest of sexual maturation is what she aims to conquer and succeeds in the end.

Kendall (2001: 64) identifies that *TBJ* "switches between three Esthers: the virgin, the sexually liberated, and the mother". Virginity indeed becomes a focal point after the defeat of her rejection from a summer writing course. Sexual experience holds the promise of rebirth and salvation, a shedding of the old methods and creation of the new. It is also an experience which Esther has not yet encountered. Esther associates virginity with weakness and naiveté, and the loss of virginity as a defining factor to her identity. She states "I saw the world divided into

people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another" (77). She envisioned a "spectacular change" after crossing the "boundary line" (78) from virgin to woman. Her numerous failed attempts at courting ("I thought I must have gone out with a different boy every week in the year" (58)) and the sequence of feeble and often ill-fated dates (with Frankie, Marco, Buddy, Eric, the sailor on the beach, the prison guard, Mark, Constantin) were resolved when she conquered her goal during her institutionalisation.

The attainment of the separation or "apart"-ness from other women without the consequence of pregnancy, in other words her individuality, is Esther's goal. She identifies this incongruity whilst waiting for her diaphragm appointment ("How easy having babies seemed to the women around me! Why was I so unmaternal and apart? Why couldn't I dream of devoting myself to baby after fat puking baby like Dodo Conway? If I had to wait on a baby all day, I'd go mad" (212-213)). She yearns for the independence her defloration seems to afford and she saw the heaviness of the undone act as a weight suppressing her growth: "Ever since I'd learned about the corruption of Buddy Willard my virginity weighed like a millstone around my neck" (218). After the diaphragm-fitting appointment which enabled her to protect herself from becoming pregnant she reflects: "I had done well... I was my own woman" and continues to plot a means she can use her goal of deflowering, "The next step was to find the proper sort of man" (213).

Enabled by Nolan, Esther meets a candidate at the Widener Library after her diaphragm fitting, Irwin the mathematics professor. Her opportunity arises and she decides to "seduce" him during her psychiatric rehabilitation ("I decided to practise my new, normal personality on this man" (216)). She views her deflowering as "a kind of impersonal, priestlike official, as in the tales of tribal rites" (218). After the act, she views her transformed condition as complete and enlightening: "I smiled into the dark. I felt part of a great tradition ... I wanted to brood over my new condition in perfect peace" (219). After paying for her hospital bills, as the intercourse resulted in her haemorrhaging, she felt "perfectly free" (232). Esther's transformation into a woman is the culmination of her pilgrimage, an addition to her identity, through the use of her agency and will. Esther became an active agent by obtaining the prescription for a diaphragm, having it fitted, finding a suitable aspirant for the act, executing the act itself, seeking help after her haemorrhaging and then severing ties with her lover.

Lastly in the discussion and contextualization of the pilgrimage in *TBJ*, she remains separated from her mother but attains a surrogate mother she can aspire to in the form of Doctor Nolan. Given the penumbra of antagonism with Mrs Greenwood in *TBJ*, which will be discussed in 2.3, Esther also attains a positive role model in Nolan, as a homecoming resolution and the only character she is respectful towards.

2.2 Metaphors and symbolism

The figs on the fig tree in the yard are green;

Green, also, the grapes on the green vine

Shading the brickred porch tiles.

The money's run out.

Sylvia Plath, 'Departure' (1956)

For many women, the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they do not make themselves be anything; they wonder indefinitely what they could have become, which leads them to wonder what they are. (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949: 320)

The central tropes in *TBJ* effectively communicate Esther's perception of herself, other women and how she perceives her situation within 1950s America. These include the fig tree, mat, arrow, tyre and the omnipresent bell jar. Other motifs include typing and shorthand, which reinforce the symbolic oppression of Esther's mother and the society which she faces and learns to overcome. The conflict and resolution of the novel are realised not through defeating an antagonist, but rather through self-actualisation and enlightenment; learning to adapt and cope with the challenges presented to Esther as a woman.

Jung (1960: 53) views the symbol as the "psychological mechanism that transforms energy", and elsewhere as a "pregnant language" (Jung, 1960: 89). As such, I will begin with the symbolism of the fig tree metaphor. This is an extended metaphor that harks back to the discussed options for women of the 1950s and features thematically as a penumbra in the novel.

Esther comes across a fable about a fig tree in a book sent to her from the *Ladies' Day* company she works for. It is significant to note that the inception and consequent realisation of the

limited choices Esther has in her future (the fig tree) is availed to her through a short story from the very company that predicates this ideology, in *Ladies' Day*, which she begins to despise for the female lifestyle she refuses to conform to. In other words, Esther views *Ladies' Day* and its female staff as the epitome of the exact vacuous and frivolous servitude (with exception to Jay Cee) that she will succumb to lest she pick a fig. It seems coincidental, or as Jung would say synchronistical¹⁵, that Esther should come across such a portrayal of her current situation, given the mental conflict foreshadowed in the introduction and portended along the way by the fact that she felt no agency and control over her situation. This is depicted in the fig tree which presents as much opportunity for growth as it does for decay. She finds it upon convalescing from food poisoning from her work luncheon. Early on in the novel Esther sees herself and her life reflected in the fig tree:

I flipped through one story after another until finally I came to a story about a fig tree. This fig grew on a green lawn between the house of a Jewish man and a convent, and the Jewish man and a beautiful dark nun kept meeting at the tree to pick the ripe figs, until one day they saw an egg hatching in a bird's nest on a branch of the tree, and as they watched the little bird peck its way out of the egg, they touched the backs of their hands together, and then the nun didn't come out to pick figs with the Jewish man any more but a mean-faced Catholic kitchen maid came to pick them instead and counted up the figs the man picked after they were both through to be sure he hadn't picked any more than she had, and the man was furious. I thought it was a lovely story, especially the part about the fig tree in winter under the snow and then the fig tree in spring with all the green fruit. I felt sorry when I came to the last page. I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig tree. (Plath, 1963: 51-52)

She later reflects on the fig tree at a dance with Doreen (after which she lists all the qualities she does not possess):

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa

¹⁵ Jung denotes the term 'synchronicity' to a coincidence which links neither causally nor teleologically to an event: "an inner unconscious knowledge that links a physical event with a psychic condition, so that a certain event that appears "accidental" or "coincidental" can in fact be psychically meaningful" (1953: 291). It is a situation that arises, a conflict that has preoccupied the individual's mind and needs to be confronted, that provides insight into the individual's current conflict and character if he/she decides to take cognisance of it.

and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (Plath, 1963: 73)

One can take note here that the option (fig) for her later quest to lose her virginity in order to become a woman was neither listed nor alluded to in the above. Moving on, Esther downplays this vision by putting it down to hunger, stating, "I don't know what I ate, but I felt immensely better after the first mouthful. It occurred to me that my vision of the fig tree and all the fat figs that withered and fell to earth might well have arisen from the profound void of an empty stomach" (1963: 74). The reprieve from the spiritual and transcendental hunger was deferred by alleviating a physical hunger in the stomach. The symbolism of the stomach connection is significant: as the site for digestion and metaphorical internalisation has been blocked with food, her attention is redirected from focusing on the "void" of existential worry/choice to the concrete, somatic hunger. Keeping in mind that this fable is presented by *Ladies' Day*, in the book of short stories sent as an apology for the 11 girls' food poisoning and consequent vomiting and dehydration, the symbolic body/mind connection between physical, mental and spiritual hunger is significant because Esther feels both empty and lost in the exact environment where she would be expected to find an identity. She cannot 'digest' the situation presented to her, the current occupation of editorials she has partaken in, the women languidly tanning on the sunroof "yawning and painting their nails and trying to keep up their Bermuda tans, and they seemed bored as hell" (1963: 4). This option of the fig tree has in fact already been presented to Esther and she has consequentially rejected it; it is poisonous to her well-being and preoccupies her mind (when there is no food in her stomach to distract her).

Accordingly, the tree represents all the pathways Esther can choose: a husband, "happy home and children"; "famous poet"; "brilliant professor"; "amazing editor"; travel to continents; "pack of lovers"; "Olympic lady crew champion": and other obscure choices (in retrospect, Plath achieved 5 of these desired options by the time of her death). However, she is ambivalent about making these choices and this indecisive cycle increases her anxiety until she fears she may not choose one. The mutually exclusive "figs" or choices she needs to decide upon are

available within her life expectancy timeframe, their spoiling/rotting or expiration is contingent. Yet, at this point, as I have pointed out elsewhere, Esther does not know what she wants because she does not yet know who she is, and therefore cannot choose what she wants to be. This existential calamity is all the more exacerbated by both Esther's perfectionism ("I wanted each and every one of them") and most importantly, her femaleness, of which she feels a victim. Esther saw herself in the figs which "began to wrinkle and go black" (Plath, 1963: 73) and eventually decayed¹⁶ at her feet. She recognised her potential for attaining each fig however discretely; each fig appealed to an aptitude she already possessed.

To analyse further the tree and fig symbolism further: The Garden of Eden, trees, fruit and fertility are associated with the mother archetype (Jung, 1953: 15), where the tree is symbolic of the "Great Mother" (Jung, 1964: 81). Further, Jung identifies a multitude of symbolic interpretations for the tree. A tree can mean the "union for opposites" (1953: 27), "evolution, physical growth, or psychological maturation", "sacrifice or death (Christ's crucifixion on the tree)" (Jung, 1964: 90), "growth and development of psychic life" (Jung, 1964: 153), but most importantly "the tree symbolizes the process of *individuation*, giving a lesson to our shortsighted ego" (Jung, 1964: 163, emphasis added). The interpretation of individuation, where the branches hold a variety of future prospects is all the more daunting for Esther because her mother accomplished only the first fig option of a husband, children and home. Since Esther views her mother in a negative and often derisive light and the tree is representative of woman and femaleness, this revelation brings about her great depression in the novel as she cannot bring herself to follow her mother's example. Although, in hindsight, the availing of this accurate presentation of her future prospects compelled Esther's rebirth afterwards. The "green, womb-like, even vaginal figs of female procreativity" (Budick, 1987: 881) are precisely the femaleness she despises but must conform to at this crossroads, in order to continue her journey.

The other symbol that perturbs Esther is that of the arrow which is complemented later in the novel by its counterpart, the kitchen mat. To contextualise these two metaphors (which are both connected in Esther's mind with the female condition and by inference her mother) the arrow enters the narrative first when Buddy Willard, the male Esther spent the most time courting

¹⁶ In her journals Plath wrote "Being born a woman is an awful tragedy... my inescapable femininity ... all is spoiled by the fact that I am a girl, a female is always in danger of assault and battery" (2000: 77). Similarly, like the figs/choices Esther perceives that begin to "wrinkle and go black" in *TBJ*, the same decay ("spoiled") is evident in the "awful tragedy" of Plath's "inescapable femininity".

however ambivalently, informs her that his mother believes "What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security,"; "[w]hat a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow *shoots off from*" (67, emphasis added). The site where the arrow "shoots off from" is nameless; the site as a contraption, bow, discharging device which enables male performance, is without a label. This is significant because Esther is searching for an identity, a name, and this disillusioning yet equally accurate observation is a denial of identity. In Mrs Willard's aphorism Esther sees her current, nameless state. The arrow in context is associated with movement, adaption, accomplishment; its phallic shape capable of transcending teleologically into an open future. The future is exactly what creates Esther's ambivalence and anxiety, and the arrow, or man, is traditionally able and destined to reach such heights. The woman, however, as mere "place", is sedentary, fated to stasis and without further associations. Yet the woman is exactly that which is not added or described; she has no descriptors which fortify or validate her insignificance and redundancy. "[I]nfinite security" is a euphemism for the dull, static quality that "a man wants", which the woman is traditionally fated to provide.

The arrow is referred to twice later on in the novel. First during a reverie about her future and second during a particularly hazardous skiing trip. Before falling asleep on one of her courting attempts with admirer Constantin, Esther reflects on Mrs Willard's marriage analogy: "That's one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from". She then adds what she would like to occur instead: "I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket" (79). She has internalised and subsequently repeats the analogy in an attempt to liken herself to the arrow and readapt it to the feminine. In doing so, she maintains the shape but increases the size of the metaphoric unit of arrow to a "Fourth of July *rocket*" (emphasis added).

Later on, whilst on a skiing trip (an experience on her list that she had not yet had which made her feel inferior) with Buddy Willard, Esther embodies the previously alluded to arrow, as she shoots off the precipice of a mountain. This is a reckless and almost suicidal attempt, "Edging to the rim of the hilltop, I dug the *spikes* of my poles into the snow and pushed myself into a flight I knew I couldn't stop by skill or any belated access of will. I *aimed straight down* ... a small, answering *point* in my own body flew toward it [the "white sun"]" (93, emphasis added). The phallic "spikes" of her poles, "point" located in her body that was compelled to act and the manner in which she flew ("aimed straight down") can be seen as implementing an inversion

of Mrs Willard's view of the male as an arrow that she readily and impressionably internalised. The assertiveness of this act, the active thrill and determination, can be attributed to the activation of her animus. As the male-like impulses within the psyche of the female unconscious dimension (which become active during courtship when the female animus reacts with the male anima), the animus as a potentiality residing in Esther's psyche was strengthened by her reflections on Mrs Willard's analogy and enacted in the skiing incident. The latency of the animus presented in the novel until this point is evident in its overcompensation as Esther "flew" too forcefully and too rapidly off the edge and subsequently broke her leg in two places as a result.

The arrow finds the site from where it shoots, following the skiing incident, by the metaphorical extension of the kitchen mat. Significantly, Mrs Willard, as subtle antagonist (like Mrs Greenwood) to Esther, incepts this idea in Esther's mind which she again identifies with. The kitchen mat can be seen as the second part of a two-part metaphor complementing the arrow symbol above. The impressionable Esther recalls Mrs Willard's creation and placement of a rug and then immediately associates it with her mother:

Once when I visited Buddy I found Mrs. Willard braiding a rug out of strips of wool from Mr. Willard's old suits. She'd spent weeks on that rug, and I had admired the tweedy browns and greens and blues patterning the braid, but after Mrs. Willard was through, instead of hanging the rug on the wall the way I would have done, she put it down *in place of her kitchen mat*, and in a few days it was soiled and dull and indistinguishable from any mat you could buy for under a dollar in the five and ten. And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to *flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat*. Hadn't my own mother told me that as soon as she and my father left Reno on their honeymoon -- my father had been married before, so he needed a divorce -- my father said to her, "Whew, that's a relief, now we can stop pretending and be ourselves"? -- and from that day on my mother never had a minute's peace. (Plath, 1963: 80-81, emphasis added).

Mrs Willard and Mrs Greenwood are viewed similarly as antagonistic and they both have an impressionable effect on Esther's psyche (which will be discussed in Chapter 2.3). However, to analyse the mat metaphor in connection with Esther, we should observe her reflection on it after the above recollection of Mrs Willard's metaphor:

This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's, but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother

did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself. (Plath, 1963: 80).

Esther, as a high achiever and brilliant academic, had not invested her energy in the typical domestic and craft activities associated with women. What she had invested herself in until this point became redundant because of its uselessness in the next (female) phase of life. She feels she inevitably must conform to this phase involving marriage and children. All Esther's academics and scholarships are irrelevant in the proceeding phase of her life that traditionally involves domesticity, a role for her that is both undeveloped and undesired. This is a disillusioning revelation which is all the more taken as the truth because Mrs Willard states it so and Esther's own mother has confirmed it. The rug was created out of "strips of wool", craftily with the style of a bricoleur; Esther "admired" the rug due to its colouring and the laborious time taken to create it. Yet the dynamism and resourcefulness involved in the rug's creation are meaningless because it was degraded in its delegation to the site of the kitchen, the woman's domain, where it would neither be seen, appreciated nor celebrated. Esther, with her "fifteen years of straight A's", who had strenuously built herself up to possess an array of educational skills like the array of intricate patterns and colouring of the mat, was destined to "cook and clean and wash", to become "soiled and dull" and ultimately as identity- and impression-less as the once fine artwork of the kitchen mat.

The dispensability and inevitability of the mat's restriction to the kitchen is the metaphorical destination which Esther feels she is trapped in and fated to reach. De Beauvoir's idea of the 'eternal feminine', analogous to Friedan's social construct of the feminine mystique, expounds the idea of woman being passive, acted unto without agency. Similar to the doctrines of Adlai Stevenson's speech, the 'eternal feminine' is a closed conceptual archetype or personage allocated to women as it reinforces an idealisation of woman as allocated the role of giving unto others: to nurture her husband's professional development and their children's upbringing. As a myth, it constructs the static image and behavioural conception of women to fit strictly feminine virtues, such as "cook and clean and wash" (Plath, 1963: 80). The 'eternal feminine' is the Other, the idealised yet simultaneously marginalised and heathen, because she is unequal and inferior. Jung would attribute the lack of animus to this concept, which results in creating an imbalance in the psyche and leads to the 'emptiness' Friedan, Kaysen, and other women of the era experienced. The autonomous subjectivity Esther desires is denied her, reinforcing the myth of the 'eternal feminine' where she is forced to "thrive beneath and beyond the world

where man chooses to live but where he does not want to be confined” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 235), the domestic site of the kitchen to which she is allocated, literally “beneath”.

The kitchen is then part of the “feminine world” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 734) much like the motif of typing and shorthand. Typing and shorthand represents oppression in *TBJ*, firstly because it is a position below most male occupations and secondly because it is introduced and perpetuated by Mrs Greenwood. Mrs Greenwood inculcates it as a suitable profession in Esther’s mind. Although Mrs Greenwood’s incentive in teaching Esther shorthand is to empower her, given the realistically small-scale scope of professions women were able to achieve, it is nonetheless a denial and interference in the career she knows Esther wants to pursue as well as an attempt to replicate herself in her daughter. Ironically, this limitation gives Esther motivation and opportunity to develop and consolidate her own choices. Esther sees her mother’s attempt to teach her shorthand as an attempt to silence or negate her own abilities as a writer. She states, “My mother kept telling me nobody wanted a plain English major ... The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters” (1963: 72). Being at the service of a writer discounts the goal Mrs Greenwood knows she seeks to achieve and the status of being a writer that she seeks to attain. Her mother’s reminder reinforces the ‘eternal feminine’ as it contrasts the masculine domain by its component of inferior women, who lack their own “autonomous and closed society” and are “integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position” (de Beauvoir, 1954: 734). Esther sought to express her own voice, not that of others, and not to perpetuate the already existing condition of servitude among women. Perhaps the contrariness was also motivated by an attempt to oust or spite her mother, as Esther believes her mother “secretly hated it [shorthand]” (36)¹⁷.

Moreover, on the topic of typing and shorthand as an oppressive motif as well as the aforementioned mat symbol, Esther is not without ambivalence. On the one hand, she yearns for belonging yet refuses to conform. Nuanced in Esther’s depiction of the fig tree, mat and arrow metaphors, is her yearning to find solace the same way other women apparently do; as well as her disdain of the fact that they do seem to (outwardly) appreciate and enjoy their

¹⁷ The predicament of perpetuating servitude is similar to that of Kaysen (1993: 131) in her autobiographical novel *Girl, Interrupted* where Kaysen states in disillusion “I looked around the room. All typists were women; all supervisors were men”. This observation is made when she begins work in the only position she could find for women, true to Mrs Greenwood’s assertion, after her discharge at McLean Hospital. Kaysen, like Esther, refuses to conform and leaves this “feminine domain”. Thus, typing and shorthand were then not only symbols of oppression for Esther, but for most female writers of the time.

profession and she does not. Ambivalence, as an “intrinsic property of the Eternal Feminine” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 316) is paradoxically to rest on the periphery of choice without making one. Given that, in this time, feminism was in its nascent state where the shifting of consciousness was first to identify the problem, and in the following waves of feminism attempt to rectify it, Esther highlights, through her ambivalence, an important point in history where the double standards of society were beginning to be exposed.

Before moving to an analysis of the female characters in the novel I will examine the last symbol pertinent to *TBJ* in connection with ambivalence, the mother, rebirth, and Esther’s subjective state as a symbol of Esther’s transformation in terms of the libido. Unlike the society-orientated typing and shorthand motif, the bell jar is a reflection of Esther’s subjective state. The bell jar is a looming and omnipresent warning for Esther, threatening to envelope her and isolate her and subsume the time which she existentially feels so pressured to expend. In this atemporal limbo, a state which threatens at any moment to overcome and consume her, she is stricken with anxiety, depression and abjection.

Before turning to how this state is described and reflected on in *TBJ*, it is fitting to show that this inactive and pressurised state is indicative of the libido. As in many of Plath’s poems, lack of movement is typically negative and dangerous, which is the same for the bell jar metaphor. Paradoxically, this lack of movement and growth, depicted only through its latency, is also indicative of a future change. The libido and its associated suppressive and negative states are evident in Esther’s decent from reality into a schizoid state, as well as the rebirth that follows this separation. Jung’s concept of the libido is more inclusive, complex, and not exclusively sexual like Freud’s. Libido, from Jung’s standpoint, encompasses sexual, mental, emotional, physical and spiritual energy, as “general life instinct” or even “psychic energy” (Jung, 1960: 35).

Fundamental to the libido are its two phases of progression and regression. Firstly, progression¹⁸ is the “daily advance of the process of psychological adaption” which is often subject to the “demands of environmental conditions” (1960: 37-38). There is conflict of opposing libidinal forces whose fricative function increases in intensity and frequency builds up to a shift or rebirth. After this, an attitude/mind-set is attained and incorporated to bring about change. The mind-set attained is one-sided, and the following regression restores the

¹⁸ Jung (1960: 46) defines progression as a “continuous process of adaption to environmental conditions springs from the vital need for such adaption”.

psyche to its equilibrium. Secondly, regression¹⁹ activates unconscious material, “springs from the vital need to satisfy the demands of individuation” and, as the “backward movement of libido” breaks the conflict of the fricative phase in progression, (Jung, 1960: 42-43, 46). Regression is not a retrograde or a degradation of a previous part in development, rather it is the opposite, a regression that “represents a necessary phase in development” (1960: 43) to the obstruction or “damming up” (1960: 45) of progression. Thus these two phases of the libido are requisite to bring about a change; the greater the two forces are, the bigger the change. The two phases can be seen as the binaries of change, the polar yet complementary constituents of transformation.

The bell jar is symbolic of this progression and regression as the prepotent symbol of the narrative. The bell jar can then be seen as a transformative symbol. In this light, what is seen as a restricted and negative incarceration is also positive and necessary for individuation. Only in such a stagnant and static space, keeping in mind the repetition of the image and the feelings it evokes in Esther throughout the novel, can a build-up and consequent overflow of positivity, freedom and growth occur. The bell jar is like the trough phase in a wave, incrementing Esther’s phase of development, her perception of the bell jar changes when she moves through new phases that fill the trough with waves. The trough is inseparable from the waves, for the waves are only evident in the presence of the trough and *vice versa*. The bell jar also heralds change; as a transformative symbol it brings to Esther’s consciousness a foreshadowing of development. In this sense the bell jar represents the libido with its two phases of “transitional stages in the flow of energy” (1960: 47). The titular bell jar is then representative of the compression and temporary suspension necessary for expansion and movement.

The bell jar first appears in the novel upon Esther’s admission to the asylum. Esther believed her location was irrelevant and the bell jar would always threaten her psyche, “I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air” (178). While Philomena Guinea escorted her to the asylum in her black Cadillac, Esther repeats this: “I sank back in the gray, plush seat and closed my eyes. The air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn’t stir” (178). After Esther’s second treatment of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) by Doctor Nolan, she states: “All the heat and fear purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air” (206). Before

¹⁹ Jung (1960: 46) reiterates the importance of regression in restoring the psyche’s balance in an individual “He [sic] can meet the demands of outer necessity in an ideal way only if he is also adapted to his [sic] own inner world, that is, he [sic] is in harmony with himself [sic]”.

her interview for hospital discharge and her meeting with her mother she reflects: “To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream” (227). Reflecting on this condition as relative to other women, Esther queries: “What was there about us, in Belsize, so different from the girls playing bridge and gossiping and studying in the college to which I would return? Those girls, too, sat under bell jars of a sort” (227). Lastly, when greeting a friend before her interview, Esther rehashes: “But I wasn't sure. I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday -- at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere -- the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?” (1963: 230).

As discussed above, the bell jar is a reflection of Esther's psyche which depicts a progression of her psychic states, whilst always signifying change itself. Its recollection increases in the plot most notably at the time of Esther's character development. Her perception of the bell jar state changes from personal, from her subjective state, to collective, where she was able to relate the inertia of the bell jar to other women. The change was brought about by ECT which shocked her into rebirth. An interaction with her mother evoked the same feelings. However, the bell jar threatened change and would inevitably “descend again” (230) in her future, indicating that she was in a progressive phase and able to reflect upon the challenging choices she had made, and would inevitably make (Jung, 1960: 38). Significantly, the final location where Esther's story ends is Belsize (bell), the recovery ward of the asylum she was admitted to, also illustrative of the titular symbol.

As discussed above, the bell jar metaphor signifies displacement, inevitability and stasis whilst also heralding a transformation. Esther uses other similes and metaphors to depict this state which also chart her descent into and ascent from herself. The bell jar is echoed in many metaphors pertinent to this state, replicated throughout the novel in similar metaphors that mostly convey the regression Esther feels. These include the car metaphor where, in the introduction, Esther desires to appear to steer “New York like her own private car” and upon reflection realises, “Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself” (2). She relates this “very still and very empty” (2) feeling to “the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (2-3), the “eye” a homonym for “I”. Giving birth like Mrs Tomillo is likened to awaiting a severe sentence where a “long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again” (62). The hopelessness of the car and tornado metaphor is repeated again with a racehorse simile (“I felt like a racehorse in a world without race-tracks” (72)), telephone poles much like the fig tree metaphor (“I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles,

threaded together by wires ... and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth" (118)) and white boxes, again much like the fig tree ("I saw the days of the year stretching ahead like a series of bright, white boxes, and separating one box from another was sleep, like a black shade" where she reflects, "Only for me, the long perspective of shades that set off one box from the next had suddenly snapped up, and I could see day after day after day glaring ahead of me like a white, broad, infinitely desolate avenue"(123)), and lastly when feeling static ("as if I were being stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out" (123)).

The bell jar that foreshadows change has proxies with similar functions where the enclosed and protective yonic shape can be seen as a chthonic repository. Such proxies include the alcove in the asylum, the cave-like "hole mouth" (163). Esther crawls into during her suicide attempt, her many cleansing rituals in deep hot baths where the significance of the drive to reach and embed herself in such sites will be discussed further on. The above metaphors serve to illustrate Esther's individuation, psyche and identification. The next section analyses the characters and more importantly her mother and mother surrogate, that played a role in her development.

2.3 Female characters, their roles and identification

Esther's relationships in general in *TBJ* are inconsistent and ambivalent. She seeks a role model which she can emulate but quickly dismisses each female character she encounters including her mother, with the exception of the mother surrogate Doctor Nolan. Every relationship she has with a female figure is affected by her ambivalence and Doctor Nolan is, to a small degree, no exception. She struggles to form an attachment yet there is always an underlying desperation and need to form her own agency through mirroring that of others. She seeks individuality and a voice. This section will examine the female characters in *TBJ* which Esther either wants to emulate or sees as rivals, as well as the temporary surrogacy of mother figures Jay Cee and Doctor Nolan.

Since this section is concerned with the identification and identity of the female characters in *TBJ*, it is fitting to begin with Plath's fascination with doubles and where this fascination first materialised. Plath did her Honours thesis on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846) at Smith College in 1955, a year and a half after her admission to McLean's Hospital. There are many parallels between *TBJ* and *The Double* (1846) such as the allure and entrapment of the solipsistic inner world, the protagonist's frustration with social masks (personas) and the abject,

narcissistic self, the surveillance the protagonist feels and the consequent paranoia, and many more. Most of all, the similarities of the protagonist's decline into insanity as a consequence of a diseased society as well as the protagonist's dire search for the self through others are evident in both novels, not to mention the extreme psychological struggle of the narrators in their attempt to become themselves or rather, their desired self. This is reinforced by the motif of the doppelgänger. Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin eventually meets his doppelgänger, Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin Junior (Jr.), who is much liked by society for his elegant and apt social decorum. The two create a friendship which quickly turns to rivalry. The original Golyadkin Senior (Sr.) then begins to descend into madness, seeing himself in every person and the novel ends where he is taken to an asylum.

Like Golyadkin Sr. and Jr., Esther sees Joan Gilling as a friend and rival. There are a few noteworthy similarities between the replicas of Golyadkin Sr. and Jr., Esther and Joan. Joan's presence and absence influences Esther greatly and she feels either great affection for Joan, or great abhorrence. Both protagonists find themselves drawn to their doubles. Golyadkin Sr., referred to as "our hero" (1846) in the novel is the hero on his pilgrimage, as Esther is the hero in her own journey. Joan, Esther's double ("Joan was the *beaming double of my old best self*, specially designed to follow and torment me" (1963: 197, emphasis added)) suddenly and coincidentally joins Esther at the asylum. The doubles in both novels enter the plot towards the end of the novel (where the protagonist has persevered through the separation stage which Campbell (1949: 23) discusses as part of the heroic journey), and are currently in the 'initiation-return' stage where they are met. Esther views Joan as competition and a threat to her character, specifically in the skills Esther does not possess (such as Joan's aptitude for physics and golf, and her presence becomes a reminder of Esther's slower recovery (1963: 197)) similar to Golyadkin Sr. who views Golyadkin Jr. (who is blessed with social graces, confidence, charm and extroversion). Joan shows Esther a picture of herself in a magazine which Esther rejects and dismisses²⁰, much like Golyadkin Sr. rejects his own appearance in others. Esther is, at times, sceptical of Joan's existence and her own sanity (1963: 210), just as Golyadkin Sr., when no one around him seems able to validate his conspiracy theory regarding the existence of Golyadkin Jr.. Esther is envious of Joan's social status in the asylum, as well as Joan's earned

²⁰ Joan asks publicly in the hall of the asylum whilst looking through a fashion magazine, "Oh but it is Esther, isn't it Esther?", to which Esther responds after scrutinising the image of herself "No, it's not me. Joan's quite mistaken. It's somebody else" (1963: 199). The staff and patients can all see the resemblance, yet Esther denies it and is filled with embarrassment and indignation at Joan's identification, much like Golyadkin Sr. felt by Golyadkin Jr. Similarly, in *The Double* (1948), when Golyadkin first sees someone who appears to look just like him, he states "It's not I, it's not I – and that is the fact of the matter".

privileges, just as Golyadkin Sr. envies Golyadkin Jr.'s warm social reception. Yet when in a situation of emergency, Esther calls Joan for help. She acknowledges the impenetrability of their bond and seeks to terminate their complex attachment ("Suddenly I wanted to dissociate myself from Joan completely" (224)), just as Golyadkin Sr. disliked the "unseemingly resemblance of the two individuals" (1849), himself and Golyadkin Jr. Notwithstanding the many pertinent references to reflective surfaces in both novels (Dostoevsky's introduction opens with three references to a "looking-glass" within the first two paragraphs), the other repeated references to hot/cold, light/dark, (as evidence of an alchemical transformation) body parts and identity, the frequent inability to express his/her thoughts and the overall distrust of the self's sensory input is pertinent to the increasing desire to relate to others.

The ego in the novels seeks a persona with which to portray the other facets of the speaker's identity. This is much like confessional poet John Berryman's technique of using a persona, 3rd speaker Henry, in his poetry to express a certain dimension of his personality that was otherwise inexpressible without such an outlet. Plath's many pseudonyms²¹ are also indicative of this splitting of the self which enables her to activate and live through the many facets of her personality. When Esther introduces herself as 'Elly Higginbottom' to Doreen's courter Lenny Shepard, Doreen later calls Esther by this name at the same time as the night maid calls 'Miss Greenwood'. Esther immediately reacts to this simultaneous discord of titles by thinking conspiratorially that they were doing such to avail the idea that she "had a split personality or something" (1963: 20). Meanwhile, she had introduced the cavalier Elly personage as a duplicate of the coy yet passive facade Doreen had portrayed to Lenny, and had consequently forgotten about it.

As we have seen above in the similarities between *TBJ* and *The Double* regarding the speaker's presentation of the self and the disparity felt from the real self, both sought a desirable role model to duplicate. The female characters can be grouped into three divisions: the admirable rivals which Esther aspires to emulate, the (semi) antagonists Mrs Greenwood and Mrs Willard that push Esther to become individual, as well as the mother surrogates of Jay Cee and Doctor Nolan. Lastly, after an analysis of the characters and their effect on Esther, I will discuss Esther's individuation.

To begin with, *TBJ* opens with *Ladies' Day*, the magazine where Esther and twelve other women work for an internship. Esther, Betsy and Doreen wrote columns for the magazine. It

²¹ These include Sylvan Hughes, Ellen Stockbridge, Sandra Peters, Sadie Peregrine, Alison Arnold.

becomes clear that Esther, like Plath in real life through her writings, sought a “belle amie” (Stevenson, 1989: 49) which she could relate to. Doreen, Betsy and Joan are the main women that Esther seeks attachment with. All unique and individual in personalities, Esther’s realisation and first slippage into depression is brought about when she becomes aware that each of the girls knows what they would like to be, whilst Esther doesn’t. This occurs during the photography shoot at *Ladies’ Day*. When asked to pose as their desired future profession, Betsy dresses as a farmer’s wife, Doreen as a social worker in India, and another girl Hilda as a hat designer. When Esther is asked what her choice would be, she replies that she does not know. This moment triggers an existential, identity crisis within Esther. Consequently, Jay Cee as a surrogate mother figure attempts to help Esther by saying that Esther wants “to be everything” (1963: 97). Esther jumps in by announcing she would like to be a poet, afterwards breaking down into tears and being left alone in the room.

Uroff (1977) views *TBJ* as Esther’s quest for identity which is “described through a series of episodes that involve possible role models” where each is “introduced and either discredited or approved”. Doreen is the first character that enters the novel. She is introduced as “one of my [Esther’s] troubles” (1963: 4). Doreen appears two-dimensional and Esther meets her with both a mixture of admiration (“I’d never known a girl like Doreen before” (4)) and intolerance. She is described as a vacuous Shirley Temple-like figure with “bright white hair round her head and blue eyes like transparent agate marbles, hard and polished” (4), a stark contrast to Esther’s banal description of herself as bland “brown eyes and brown hair” (3). Doreen is clearly the alpha rebel female in the crowd and Esther is deeply affected by her company (“being with Doreen made me forget my worries. I felt wise and cynical as hell” (7)). Esther admires her intuition, the languid manner in which she “coolly” blows “smoke flares” (5) out of her nostrils, her coy demeanour around men and the “dainty” (11) manner with which Doreen sips her drink. Esther both idolises her (“Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight from my own bones” (7)) and adheres to her advice, for example, when Esther is unsure of the custom of tipping bellmen, she adheres to Doreen’s advice. Esther saves her place card when Doreen misses the luncheon for her date with Lenny. Instead of going home and leaving Lenny and Doreen to their courting, Esther stays on to watch Doreen (“I wanted to see as much as I could” (12)). As a socialite with charisma and good looks, Doreen provides Esther with access into the social world. Doreen visits Lenny’s house and is invited to a carnival and later the country club to meet Marco, Doreen’s arranged date for her. Importantly, Esther became ‘Elly Higgins’ when she was with Doreen, meeting Lenny and his friend (Elly Higgins is the alias

she uses when she introduces herself to the men Doreen wanted to meet, the demure persona Doreen evoked in her). Altogether, Esther is quite taken by Doreen's confidence and the way in which Doreen expresses herself.

However, after Esther has idolised and followed Doreen, at the first sign of failure or incompetence on Doreen's behalf, Esther quickly dismisses her and restarts her search for role models. This happens when Esther leaves Doreen at Lenny's, after the pair were arguing and fighting because they were intoxicated and Esther returned to her hotel room at the Amazon. Doreen later knocks on Esther's door for aid, as she is too drunk to look after herself or find her own door, and Esther leaves her next to her vomit on the carpet. Esther states at this point "deep down I would have nothing to do with her [Doreen]. Deep down I would be loyal to Betsy and her innocent friends. It was Betsy I resembled at heart" (21). This shows an extreme and unexpected refashioning of Esther's perception of Doreen, from initially lauding her behaviour to becoming disgusted with it. Esther seems unimpressed by Doreen's failure to stay the same aloof, supercilious and captivating person Esther first met. Yet Esther changes her mind again about Doreen when Doreen aids her recovery from the luncheon food poisoning by bringing her broth ("I felt a sort of expert tenderness flowing from the ends of her fingers. She might have been Betsy or my mother or a fern-scented nurse" (44)), and later when she agrees to attend the country club event.

Doreen's two-dimensional personality and Esther's rash dismissal of her after her drunken episode indicates both Jung's aforementioned ideas of the shadow and the persona. These two archetypes within the psyche are opposite in portrayal yet complementary in their function to unify the psyche. Although the shadow is more evident in Esther's interaction with Joan, Esther's atypical response of dismissal to the once adored Doreen indicates the intensity of her admiration for Doreen's persona. Doreen, portrayed as socially fun and captivating, a quality Esther much admired but did not have herself, had mastered the persona, given the effect she had on others. Doreen was also aware of her own sexuality and displayed it freely, something which Esther had not yet come to terms with or incorporated in her own individuality (until she decides to "seduce" Irwin later on).

Kendall (2001: 51) observes: "Despite the need to conform, Plath's writings often express loathing for the limiting role models to which they aspire, and self-loathing for their reliance on them". Doreen's limitation was that she showed weakness when she consumed too much alcohol and became intoxicated and non-compos mentis. Her fall from grace, like many other

characters in *TBJ*, is disillusioning and frustrating for Esther because she idolises them so intensely. She desires Doreen's casual and suave cynicism, yet is repulsed by her licentious and slovenly behaviour.

Betsy has a lesser effect on Esther even though Esther re-fashions herself to become like her. She has a smaller and duller part in *TBJ*. After dismissing Doreen, Esther feels that her dismissal was justified because she “resemble[s] her [Betsy] at heart” (21), hastily and decidedly vowing her loyalty to Betsy (although she originally rejected Betsy's company for Doreen's). Betsy is depicted as a good girl, with a “bouncing blonde ponytail and Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi smile” (6). Her passion and excitement about corn and farming evidently bored Esther (“that damn corn” (6)), where Esther decided Betsy was less interesting and obviously lacked the “instinct” Doreen possessed that Esther so admired. Esther felt less than Betsy and discomfited by the feeling that Betsy was “trying to save me [Esther] in some way” (6). Esther wears the clothes Betsy lent her on her train ride home to Esther's home. Doreen derided Betsy by calling her ‘Pollyanna Cowgirl’, the name which Esther repeats when she wears Betsy's clothes in the train. Esther reflects on her appearance in Betsy's attire, “A wan reflection of myself, white wings, brown ponytail and all, ghosted over the landscape” (108). Importantly, the blouse and skirt outfit that Betsy had lent Esther, Esther wore for two weeks, until her suicide attempt under the basement. This deliberate and odd attempt to keep Betsy's clothes on (at the cost of being unwashed for two weeks) shows a strange attachment between Esther and Betsy ('s clothes). Betsy, as the loyal, stable and well-behaved friend whom Esther so strongly “resembled at heart” (21) is not mentioned again in *TBJ*.

Bonds (1990) identifies that “Esther's movement toward her breakdown entails a series of rejections of or separations from women who, though they may be associated with some stereotype of womanhood unacceptable to Esther, have nurtured some important aspect of her evolving identity”. Through Doreen Esther learnt allure and appearance, through Betsy Esther learnt loyalty and caring, even though she felt rivalled by both. Esther had not yet found or established a defining personality trait for herself although she had been exposed to other possibilities of the persona from which she could choose, through the abovementioned two characters in the first part of *TBJ*. Notably, *Ladies' Day* should have provided Esther with both the environment and an array of personalities to help her find the “language and identity she seeks” (Budick, 1987: 873), but this was not the case.

The last admired rival which Esther sought to emulate is Joan Gilling. Mentioned in the first part of the novel as a “big wheel” (55), Joan reappears at the asylum where Esther was admitted. Joan is definitely the rival that receives the most attention and interaction from Esther in *TBJ*. Joan is always distastefully likened to a horse in Esther’s distasteful descriptions (“as big as a horse” (55), a “big, horsey girl in jodhpurs” (187), emanating a “strong horsey whiff” (190), “looked so horsey, with such big teeth and eyes like two grey, goggly pebbles” (207), “lumpy as an old horse” (211)”. Joan is the ‘friend’ character Esther has the most ambivalence towards. Joan is a threat to Esther because she is an academic like Esther, she dated Buddy Willard before Esther (“I began to think Buddy had poor taste” (55)) and she was accepted into the Willard family. Yet Esther’s internal conflict with Joan is more complex.

Esther feels a connection with Joan. Joan enters the hospital where Esther is admitted unexpectedly. As a kind of double for Esther, she informs and shows Esther that she has followed Esther’s story in the newspapers as Joan collected all the newspaper clippings of Esther’s disappearance and took them with her. It becomes apparent that Joan’s suicide attempt and hospital admission were instigated by Esther’s of which she had followed in the news. As she informs Esther of the events leading to her admission Esther relates to the similarities between the two women’s situations (after which Esther states, “It occurred to me Joan and I might have something in common” (192)). Thus began Esther’s fascination with Joan. Joan was briefly discharged before a repeated suicide attempt, during which Esther “followed her progress through the asylum grapevine” (196), obviously jealous of Joan’s progress (“I gathered all my news of Joan into a little, bitter heap, though I received it with surface gladness” (197)) at the time which she viewed as “marking the gulf between me and the nearly well ones”. Esther oscillates between intense dislike for (“she couldn’t even keep a boy like Buddy Willard” (207), “gave me [Esther] the creeps” (207)) and approval of Joan (“in spite of my old, ingrained dislike, Joan fascinated me” (209)).

Just before Joan confesses her intimate feelings for Esther, Esther states, “Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, *black image of my own*” (209-210, emphasis added). She feels mirrored by Joan: their journeys similar, their taste in men, academics, suicide attempts, admission into hospital. At this point of complete identification, strangely, Esther begins to question her own sanity: “Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose” (210).

Esther should presumably feel content and comforted with such a similar attachment, as the one she had with Joan.

Again Esther oscillates between like and dislike for Joan. Prompted by Joan's advancement on Esther, she rejects Joan, but not for long. Later Esther continues to feel threatened by Joan's accomplishments ("I felt it unfair of Joan to beat me through the gates" (214)), but also reassured by their likeness ("In spite of my profound reservations, I thought I would always treasure Joan. It was as if we had been forced together by some overwhelming circumstances, like war or plague, and shared a world of our own" (215)). Although Esther assures Joan she will visit her after her (first) discharge, inwardly Esther dismissed the offer.

Yet Joan is notably the first support Esther seeks when she is in distress after she succeeds at losing her virginity with Irwin and suffers consequent haemorrhages. She asks Irwin to drop her off at Joan's apartment. Joan rises to the occasion by calling four doctors and insisting she drive with Esther to the hospital, even though Esther had not fully informed Joan of the reason why she haemorrhaged. Joan returned to the asylum after this incident, where she committed suicide by hanging herself in the woods shortly after. Upon hearing of Joan's death from Doctor Quinn, Esther's reaction is not that of shock, or empathy, but rather disgust, "Suddenly I wanted to *dissociate* myself from Joan completely" (224, emphasis added), where the need for an immediate and complete "dissociation" implies a previous fulfilled and thorough association. This strange detachment is implied when Esther is invited to the funeral by Mrs Gilling as "one of Joan's best friends" (232). Again this detachment is referred to at the funeral where Esther sees in the flower arrangement a "black shadow of something that wasn't there" (232) (very much similar to the "black image of my own" (209) Esther saw in Joan earlier), wonders who she was burying (232) and then "took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am" (233).

The lack of remorse shown for Joan's death is unnerving given the strong, however ambivalent feelings Esther had towards her. Markedly, Joan is first alluded to as a "black image" and later, a "black shadow". "[I]mage" and "shadow" are both black. This blackness, as opposed to the usual connotation of evil, sinister and menacing, can be understood better when looked at in the light of the shadow. As discussed in Chapter 1, as the source or creativity and vitality the shadow is only 'dark' because it comprises the weaker, undeveloped parts of the psyche, not because it plays a lesser role in the psyche. The shadow is also seen only in its projection unto others (meaning that Joan's presence and later absence galvanised Esther into the realisation

that Joan possesses qualities that Esther possesses but does not use). This revelation can then be seen as “realization of the shadow”, which is “the growing awareness of the inferior part of the personality” (Jung, 1960: 140). The fact that Joan activates Esther’s shadow also explains the intense disgust and repulsion (the many insulting ‘horsey’ descriptions of Joan) mixed with intrigue (the slips where she associates with Joan on a personal level).

On the whole, Joan, more than both Betsy and Doreen, as Esther’s double, is most influential in Esther’s development within the first category of admired rivals, mentioned above. It is through these three characters that the impressionable Esther becomes aware of her shadow and persona.

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In a different way to Joan Gilling and as (semi) antagonists, Mrs Willard and Mrs Greenwood force Esther to grow in character. Both women are mothers and maternal to Esther, yet Esther rejects their attempts to form bonds with her, although, ironically, she and inadvertently internalises their teachings and constructs of woman. This can be seen in Esther’s flashbacks which often involve an interaction with or admission from either mother. They instil Esther’s matrophobia which echoes throughout the novel, seen in her disgust at motherly figures such as Dodo Conway and Mrs Tomolillo. It is Mrs Willard who actually sets Esther on her physical/spiritual quest for defloration, where she becomes a liberated woman.

Although Esther quotes and refers to Mrs Willard frequently (as seen above with the kitchen mat and arrow metaphor), it is always with dislike and sometimes even envy. Mrs Willard appears to be living the standard life of a 1950s woman. She has a son, teaches at a school and cooks and cleans for them. She perpetuates the ‘problem with no name’ by contentedly living the marginalised life Esther so greatly struggles to conform to. As such, she overlooks Buddy’s affair with the waitress during a family holiday even though she is a “real fanatic about virginity” (67) and continues to preach about the importance of maintaining one’s purity (for women) until marriage. Esther views Buddy as leading a “double life” (68). Mrs Willard is a hypocrite and bigot; her judgemental attitude permeates Esther’s construction of what a woman should be. Interestingly, Mrs Willard never enters the text directly, she does not explicitly form part of the plot. She is only ever mentioned in the form of the frequent flashbacks referring to her dictations regarding sexuality and what a woman “should be” (“what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from” (67)) which further reinforces her influence on Esther.

Mrs Willard's sanctimonious double standards present a sexual limitation for women in the 1950s. Her outlook of maintaining one's purity until marriage, for women, was universally held during the time. This was not a novelty as it is another characteristic manifestation of the limitations women experienced in the era on a physical and sexual level. This suppression of sexual experience and the stigma attached thereto, frowned upon women taking an active role in courtship. Rich (1972: 19) views this "sexual identity" as a concept that needs to change in society, it needs to undergo a re-visioning in order to equalise the concept's status between both of the sexes. Esther researches the opinions of her seniors to find out whether this double standard is acceptable or not, to which they responded, "most boys were like that and you couldn't honestly accuse them of anything until you were at least pinned or engaged to be married" (1963: 66). Esther despises this sexual identity that Mrs Willard represents and she finds in this unspoken social standard an opportunity to challenge it.

However indirectly, Esther used her virginity as a tool to oust Mrs Willard, and by implication, the tradition of her era. As sexual purity was such a defining factor of one's identity, Esther began an anti-conformist retaliation on which to predicate her own identity. Accordingly, Simone de Beauvoir can extend the concept of the necessity of woman's virginity further. She comments on the social and reproductive functions which can relate to Mrs Willard's fundamentals of virginity where the virgin is "fertility, dew, and the source of life" where her virginity functions to heal, strengthen and restore (de Beauvoir, 1949: 234). Virginity is invaluable in women because its pureness is "definitive and irreversible", a "breaking with the past, without recourse" that Esther seeks defiantly to achieve. De Beauvoir points out how intercourse, for women, enables them to discover and familiarise themselves with their body unlike men who are "ordinarily active and decisive" (1949: 450); men who are traditionally the instigators of intercourse and the only sex who can acceptably desire the other.

To stress virginity as a defining factor and its successful conquest further another two instances from the plot that are noteworthy, given de Beauvoir's observation of the function and associations of virginity. Firstly, Esther sought out Irwin on the day she purchased her diaphragm, straight after the appointment. Esther was determined to fulfil her contrary need to overthrow the social norm. Secondly, she severed all ties with Irwin as quickly as possible after the act was completed, she had paid for her doctor's bills so that she could finally "brood over [her] new condition in perfect peace" (219). There was no marriage or ceremony in her defloration, none of the customary conventions leading up to the act or occurring after. She sought to defy the tradition, among women, of sex only after marriage and did so.

Mrs Greenwood, like Mrs Willard, is a shaping force for Esther's concept of womanhood. Of Aurelia and Sylvia Plath's relationship, Stevenson (1989: xiii, original emphasis) reiterates the complex link between rivalry and motherly love: "Her [Plath's] competitiveness and extreme intolerance of rivals seems to have been rooted in a tremendous hunger for love, which she construed as the *exclusive* approval mainly from her mother". Mrs Greenwood fails, although she makes many promising attempts, as a positive role model for Esther. Perloff (1972) asserts "Esther is particularly aware of this problem [role models] because the person who should be her model – her mother – cannot help her", also, "[t]he novel's flashbacks make clear that Esther has always played those roles others have wanted her to play. For her mother, she has been the perfect good girl...". This "good girl" is the exactly the girl Esther challenged when she returned home after her column-writing shift at *Ladies' Day*.

Mrs Greenwood is both a barrier to and an enabler of Esther's identity in *TBJ*. This connection can first be understood in Jungian terms of projection and identification. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, we are informed that Esther's mental stability is precarious. Through the challenges and situations in the novel it is further fragmented and then repaired. Jungian analyst Mary Briner (2010: 113) explains that a woman's mental health is connected with the mother:

A woman's attitude toward her own feminine psyche, first experienced through her mother, is the foundation of her psychological house. Everything else is built on it. The first psychological stage in a woman's life is identification with her mother. It is through this mysterious process of identification that she learns what a woman is and how to be one.

This identification, and the mixed boundaries between mother and daughter that follows it, results in a communication disparity:

Struggle does not always involve distinct and antagonistic interests or a clash of wills. The problem can equally arise, not when protagonists are at odds with each other, but rather when they are too nearly identified, when communication becomes dangerous or fails in its purpose because the participants come too close. (Rose, 2001: 80).

The closeness or identification indicates that Esther, as Briner points out, has not yet learnt how to become the woman she wants to be. The "[s]truggle" Rose identifies between mother and daughter is motivated by Esther's desire to break this bond and become an individual. These observations are evident in the following circumstances in *TBJ*.

Mrs Greenwood is first mentioned in the plot when Esther and Jay Cee discuss language (communication) as an option of Esther's future career. The first mention of Mrs Greenwood

on the topic of languages is significant because throughout the novel it is apparent that Esther cannot communicate with her mother in any language. Mrs Greenwood “convinced” (117) Esther to learn shorthand (as social communication) and rationalised that it would assist her in writing her novel. Mrs Greenwood attempted to teach Esther her own profession, to model her choices. Esther is unable to learn her mother’s profession, (“There wasn’t one job I felt like doing where you used shorthand” (117)).

Esther rejects her mother’s teaching of shorthand the same way she refuses to model her mother’s cooking and receive her gifts and advice in the novel. Mrs Greenwood, like Esther’s grandmother, was a good cook. Esther recalls how her mother “was always trying to teach me one dish or another” (71), but Esther would spitefully ruin every cooking attempt so that she would not be asked to try it again. Shorthand, associated with her mother, is much similar as an oppressive/reinforcing practice to the allocated gender role of cooking for women in the 1950s. This is because Esther sees both cooking and shorthand are subservient roles, wanting instead to become a writer which she sees as dominant role.

Similarly, Esther rejects her mother’s roses by throwing them into the wastebasket at the asylum. Mrs Greenwood brought Esther roses for her birthday. Esther, drained and frustrated by all her visitors, was pleased by the news that Doctor Nolan decided to refuse Esther any visitors. This was the first separation between mother and daughter that was active rather than passive-aggressive. It is after this incident that Esther confides her intense dislike for her mother to Doctor Nolan (“I hate her” (195)). This is the first time Esther verbalises and acts on her dislike for her mother.

Moreover, Esther deliberately disobeys her mother’s implicit advice on courting. Mrs Greenwood doesn’t educate Esther herself about sexual intercourse and intimacy, but rather sends her an article from the *Reader’s Digest*. As mentioned, Esther’s decision to have premarital sex was made to oust Mrs Willard. However, given her mother’s indirect attempt at sexual education Esther also indirectly spites her mother at the same time. The article sums up “all the reasons a girl shouldn’t sleep with anybody but her husband and then only after they were married” (76). The virgin/woman is taught the ways of life by her sexual instructor/man, implying a one-up position of power. The manner in which Esther sums up the “main point” of the article echoes the arrow metaphor²², where a woman recants her integrity and purity

²² Compare Mrs Willard’s arrow metaphor “What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from,” (67); the article’s crux “The main point of the article was that a man’s world is different from a woman’s world and a man’s emotions are different from a woman’s emotions and only

when giving into the man (who is ostensibly the only party who is endowed with a sexual appetite or sexual needs), and will consequently bear the socially unacceptable brunt of a possible pregnancy and guaranteed stigma. Esther astutely observes the bigotry in the article, “Now the one thing this article didn't seem to me to consider was how a girl felt” (77). After this she highlights the double standard in premarital sex, (“I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not ... pureness was the great issue” (77)). In fact, this was such an issue for Esther that she viewed virginity as a defining factor, “the world [is] divided into people who had slept with somebody and people who hadn't, and this seemed the only really significant difference between one person and another” (77) of which, through defying her mother (as well as Mrs Willard), she planned to overcome. Esther also purposefully defies her mother's advice by entering Constantin's room, (“My mother had always told me never under any circumstances to go with a man to a man's rooms after an evening night out, it could only mean one thing” (76)).

The need to defy her mother is intensified by their closeness when at Mrs Greenwood's home. Plath uses this biographical point in *TBJ*. Esther slept in the “twin bed” next to her mother, and whenever she returned home she “made a point of never living in the same house with my mother for longer than a week” (114). This fricative closeness culminates in Esther's first homicidal ideation. She fantasises matricide when her mother is asleep in the bed next to her, during an episode of insomnia. Her mother's snoring peevd Esther into fantasising her mother's strangulation (“the only way to stop it would be to take the column of skin and sinew from which it [the “piggish noise”] rose and twist it to silence between my hands” (119)).

The projection and identification between mother and daughter is also evident in Mrs Greenwood's reaction to Esther's psychiatric treatment. This could be because Mrs Greenwood interprets the realistic need for external aid in the form of treatment and doctors as a failure on her own behalf to raise a normal daughter. In Esther's descriptions Mrs Greenwood acts and sees herself as a *stabat mater dolorosa*, suffering at the hands of her daughter. When Esther informs her mother she will no longer accept Doctor Gordon's ECT, Mrs Greenwood replies “I knew my baby wasn't like that” and then adds “I knew you'd *decide* to be all right again” (140, emphasis added). “[D]ecide” infers that Mrs Greenwood saw Esther's suffering and

marriage can bring the two worlds and the two different sets of emotions together properly. My mother said this was something a girl didn't know about till it was too late, so she had to take the advice of people who were already experts, like a married woman” (76-77).

consequent treatment as directed at her. Perloff (1972) confirms this observation where “Mrs Greenwood is a terrifying presence in the novel ... Mrs. Plath reveals that, precisely like the mother in the novel, she could only regard her daughter’s mental illness as an insult to herself”.

This projection is evident as well in Mrs Greenwood’s “guarded tongue” (153) that prevented others from discovering Esther’s psychiatric treatment. She is ashamed of her daughter’s mental illness. Similarly, when Doctor Nolan warns Esther that others would treat her differently upon her discharge from the asylum, the first person Esther thinks of is her mother:

My mother's face floated to mind, a pale, reproachful moon, at her last and first visit to the asylum since my twentieth birthday. A daughter in an asylum! I had done that to her. Still, she had obviously decided to forgive me. "We'll take up where we left off, Esther," she had said, with her sweet, martyr's smile. "Well act as if all this were a bad dream." (Plath, 1963: 227).

This quote highlights a few important beliefs on both Esther’s and her mother’s behalf. Esther’s astute observation that her mental illness has caused her mother embarrassment and shame is relieved by her mother’s forgiveness. This is validated by Mrs Greenwood who ignores the severity of Esther’s mental struggle and reinforces the communication gap between the two when she says that they will not discuss it and rather pretend that it was a “bad dream”. This shows the stigma surrounding mental illness as well as how women did not discuss their private lives as this was taboo. Esther’s response to her mother’s dismissal of her mental breakdown diminishes Esther, because Esther says of the whole experience and the situations that lead up to it that they were “part of me. They were my landscape” (227). This is also evident when Esther reflects upon her visitations that “My mother was the worst. She never scolded me, but kept begging me, with a sorrowful face, to tell her what she had done wrong” (195). Mrs Greenwood sees Esther’s mental “failure” as a projection of her own failure as a mother; she cannot help her daughter recover from her illness without personalising it and introjecting her own identity on it.

Lastly, on the topic of Mrs Greenwood and Esther’s projection, Bowlby’s ‘ambivalent attachment’ discussed in Chapter 1 as well as the child’s replication of his/her parents’ coping with trauma (grieving), is clearly depicted in the following two incidents, namely, the biographical visitation of Plath’s father’s grave and her first suicide attempt, both included in *TBJ*. Esther decides during her downward spiral from sanity that she needs to gain closure and visit her father’s grave. She also states that his death “had always seemed unreal” (159) to her because her mother prevented her from attending it. Esther also states that she never saw her

mother mourn her father and justifies her visit by stating, “it seemed fitting I should take on a mourning my mother had never bothered with” (159). It is apparent that Esther had, until this point, replicated her mother’s grieving process as she had not been allowed to attend the funeral²³ and had neither mourned it, because her mother hadn’t. She had not yet mourned for her father, nor had she mourned in her own way. Thus, her active attempt at reconciling his death, and gaining closure, can also be seen as character growth. When she does lament his death, she responds cathartically to her own surprise (“I couldn’t understand why I was crying so hard” (161)) and then recalls that her mother had never mourned (“Then I remembered that I had never cried for my father’s death. My mom hadn’t cried either” (161)). At this point, Esther begins to mourn in her own way. This is significant as Esther had, until recently, adopted her mother’s method of coping which was to dismiss the trauma of her father’s death without acknowledging the impact it had on her. This was a turning point for Esther.

The second incidence of Esther’s suicide attempt, a section Plath added from her own life²⁴, was expertly planned and executed with meticulous care (the suicide, in connection with the mother will be discussed in depth in 2.3, although here Esther’s ambivalence is noteworthy). Mrs Greenwood showed delight at being called by an unconscious Esther when she was found and admitted to hospital. Mrs Greenwood is seated on the edge of the hospital bed, Esther describes her as follows, “She looked loving and reproachful and I just wanted her to go away” (166), a complex passive-aggressive response to her dire situation. However, when Esther is told by her mother that she called for her whilst drowsy, she responds, “I didn’t think I said anything”.

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Esther finds her true female role models in editor Jay Cee in the first half of the novel, and Doctor Nolan²⁵ in the second. She compares both women to her mother. Both women also have

²³ This is another biographic detail Plath added. Aurelia (Plath, 1975: 25) writes, “The children would never recognise their father, I felt, so I did not take them to the funeral” and adds that she did not show her grief in front of her children because Aurelia had not liked it when her own mother had cried in front of her.

²⁴ In *Letters Home* (Plath, 1975: 124) Aurelia discloses her “premonition” of Plath’s first suicide attempt, after which she rushed home to find Plath missing.

²⁵ The bond that Esther formed with Doctor Nolan in the asylum is a biographic detail where Plath formed a relationship with Ruth Beutscher as McLean Hospital. Of this relationship and its therapeutic aid for Plath, Wagner (2000: 108) states “... in December 1958 she began to visit Dr Beutscher again, the doctor she had seen in McLean Hospital. ... It was with Ruth Beutscher that she most deeply explored the ‘fairy tale’ ... she explored the resentment she felt towards the mother for whom she had to perform, the mother she blamed for killing her father”. Stevenson (1989: 47) adds, “Ruth Beutscher’s psychotherapy also intensified the presence of her much-loved yet ultimately resented mother, whose double she had to be, for reasons of guilt or ego weakness, and to whom she was tied by a psychic umbilicus too nourishing to sever”. Plath herself notes Beutscher’s

a profession Esther admires, Esther also views them as competent. As surrogate mothers they are also advisors and, unlike Mrs Greenwood, Esther adheres to their teachings and finds herself empowered.

Jay Cee instils in Esther a need to become something that she deliberately chooses, not something that is traditional and chosen for her. Jay Cee isn't as attractive as Doctor Nolan, Esther is somewhat insulting in describing her looks as "terrible" (36) and "pug-ugly" (5). This deficiency is, however, redeemed by her intelligence, something that Esther greatly admires. Esther notes that she is "very wise" (36) and has "brains" because she is knowledgeable of languages and the writers in her field. Esther seeks to emulate Jay Cee by becoming 'Ee Gee' (similar to how she emulated Doreen using the alias Elly Higginbottom). When she indulges in this brief reverie she states, "I wished I had a mother like Jay Cee. Then I'd know what to do. My own mother wasn't much help" (36). For instance, when Esther cries after she realises that she does not know what profession to dress up as during the photo shoot at the office. Jay Cee comforts her by bringing her an "armful of manuscripts" (98), a supportive reassurance quite unlike Mrs Greenwood's attempt to teach Esther shorthand because manuscripts and writing was something Esther wanted to do. In doing so Jay Cee perceptively comforts Esther in a way she knows Esther would appreciate. Indeed Esther appreciates this act of kindness so much that she imagines impressing Jay Cee (and rewarding her kindness) by sending her short stories under an alias and then appearing as herself when she meets with Jay Cee. Jay Cee brought to Esther's attention that she was not currently doing what she wanted to do, after which Esther feels "unmasked" (26). Jay Cee's kind queries prompt Esther's realisation that academics had been her anchor and that she need find a new one because her high school career had ended and her next phase required it, "After nineteen years of running after good marks and prizes and grants of one sort and another, I was letting up, slowing down, dropping clean out of the race" (27). Jay Cee's wisdom, encouragement, and compassion are virtues Mrs Greenwood lacks.

Moving onto Doctor Nolan, as Esther's surrogate mother, in the light of a Jungian reading of *TBJ* as a pilgrimage, she can be seen as the archetypal Wise Old (Wo)Man. Her function in the novel is to educate Esther and provide her with the tools she needs to reach enlightenment in

response to her confessions regarding her mother in a diary entry. She confessed her hatred for her mother to Beutscher who gave Plath permission to hate Mrs Greenwood. Plath saw Beutscher as a "permissive mother figure", and in connection with their relationship states "I can tell her anything, and she won't turn a hair or cold or withhold her listening which is a *pleasant substitute for love*" (Plath, 2000: 429, emphasis added).

her quest for selfhood. She is both a positive role model and an anti-heroine. She accomplishes what Mrs Greenwood could not; she achieves a genuine bond enabled by communication between Esther and herself.

To look at Jung's (1953: 111-114) description of the function and characteristics of the Wise Old (Wo)Man:

The wise old man [sic] appears ... in the guise of a magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any other person possessing authority. ... in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources. The archetype compensates this state of spiritual deficiency by contents designed to fill the gap. ... The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea—in other words, a spiritual function or an endopsychic automatism of some kind—can extricate him. But since, for internal and external reasons, the hero cannot accomplish this himself, the knowledge needed to compensate the deficiency comes in the form of a personified thought, i.e., in the shape of this sagacious and helpful old [wo]man.

Doctor Nolan possesses all of the characteristics listed above. Nolan advises solutions to the sexism, existentialism and identity crisis that obstruct Esther. Nolan is also Esther's last hope for survival as her admission into the asylum was paid for by Esther's benefactor Philomena Guinea; she is presented at Esther's point of greatest despair and hopelessness. She "confirms Esther's identity and re-establishes her sense of self" (Budick, 1987: 880) which allows her to re-enter the real world outside the asylum. As an anti-heroine she helps Esther to "forge a new identity" that "is the instrument whereby Esther learns to be, not some other woman, but herself" (Perloff, 1972). Perloff (1972) also notes that Nolan is the only female character that Esther does not attempt to replicate, unlike Doreen, Jay Cee and Betsy; or conversely to defy, like Mrs Greenwood and Mrs Willard. Nolan is, most notably, "the only character in the novel treated with unambiguous respect" (Bonds, 1990). As such, she gives Esther permission to admit her hatred for her mother. She also provides a solution for Esther's consuming preoccupation with losing her virginity by making an appointment for Esther to get a diaphragm fitted, something which Esther could not accomplish on her own (after which Esther praised her new liberated self by saying, "I had done well... I was *my own woman*" (213, emphasis added)). This shows that Nolan not only empowers Esther's anti-conformist desire to defy the custom of being pure for marriage, but also validates Esther's need to do so. She

also empowers Esther by giving her verbal sexual education, unlike Mrs Greenwood whose education was in the form of a posted article. Nolan also educates Esther about lesbianism.

In comparison to Mrs Greenwood, Nolan is stylish, competent and accomplished. She herself defeats the professional limitations of gender because she is a female psychiatrist. Given that this was a time mostly influenced by Freud's one-sided theory that favours the male sex, Nolan is unorthodox, a pioneer in her own way. Nolan nurtures an adult relationship because she respects her and the respect is reciprocated. There is no one-up position between the two, unlike Esther's relationship with her mother. In a sense, Nolan replaced Mrs Greenwood when she banned Esther's visitors because she had seen that Esther threw away her mother's flowers and that her mother's visits were obviously upsetting her. She took Esther's side against her mother, and Mrs Greenwood became a common enemy. Nolan helped create a safe and comfortable environment for Esther's recovery and subsequent growth.

Nolan also aided Esther's recovery by prescribing ECT treatments. These treatments alleviated Esther's depression and promoted her mental recovery. Unlike Doctor Gordon's previous traumatising treatments, she compassionately informed Esther about her treatments and did not force them upon her. When Esther felt betrayed that Nolan had not informed her in advance, which were most likely residual feelings arising from Doctor Gordon's ECT treatment, Nolan assured her she was safe, Esther confesses, "I liked Doctor Nolan. I loved her" (203) after which Nolan consoled Esther "like a mother" (204). After the first treatment Esther felt "purged" and "surprisingly at peace" (206). Afterwards, Nolan described the procedures to come and checked that the initial treatment went as she said it would. She also informed Esther that the treatment is not involuntary, that it depended on what they as a team decided was right. This built rapport between the two.

Esther also sees Nolan as a confidante and advisor. Nolan defies the silence of women in the 1950s and encourages Esther to discuss taboos and worries, permitting dialogue and encouraging communication. It is to Nolan that Esther first voices her predicaments regarding her mother and society's restrictions that obstruct her growth. In response to the article Esther's mother had posted her about premarital sex, Nolan responds, "Propaganda!" (212). Esther also confides her worries at the likelihood of becoming pregnant after intercourse and her frustrations at "being under a man's thumb" (213). Nolan also corrects Esther's qualms about possibly influencing Joan's suicide and reminds Esther of her choices by informing her that

she need not attend the funeral if she does not want to. Nolan also assures Esther before she enters her interview to leave the asylum.

The ‘new’ Esther that leaves the asylum, empowered by Nolan, has accomplished many feats she previously would not have been able to achieve. Although Esther leaves the asylum on a note of ambivalence, she has also developed critically as an individual. Compared to the insecure, effaced girl she was in the beginning who did not know where she was or what she wanted, who did not even know what she liked to drink or wear, she has developed immensely. In the beginning she felt dejected by her own silence, (“The silence depressed me. It wasn’t the silence of silence. It was my own silence” (17)); she was self-abasing (she describes herself as “yellow as a Chinaman” (p.7), “gawky and morbid as someone in a side-show” (p.9), and criticises her own height”, “appalled to see how used-up I looked” (17)) and she focused on her inadequacies (71-72). She had a chip on her shoulder and repeatedly referred to her poverty. She acquired the ability to communicate her choices, unlike the previous Esther who passively drank the daiquiris Marco ordered for her and confessed, “It never occurred to me to say no” (92); sat indecisively at the beach and “waited, as if the sea could make my decisions for me” (147), the same Esther that couldn’t express her gratitude to Philomena Guinea for paying for her treatment but couldn’t say so because she “couldn’t feel a thing” (178).

Nolan thus enables Esther in her quest for selfhood, unlike the previous female role models. However, the above discussion of the admirable rivals, antagonists as well as surrogate mothers shows how each added to Esther’s search and attainment of identity.

2.4 Psychiatry, medicine, the body and suicide

Through Esther’s pilgrimage she undergoes psychiatric treatment and ECT. Her neurosis and suicide attempts enable her to enter the medical field which then forms part of her understanding of herself. She learns of the relationship between medicine, hospital admission, the mind and body. Overall, the following discussion aims to highlight the significant connection between suicide/rebirth of the new/old self and the womb/mother as seen in ECT and the body, suicidal acts and ideation.

The experience of ECT and its effects on the mind/body is described as a reprogramming, a recreation of the mind’s memory into a *tabula rasa*. Esther’s first experience of ECT issued by Doctor Gordon (“I shut my eyes. There was a brief silence ... it shrilled, through an air

crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant. I wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done” (138)) is very different from her second controlled treatment issued by Doctor Nolan (“... darkness wiped me out like chalk on a blackboard ... I woke out of a deep, drenched sleep” (206))²⁶.

Like the body’s ECT shock into a kind of death, Esther also sees her experiences in terms of her stomach, heart and cognition. The stomach symbolism, previously referred to after the food poisoning incident (after much vomiting Esther felt “purged and holy and ready for a new life” (44)) is reworked when Esther enters Buddy’s sanatorium. Buddy was sent to the sanatorium because he contracted TB. Esther conceives the sanatorium in terms of the body. She observes “[t]he colour scheme of the whole sanatorium seemed to be based on liver” (85). She describes the décor as “[d]ark, glowering woodwork, burnt-down leather chairs” (85) and a “liver-coloured corridor” (86). The liver is the only organ that can regenerate itself; it detoxifies and regulates the body. It also secretes bile to aid digestion. The liver reappears in the novel when she describes Hilda’s “bile green” hat, repeating “bile” four times in the same paragraph (95). This description, in terms of the body’s organs, shows how Esther attempted to connect with herself through her body.

The heart’s beat is an affirmation of Esther’s existence. “I am”, appearing on the two occasions in trinity when Esther’s psyche is under stress, is also repeated three times, with an iambic rhythm like that of a heartbeat. It reminds her that she is alive and she listens to and translates this beat twice in *TBJ*. First when she swam out into the sea in an attempt to drown herself (“I thought I would swim out until I was too tired to swim back. As I paddled on, my heartbeat boomed like a dull motor in my ears. I am I am I am” (152)), and second at Joan’s funeral (“I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am” (232)). Listening to her heartbeat is an earthing attempt, meaning Esther attempts to centre herself by anchoring her experience in her body. Kendall (2001: 13) views this repetition as an “assertion, almost

²⁶ The aftereffect of the ECT treatment, regarding a reprogramming of the memory, is similar to Ken Kesey’s description in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962). The character that underwent treatment describes it as “All day now he won’t do a thing but hold an old photograph up in front of that burned-out face, turning it over and over in his cold fingers, and the picture wore grey as his eyes on both sides with all his handling till you can’t tell any more what it used to be” (Kesey, 1962: 18). The memory loss of the old self is removed, and through a deep induced sleep it is replaced by a blank slate where the new self can be reared. This link between electricity and death (Showalter, 1985: 217-218), of the old self in this case, reinforces all the more that Plath’s “primary trope [is] the engendered body” (Diehl, 1990: 136). The body/mind undergoes a death in order to resurrect the new self.

celebration, of selfhood at the moment of annihilation [that] later becomes a favourite theme of the Ariel poems”, together with Budick (1987: 883) who states “[t]he repetitive beat of her heart asserts both identity (I) and existence (am)” and connects its refrain to mother surrogate Doctor Nolan, “Its triple repetition recalls Dr. Nolan’s naming of Esther three times”, who issued her successful treatment of ECT.

Conversely, in connection with cognition, Esther is most distressed when she is not feeling connected to her body. Her sensory input is impaired and she cannot make sense of what she sees, hears and feels; her body also experiences a kind of depression. When she first slips into her depression, she cannot make sense of forms; her eyes cannot interpret what they see (“My eyes sank through an alphabet soup of letters” (119). She can neither make sense of words (“Words, dimly familiar, but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain” (119-120)). She can neither recognise the forms of the family members in Doctor Gordon’s photograph on his office desk which made her “furious” (124). Elsewhere in *TBJ* there are many other descriptions of Esther’s inability to make sense of faces. Her visual impairment was a sign of her mental decline; her body’s warning that her survival was threatened.

Another example of this is when Esther’s body became unresponsive to her mind’s commands. This indicates the degree of separation Esther felt within herself during the period that she was severely depressed²⁷. In her attempt to call Jody back, she could not physically grasp the telephone “My hand advanced a few inches, then retreated and fell limp” (114). Another example is when she tries to commit suicide, an attempt she humorously calls the “hanging fiasco” (155). Here Esther’s body did not respond to her mind’s instructions. Her body had “little tricks”, such as “making my hands go limp at the crucial second” and she felt the need to “ambush” it (153).

This shows how the body, like the mind, also experiences trauma. Plath indirectly highlights this in *TBJ*, voicing a woman’s experience.

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²⁷ Kaysen (1993: 75) describes this malformed perceptive ability as “insanity com[ing] in two basic varieties: slow and fast... Experience is thick. Perceptions are thickened and dulled”. Kaysen (1993) also calls this bodily experience of her slip from reality a “parallel universe” (5). She also had to have her stomach pumped from consuming ample pain pills in her suicide attempt. She notes her disconnection with her own hand (102), much like Esther’s.

The underlying connection between rebirth, suicide, the womb and the mother can be traced through the following discussion of Esther's suicidal ideation, acts and her ritualistic behaviour.

Stevenson (1989), like Alvarez (1971) and Kroll (2001), views Plath's preoccupation with suicide in an abstract spiritual sense as necessary for a spiritual rebirth, not in terms of the Western conception of suicide as a closed termination of life and consequent damning to hell. Stevenson (1989: 37) implies Plath's view as Eastern due to its function of "purging", where "once the risk was taken and overcome, balance was restored and guilt banished, its occasion no longer of importance", like a reincarnation. Kendall (2001: 53) attributes the cause of Esther's unsuccessful suicide to her inability to find a suitable role model. Before illustrating this connection in *TBJ* I will highlight the connection between the mother and suicide and rebirth, as well as how she is symbolised according to Jung and de Beauvoir.

Esther's suicide and the place which she chooses to execute it are connected with the mother. In *Aspects of the Feminine*, Jung (1982: 125) asserts:

Hollow objects such as ovens and cooking vessels are associated with the mother archetype, and, of course, the uterus, yoni, and anything of a like shape ... [where the] place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld of inhabitants are presided over by the mother. On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.

Jung explains the positive and negative associations the unconscious links with the mother. The mother is equally representative of death as she is of life. Mother is the site where life is created and nurtured, "associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness" and "protection" (1982: 125), but it can just as likely also be chthonic and destructive. As such, Jung identified the ambivalence of both opposite qualities as "the loving and the terrible mother" (1982: 125). Regardless of which, the yonic shape of her womb as cavity and repository is the site of *transformation*. Likewise, de Beauvoir (1949: 179) describes the womb as "secret, sealed like a tomb (179), symbolic of "immanence, of depth" (230). She affirms the womb as a transformative space in which a "ripening" (738) or "nidification process" (56) occurs.

As such, Esther's destructive acts are directly connected to her mother and they indicate her need to return to the site of the womb in order to undergo a rebirth. This is explicit in her most

extreme suicide attempt and implicit in her less serious ones. These suicidal ideations arose with increasing severity after her mother picked her up from the train station. Her lesser fantasies about death include ideas surrounding jumping off building storeys (131), vicarious disembowelment like those punished in the Japanese tradition (132) and jumping out of Philomena Guinea's black Cadillac, over the bridge into the waters below (177).

There are a few more extreme fantasies that Esther enacts. The first is the skiing incident with Buddy, where she aims for the "bottom of the well" like "the white sweet baby cradled in its mother's belly" (1963: 93), which Budick (1987: 879) believes "anticipated her back-to-the-womb attempt". The second is her attempt to swim far enough into the sea to drown herself, where the mother is typically related to the sea. The third attempt when she cuts herself²⁸ and plans to lie in the hollow, yonic shape of the bathtub and "s[i]nk to sleep" (142), until she realises that cutting herself was not ideal because "what I wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, and a whole lot harder to get" (142). The fourth is when Esther takes the cord from her mother's silk bathrobe and tries to hang herself, after which she tries to strangle herself when sitting on her mother's bed.

The last suicide attempt, which precipitated her stomach pumping and admission to the asylum, has many allusions to the mother and the womb. In a sense, Esther's attempt to crawl into the cellar after swallowing her mother's sleeping tablets can be seen as an attempt to crawl²⁹ (like a baby) back into the womb. To contextualise this incident, Esther located her mother's sleeping pills in the "strongbox"(162), carefully planned her outfit (still wearing Betsy's clothes), wrote a note to her mother, poured herself a glass of water and went down the stairs to the "dark gap" of the cellar wall³⁰, a "secret, earth-bottomed crevice" (162). She describes

²⁸ This incident is also a biographic detail. Aurelia notes during this time where Plath returned home from her internship at the magazine company, as in *TBJ*, she arrived home and noticed Plath had cut her legs. Upon Aurelia's questioning of the cutting, Plath replied "Oh, Mother, the world is so rotten! I want to die! Let's die together!" (Plath, 1975: 124).

²⁹ Esther uses the verb 'crawl' before where, when suffering from insomnia, she attempts to crawl under the mattresses and let them cover her "like a tombstone", after which she noted "It felt dark and safe under there" (119). This bears similarities with the idea of the secret, protective connotations the mother archetype bears, as discussed in accordance with Jung and de Beauvoir above. It also resonates with the idea of regressing back to an infant.

³⁰ The cellar's repository structure is like that of a cave. Jung (1953: 83, emphasis added) describes the symbolism, and reason for entering into a cave as follows: "Anyone who gets into that cave, that is to say into the cave which everyone has *in himself* [sic], or into the darkness that lies behind consciousness, will find himself [sic] involved in an—at first—unconscious process of transformation. By penetrating into the unconscious he makes a connection with his unconscious contents. This may result in a momentous change of personality in the positive or negative sense. The transformation is often interpreted as a prolongation of the natural span of life

this interim as a vaginal canal, the “hole mouth” and “mouth of darkness” where the “dark felt thick as velvet” (163). After drinking the pills, the last part of her plan which was expertly conceived and executed with meticulous care, she “crawled to the furthest wall” with a “bent head” on her “knees”. After she had reached the furthest wall the sleeping pills began to take their toll on her consciousness and in “one sweeping tide, rushed [her] to sleep” (163)³¹.

In this light, given the symbolism Jung attributes to the mother archetype, Esther’s drive to suicide can be seen as directly motivated by/through the mother.

or as an earnest of immortality”. Esther unconsciously seeks the transformation that occurs in the womb-like site of a cave/cellar, as a rebirth.

³¹ In *Letters Home* (1975: 125) Aurelia discloses her “premonition” of Plath’s first suicide attempt. After feeling suddenly filled with agitation and worry over Plath, she rushed home when the film ended to find the suicide note that Plath had left.

Chapter 3: The woman with many faces: Mother, poetess and wife

“I am a writer... I am a genius of a writer; I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name.” – Written on October 16th, 1962 (Plath, 1975: 468)

“To see what to expect from mother, etc., accept it and know how to deal with it. This presupposes an independence and sense of identity in myself, which I have not got. This is the main issue.” (Plath, 2000: 461)

TBJ functioned for Sylvia Plath as a *bildungsroman* and led to the culmination of her writing career, her *bildungspoesie*. Hughes (1994) affirms that the novel (which I discussed in terms of a spiritual/sexual pilgrimage as well as *bildungsroman* in the previous chapter) serves as a platform for the later poems, “Without undergoing the psychic transformation of self-remaking, which she accomplished in writing this scenario [*TBJ*], the author might not have come so swiftly and so fully, as she did, to the inspiration and release of *Ariel*. She might not have gotten there at all”. Hughes (1994) also identifies *TBJ* as “a vital work, a work of existential emergency” and Rose (1991: 186) as an “autobiography of the coming-into-being of a writer”. Hargrove (1980: 259) views *TBJ* “[a]s a novel of growing up, of initiation into adulthood, [*TBJ*] is solidly in the tradition of the Bildungsroman. Technically, *The Bell Jar* is skilfully written and contains many of the haunting images that dominate Plath’s poetry” and furthermore, *TBJ* is “more than a feminist document, for it presents the enduring human concerns for the search for identity, the pain of disillusionment, and the refusal of defeat”. Thus, the poems written after *TBJ* (written from 1961 through to Plath’s death in 1963) consist of Plath’s 3rd and final phase of her writing, the closing phase of her anthology’s “single metapoem” (Axelrod and Dorsey, 1997: 78). Plath had just finished and sent a draft of *TBJ* to James Michie in October 1961 (which she began writing on March 18 1961 a few months earlier), and Stevenson (1989: 221) observes that this submission fuelled her later poems: “Yet within her, more urgently than ever, seethed the powerful ferment of her poetic myth, the anxiously observant novelist-wife-mother containing and, in successive poems, realizing in her art the old fury and despair she only just repressed in her life”. Poems selected from this final batch will be analysed in this chapter.

In these poems the themes of Chapter 2’s fig tree (identity and the mother, as well as the female body, domesticity, childbearing, marriage and profession) will be explored further. The poems

are grouped thematically under the subsections of the mother, female body and children, domesticity, wife and marriage, profession and vocation. Ordered according to chronology within the subsection they are placed, I will explore the selected poems for *each* and analyse Plath's (final) conceptualisation of identity and womanhood, as scaffolded in *TBJ*. This involves the post- and *Ariel* poems. The reason for this is that the later poems are an important starting point because they continue the pilgrimage and central conflict in *TBJ* on two levels: Plath and her mother, Plath and her own identity. Plath wrote most of the *Ariel* poems on drafts of *TBJ* (Rose, 2001: 142), which indicates the emotional and psychic connection between the two sets of work as well as the transition between the two.

3.1 Medusa – the omnipresent, first mother

It was your Demon Slave. Like a possessive
 Fish-mother, too eager to protect you,
 She devoured you

Ted Hughes, 'Totem', 1998

The above quote, taken from Hughes' *Birthday Letters* (1998), indicates the extremity of how "Hughes and Plath – are not active agents in their own right but pawns for ... Aurelia Plath" (Wagner, 2000: 150). This subsection analyses Plath's depiction of this sentiment in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' (22 October 1961), 'Elm' (19 April 1962) and 'Medusa' (16 October 1962). Given that during this time Plath had birthed her first child, a daughter called Frieda (born 1 April 1960) and her son, Nicholas (born 17 January 1962), was already almost a year-old, Plath was a new mother experiencing motherhood herself. Such a new beginning most likely spurred her on to begin to confront her mother-complex as she began to investigate inviolately the crystalline perfect housewife and doting daughter persona she had maintained until this point. Indicative of a turning point, this is a stage of inordinate self-growth and development where she shed an old personality and cultivated a new one; nearing attainment of self.

Folsom (1994: 522) identifies "[i]n many of her poems, what Plath perceives is a death-figure which threatens to swallow her up unless she can reassert her living identity by "fixing" and thus immobilizing her enemy in a structured poetic language". This fixation on a ubiquitous

“death-figure” can be seen as an ambivalent cathexis where mother and death are equally desired and feared; the “death-figure” image is continuously maintained and explored. This continual exploration can be seen as an attempt to separate the daughter from the mother in order to form her own discrete identity. Previously I discussed the mother in terms of a chthonic compulsion, according to Jung (in *TBJ* and the womb). Folsom’s observation also highlights the influence of symbolist mysticism/manifesto where the focus is on subjectivity (the personal, feelings, private mythology) which highlights metacommentary (meaning beyond shapes and colours); its expression with characteristic interest in the macabre, occult and death, mother and death. The mother as underworld and mystery is prevalent in Plath’s late poems.

To recap on Jung’s (1974: 81-82) Mother archetype and symbolism, Jung states:

All these symbols can have a positive, favourable meaning or a negative, evil meaning. An ambivalent aspect is seen in the goddess of fate (Moirai, Graeae, Norns). Evil symbols are the witch, the dragon (or any devouring animal, such as a large fish or a serpent), the grave, the sarcophagus, deep water, death, nightmares and bogies (Empusa, Lilith, etc.).

Characteristic of Plath’s poetry is this very death, oblivion and dormancy (which are more prevalent in the following selected late poems) than their inverse: life, rejuvenation and creativity. Mother as good and evil: mother is Mary (‘Elm’); mother is Medusa (‘Medusa’). Mother as devourer is implicit in many poems. Tombstones, headstones, graves, mausoleums, museums, indicative of Jung’s “evil symbols” above are also present in many of her poems, as well as the sea and similar death-like/sepulchral states of the mind such as abeyance, fugue, depression and schizoid states. Jung (1974: 82, emphasis added) adds further observations on the topic of the “loving and terrible” mother archetype:

The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcends reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. All these attributes of the mother archetype have been fully described and documented in my book *Symbols of Transformations*. There I formulated the *ambivalence* of these attributes as “the loving and terrible mother”.

Before Plath’s third and final phase, a noteworthy influencing factor of this time is that she read *African Folktales* (1952) by Paul Radin and Jung’s *Symbols of Transformation* (1956). In

Symbols of Transformation, she found “confirmations of certain images in my story”, of a “supposedly loving but ambitious mother who manipulated [a] child”, “the image of the eating mother” (Plath, 2000: 514). This can explain the devouring mother that dominates Plath’s (late) poetry as well as the looming presence of death/mother.

Mother, death, love and ambivalence are evident in the following poems. This is shown through the characteristically heightened ambivalence in Plath’s poetry, complemented by an undertone of a deep, yearning desire for love. She presents the duality of life/death, hate/love. Ambivalence is her main attribute as she feels strongly for both dichotomies. This shows too how extensively Plath’s writing is concerned rather with the mother, as opposed to the father. The ambivalence (the fundamentals of which are explained by Bowlby in Chapter 1), the search for love, the haunting mother in nature and everywhere else is depicted in Plath’s *mythopoetica* as her *cherchez la femme*; the search to locate and integrate her own identity. Mother is mother nature: both healing and destructive, kind and cruel. Keeping in mind that Aurelia Plath wanted to become a writer herself (as well as the connection between success, creativity, perfection and the mother’s reward of love to these services) as equated in Plath’s mind from an early age (discussed in Chapter 1), love is also a *provisio* for writing, for health³². Mother also presents the greatest barrier on Plath’s pilgrimage.

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‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ – 22 October 1961

Plath wrote ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ as an exercise at Yaddo³³ where she unknowingly used Jung’s technique of ‘active imagination’. Plath’s reflections on the poem make its oracular and prophetic nature clear, “And that yew tree began, with astounding egotism, to manage and order the whole affair ... I couldn’t subdue it” (Plath, 1960: 292), which mark an incremental growth in her writing career³⁴. The topical tree and its symbolic growth in connection with individuation (discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to the fig tree and Jung’s symbolism) is

³² At the time Plath confronted her mother-complex in her diary she realised how her health and writing are interconnected: “And writing is my health” (2000: 523).

³³ A footnote in *The Collected Poems* (Plath, 1960: 291) describes the setting she used for poetic material: “The yew tree stands in a churchyard to the west of the house in Devon, and visible from SP’s bedroom window. On this occasion, the full moon, just before dawn, was setting behind this yew tree and her husband assigned her to write a verse ‘exercise’ about it”.

³⁴ Plath began to write, during this phase, with increasing speed and depth. Kendall (2001: 46) adds “By midday the poem [‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’] was written. The speed of its composition, in the midst of a writing block, prefigures the breakthrough of October the following year, when Plath averaged almost a poem a day, and often finished a poem before breakfast”.

marked here. Likewise, Phillips (1973: 147-148) views the *yew* tree in particular as symbolic of “inexhaustible life and immortality” and it functions as a “representative of the growth and development of Plath’s psychic life as distinct from the instinctualized life symbolized by animals such as the rabbit and the horse, Ariel. That it is an important symbol to her [Plath] is implicit in the fact that the yew appears in other poems...”. Although the yew tree only appears once in this study, it is nonetheless a significant symbol for Plath in connection with individuation.

The speaker observes the scene, reflective of her psychic landscape/mindscape, with a meditative and baleful tone. She finds confirmation of her state of mind in nature, the sepulchrous and eerie (“Funny, spirituous mists inhabit this place”) scene of the church, moon and yew tree. The speaker is in an interim state; neither here nor there, and directionless, “I simply cannot see where there is to get to”. She only realises her predicament when she attempts to connect herself with her natural surroundings, indicated by the personal pronoun “I” (only used 5 times in the poem): “I simply cannot see”, “I live here”, “I have fallen a long way” (emphasis added). The “mists inhabit[ing]” her surroundings point to the above “secret, hidden, dark”, the “world of the dead”, “terrifying and inescapable like fate” that Jung (1974: 82) discusses above. Jung’s idea of fate is present in the speaker’s inability to see a future that is anything but foreclosed (“I simply cannot see *where* there is to get to”), her agency undermined and irrelevant, indicated in the passive tense (“where there is to get to” as opposed to “where there is that I can get myself to”). The speaker thus feels controlled by the external forces of nature, trapped and shut inside a malign environment. She is threatened despite the deceptively benevolent “humility” which the grasses murmur.

The speaker is in limbo, “Separated from my house by a row of headstones”. Yet the answer to her feelings of separation and homelessness is made apparent in the second stanza where “The moon is no door”. This is when the moon³⁵ enters the poem as moon-mother. The moon cannot provide the speaker with a home; the door is not locked; it is simply not available as there is no door. The speaker is barred; the moon is withholding (love). The moon’s “face” is

³⁵ In the subchapter ‘The Central Symbol of the Moon’, Kroll (2007: 22) views the moon symbol in Plath’s poetry as “one of the most striking elements in Plath’s mythic system” which “illuminates the nature of the entire mythology, because it is a shorthand symbol or emblem of the whole vision, rather than a detachable and purely local image”. Kroll adds “There are more than one hundred direct references to the moon in Plath’s poetry, and they divide along precisely these lines: the early extraneous references and the late symbolically integrated ones”. Kroll identifies the function of the “Moon-muse” where it “symbolizes the deepest source and inspiration of her poetic vision, her female biology, and her role and fate as protagonist in a tragic drama; and, through the use of a lunar iconography, it gives concrete form to the particular spirit of the mythicized biography”.

“White as a knuckle and terribly upset”. The moon’s sovereign rule does not come to the aid of the speaker. She does not provide an opening, an answer, a “door”. The moon “drags the sea after it like a dark crime” as it “drags” everything else including the speaker; it rules mercilessly where “drag” implies the moon’s ruthlessness.

Plath often depicts the moon’s callousness using the verb “drag”. Whether the moon is explicit or implicit in the poem, it is present in its proxies with similar shape and colour:

A woman is *dragging* her shadow in a circle
 About a bald, hospital saucer.
 It resembles the moon, or a sheet of blank paper
 And appears to have suffered a sort of private blitzkrieg.

[‘A Life’, emphasis added]

The moon, my
 Indefatigable cousin
 Rise, with her cancerous pallors,
Dragging trees—
 Little bushy polyps

[‘Purdah’, emphasis added]

O half moon—

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

...

Knuckles at shoulder-blades, the
 Faces that

Shove into being, *dragging*
 The lopped

Blood-caul of absences

[‘Thalidomide’, emphasis added]

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
 Staring from her hood of bone.
 She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and *drag*”

[‘Edge’, emphasis added]

And, used in this study:

The moon, also, is merciless: she would *drag* me

Cruelly, being barren

[‘Elm’, emphasis added]

Red stigmata at the very center,

Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of departure,

Dragging their Jesus hair

[‘Medusa’, emphasis added]

The moon is an inexorable force that “drags” her unwilling victims where she pleases. She drags shadows, trees, faces, Jesus hair, but most importantly, she drags the speaker. The speaker feels controlled by the moon muse.

To return to ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’, the despotic manner with which the moon “drags” the sea is all the more threatening because “it is quiet”, there are no portents. The silence is heightened by the petrified stillness of the moon’s “O-gape of complete despair” in which the speaker concedes to inhabit: “I live here”. The only noise in this atemporal site is from the ominous “bells” that “startle the sky”, occurring “Twice on a Sunday”, foreshadowing doom (this characteristic appears in many other poems where “bells” or a similar foreboding knell-sound is present, for example, in ‘The Courage of Shutting Up’, ‘Daddy’, ‘Fever 103’, ‘By Candlelight’, ‘Eavesdropper’, ‘Paralytic’).

In the third stanza the moon’s identity is revealed as the second central symbol which the yew tree points up to, like an epigram, a conduit. The declarative statement: “The moon is my mother” is the only entity the speaker identifies with in the poem (The moon is the speaker’s anchor, too, like the sea, the yew tree that “points up” to the moon, the energy source. It is as if the yew tree is powered by the moon, a servant for the moon.) However, the moon-mother-muse is “not sweet like Mary” because she withholds love and she disallows the speaker to find direction, leaving her disconnected. The speaker equates the moon with mother Mary, the Christian symbol of ultimate love and nurturing (unlike this doleful Mary allusion is another in ‘Medusa’ where the speaker’s tone is indignant and outraged “Who do you think you are/ A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?”), simply to show what the moon-mother is lacking, what she is not: she is *not* “sweet like Mary”. Her secret hidden depths are evident in “[h]er garments [that] unloose small bats and owls”, the nocturnal birds and creatures of prey. The speaker then

announces her loneliness, her isolation, and also concedes the underlying yearning to connect with her mother, “How I would like to believe in tenderness/ The face of the effigy, gentled by candles, / Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes”, much like how a mother would peer over her baby in a cradle, like Mary.

In the fourth and last stanza, the speaker becomes aware of the distance between where she is and where she would like to be, “I have fallen a long way”. Her current “fallen” state alludes to the biblical idea of “fallen” as sinful and separate from all that is good, as a tragic failure from her idealised, idyllic situation (“How I would like to believe in tenderness”) of the once ‘high’ position she, by inference, must have been in. She is briefly distracted by the clouds and the saints in the church but returns to the moon who does not see her vision, “The moon sees nothing of this”. The moon is detached, she is “bald and wild”. The moon’s minion, the yew tree, reaffirms the silence (“it is quiet”) of the second stanza, “And the message of the yew tree is blackness – blackness and silence”.

The final message of “blackness and silence” the speaker receives from the moon through the yew tree is similar to the “silence” that “drew [Esther] off” to sleep in *TBJ* after swallowing pills in the basement (Plath, 1963: 163). The all-encompassing “blackness” in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ is to the “dark [that] felt thick as velvet”, where the “silence” seductively “rushed [Esther] to sleep”, where she “felt the darkness, but nothing else” (Plath, 1963: 164). The oblivion Esther arrives at in *TBJ* is similar to the oblivion the moon-mother transmits through the yew tree.

Despite the harshness with which the speaker describes the moon’s rule, the speaker’s description does not have a threatened tone but rather one of acceptance and acquiescence. It is as if she submits to her condition, as instructed by the moon, but she wearily yearns for another resolve. The overall eerie setting as the moon’s ruling landscape appears to be like the “world of the dead” Jung mentions above, delimited by “Funny, spirituous mists” as well as the elusive spirits presiding in the church where “the saints are all blue”. In this setting in particular, this poem hints to the underlying need for connection with the moon/mother as well as the speaker’s inability to achieve it.

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‘Elm’ – 19 April 1962

The elm, like the yew tree, forms part of Plath's private mythology. Her personal significance with the elm is that she lived at 26 Elmwood Road in Wellesley, Massachusetts with her mother and brother in 1942. In September 1957 Plath and Hughes moved to an apartment at 337 Elm Street Northampton, Massachusetts, near Childs Memorial Park, Blessed Sacrament Church, and Northampton High School. Previously attempted many times after many unfinished poems (Kroll, 2007: 47), 'Elm' was written in a time that Plath was "preoccupied with images relating to women" (Kroll, 2007: 49) (in earlier drafts for 'Elm' Plath incorporated Cleopatra (Kroll, 2007: 153)). The poem was written when Plath and Hughes moved with daughter Frieda to Court Green in North Devon where she wrote many of her famous poems. Hughes crafted a desk made of the wood from an elm tree for Plath to write on. The poem was completed two days after Plath's friend Percy suffered a stroke (Stevenson, 1989: 235), which could also have heightened her melancholy. Plath sent a copy of this poem to psychologist Ruth Beutscher (Stevenson, 1989: 241) to share her interests and expression (as she notably no longer sent her poems to her mother, preferring her chosen mother surrogate). The poem was also influenced by Robert Graves' Muse-poet lectures given at the time (Kroll, 2007: 45).

Most importantly, above all biographically relevant factors, is the effect this poem had on her mother. As mentioned before, Plath and her mother were connected on a significantly profound level and this is evident in the aftermath, the after-effect the poem had on Aurelia's psyche; 'Elm' is the poem that "haunts" Aurelia (Art Documentaries, 2014), more specifically the tenth stanza of the *terza rima*: "I am inhabited by a cry. / Nightly it flaps out/ Looking, its hooks, For something to love". This search for love is evident in Oberg's (1978: 155) observation, "By the time she wrote her last poems, there was less and less room for and patience with love. If the poems were once meant to create love, they came to stand for a world which had forgone or gone beyond some loving, human circumference", where the "last poems" are the "terrible, terrifying creations of a woman who, near the end of a life, still could not do without love" (Oberg, 1978: 156).

The speaker in 'Elm' gloats about her knowledge, experience and at times confesses her yearning and limitation. The "I" speaker is significantly more prominent in comparison to 'The Moon and the Yew Tree'. The first stanza begins "I know the bottom", she says, "I know it with my great tap root", in comparison to the second last stanza that disqualifies the implied omniscience the speaker claims to have had in the beginning: "I am incapable of more knowledge". "[M]ore" is indicative that the knowledge has surpassed its previous ignorance. Yet the "bottom" of which the speaker knows is what (she believes) the hearer fears. The

speaker does not fear it (“the bottom”), “I do not fear it. I have been there”; this statement is concretised by the assertion that the speaker has “been there”, experienced the “bottom” with her “great tap root”. The speaker is armed with knowledge about this source. Experience endows her with protection, yet paradoxically it is the same experience that limits her.

The “great tap root” could be seen as the recess of the speaker’s unconscious, the highly fertile and vital source of creativity as much as destruction. As a “root” gains its nourishment from the soil, the water below, that it is below and not above implies a darker, pernicious ranking similar to “I have fallen a long way” in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’, “fallen” pointing to the dark depths the speaker currently inhabits. The “bottom” (like the “fallen” state in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ that the speaker acknowledges herself to be in) implies the unconscious mind. Given the natural elements and landscape in the scenery of the rest of the poem the “root”, as the lowest yet most important level, allows nourishment to infiltrate the system of the speaker as it would a plant or tree.

The insidiousness of the resource absorbed by the tap root of the subject (it is “fear[ed]”), although a source of vitality, also suggests this knowledge is that of the unconscious. It is unknown to the hearer, that is, it has yet to be explored and “tap[ped]” into or accessed. This explains why the speaker brags of this accomplishment as it is a dangerous pilgrimage to have undertaken; a risk for the pilgrim due to its perilous nature. The “sea” that can be heard “in” the speaker indicates too that the realm of the unconscious is the site where the speaker has been. As a “favorite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives” (Jung, 1974: 177-178), the sea speaks of its “dissatisfactions” which the speaker then adds could also be interpreted as the “voice of nothing” or even “madness”. Much like the “incoherencies” the sea incurs in ‘Medusa’, the “dissatisfactions” the sea suggests make the speaker query the cause. The speaker then immediately asserts after two rhetorical questions regarding the sea’s location that “Love is a shadow” and then derides the speaker about her quest and thirst for love: “How you lie and cry after it/ Listen: these are its hooves: it has gone off, like a horse”. The form which “Love” takes is empty, a mere “shadow”. As a “shadow”, it is indiscrete to the speaker, unattainable, yet they are both connected. The hearer *cries* after the shadow of “Love”, the same way the hearer is “inhabited by a cry” and searches for “something to love”. The echoes of the hearer’s lost love that taunt and tease are all-encompassing and phonetically exposed through the sound of hooves that leave only their “Echoing, echoing” the same way that love leaves and at the same time is haunted by its residual shadow (the idea of a perpetual lost feeling/object, in connection with a horse’s echoing hooves, is reiterated in poems such as

‘Words’ “And the echoes!/ Echoes traveling/ Off from the center like horses”; in ‘Years’ “What I love is/ The piston in motion/ My soul dies before it./ And the hooves of the horses,/Their merciless churn”).

The speaker’s next rhetorical question of what to bring the hearer is answered by “poisons”, not physical poisons, but the “sound” of poisons. Perhaps this offer is intended to provide the hearer with an illusion of that which the hearer needs; the sound and not an actual poison itself. In a way the “sound” of poisons, rather than the taste of poisons, for example, is intended to damage the auditory ability of the speaker above any other sense so as not to hear the “cry” that flaps out, to not feel wanting (like the other disquieting/restless noises of “shriek”, “voice of nothing”, “big hush”). This poisoning and its connection with the ability to hear recalls the poisoning incident in *TBJ* where the girls of *Ladies’ Day* were critically ill from poisonous crab meat served at their luncheon. Significantly, the girls were “[s]ick as dogs and *cryin’ for ma*” (1963: 43, emphasis added). Here, the connection between physical suffering (poisoning), the heart yearning for (motherly) love and the body suffering from love (a lack thereof or poisonous love) is significant. Like the love that the hearer yearns for in ‘Elm’ (“How you lie and cry after it”) and the hearer’s search for love that “flaps out” “[n]ightly” like an owl, are noxious, like the crab meat in *TBJ* that resulted in the girls’ yearning for their mother.

The “big hush” of rain is equated with the “tin-white” arsenic of “fruit”, malign like the looming sea (heard “in” the speaker (another body of water that would ideally quench a thirst, rejuvenate the hearer). The “fruit” is “like arsenic”, the chemical element found in ground water that functions as a pesticide, herbicide and insecticide, as well as the lead in car batteries. Arsenic ultimately damages nature, the same way the poison would damage the speaker. This is a precarious transposition of what fruit would normally symbolise: nourishment, fertility.

Furthermore, in stanza six where the second colour of red is mentioned, it is first alluded to then explicitly stated. Red or blood is first implied through the “atrociousness of sunsets” (Kendall, 2010: 36) that the speaker has “suffered”, which builds up into “My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires”. The sunset induces the speaker’s disintegration: “Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs/ A wind of such violence”. This death/rebirth is destructive in itself given the “clubs” that form from the “pieces” the speaker “breaks” into. The shattering and rebirth³⁶, reformation of the speaker is a violent and baneful transformation, so much so

³⁶ As one/two of the three polarities (“the false self and the true self, and death-in-life and life-in-death” (Kroll, 2011: 13)), the rebirth of the new self is thematic in Plath’s poetry. This rebirth in ‘Elm’ bears similarity to the rebirth in ‘Fever 103’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’. In ‘Elm’ the speaker breaks into pieces that form violent clubs that fly

she “must shriek” from the “merciless” transformation which is as “merciless” as the moon. The moon enters the narrative at this point, following the sun, as a cruel and “barren” figure. She is wounding and envenomed (“she would *drag* me”), even her aura or “radiance” “scathes” the speaker. However, upon reflection, the speaker wonders if the cause of this “radiance” is not from inside the speaker herself (“Or perhaps I have caught her”), where “caught” implies either the contraction of an infectious disease or even the successful attainment of something desired. At this point the speaker muses whether she has internalised the “merciless”, “barren” qualities that the moon possesses.

Regardless, the speaker tries to separate from the moon(/mother) “I let her go. I let her go”. She then addresses the moon directly, “How your bad dreams possess and endow me”, positively asserting how the speaker has assimilated the moon’s “radiance”, her qualities. This is not rhetorical like the other questions but rather a mournful reflection of the inseparability of their relationship. The “bad dreams” that “possess and endow” the speaker recall how Mrs Greenwood assured Esther that their relationship would continue regardless of their conflicts at Belsize, downplaying the severity of Esther’s mental illness (“We’ll take up where we left off, Esther,” she had said, with her sweet, martyr’s smile. “We’ll act as if all this were *a bad dream*” (Plath, 1963: 227, emphasis added)). It also recalls Aurelia’s premonition of Plath’s suicide attempt in *LH*, where she sped home after experiencing a “premonition” (1975: 124), the psychic connectivity mother and daughter shared. The “bad dreams” are interfering and contagious.

The speaker has “caught” the moon’s qualities, they “possess” her and in stanza ten she admits she is “inhabited” (this possession, perversely negative and demonic, recalls the possession/inhabitation in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ where “Funny, spirituous mists inhabit this place”). The speaker is “inhabited” by a sound, a “cry”, the audient unidentifiable only in so far as that it is a nocturnal bird/animal of prey. It “flaps out” “nightly” “[l]ooking, with its hooks, for something to love”. The “hooks” with which the seeker searches imply that the “something to love” that it searches for could also be something to eat/consume (devour) as well as possess. It (the “dark thing”) already possesses the speaker who admits, “I am terrified by this dark thing/ That sleeps in me;/ All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its

about; in ‘Fever 103’ the speaker transforms into a lantern and rises with “beads of hot metal” that fly about, to paradise; in ‘Lady Lazarus’ the speaker burns and rises “Out of the ash”. Notably, these three rebirths are precipitated by the colour red (either explicit or implicit). Plath’s use of the alchemical colour red in physical/spiritual transformation will be discussed in Chapter 4.

malignity". Similarly, the "dark thing" with its "soft, feathery turnings" (described as malign because it guises evil) in 'Elm' resembles the "small bats and owls" alive in the moon-mother in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree'. The "dark thing" that "sleeps" inside the speaker terrifies the speaker. The cause of terror could be that the "dark thing"/need is ravenous for love that is all consuming because it has been starved from love for so long; or its dormancy and imminent awakening unsettles the speaker as she cannot anticipate her level of control over it when it awakens.

The speaker then looks around for love and connection. She sees clouds that pitilessly "pass and disperse". The clouds, as "faces of love" are also "pale irretrievables", the speaker cannot access or connect with them. She then asks herself, "Is it for such ["faces of love"] I agitate my heart?". The speaker is aware of the deficit within her as well as the need to fulfil it, she "agitate[s]" her own heart ("*my* heart") for it. It is this awareness that piques a further introspective statement: "I am incapable of more knowledge", she will not look further inward as she has seen how this searching has already damaged her. The unleashing of her inner potentialities, the continuous inward searching for her own identity has drained and hurt her enough.

Like her previous search in the clouds, she recognises a "face /So murderous" in "its strangle of branches". The elm tree shows its malevolence through its strangulation of a subject the speaker identifies in the branches. Further, the face has a "snaky acids kiss" (like the asphyxiating "Cobra light" in 'Medusa' or the "white serpent" in 'Edge'), its acid injurious in a deceptive kiss, like the abovementioned arsenic. The face "petrifies the will" (like 'Medusa') at a leisurely pace ("isolate, slow faults") that eventually murders ("That kill, that kill, that kill"). This echo recalls the earlier shadow of love that "has gone off, like a horse", as well as the restless, stirring manner in which the speaker acknowledges she searches for love, "I agitate my heart".

The speaker depicts a deep, destructive longing for love as well as its link with her personal development. This yearning haunts the speaker to such an extent that the moon-mother and all the animals in her radiance emanate harm toward the speaker; the water imagery is not nourishing but harmful and malign, intended to poison and damage. The speaker is unloved and alienated from love.

*

'Medusa' – 16 October 1962

The poem 'Medusa' is significant in Plath's anthology because it is the first, most transparent depiction, of her relationship with her mother. It brings to consciousness the first awakening of the mother-complex, alluded to in poems such as 'The Disquieting Muses' (1957) and 'Poem for a Birthday' (1959), where the mother-complex is brought to consciousness; it is specifically in 'Medusa' that Plath first "betray[ed] the company she keeps" (Wagner, 2000: 65), the apparently amicable mother-daughter façade was finally realised and challenged.

Critics agree with the gravity and significance of this poem's subject matter, particularly in connection with her individuation, her identity. Stevenson (1989: 266) views the poem as a "bitter, brutal attack on the Mother of her inner myth, Electra's rival for daddy's love, but at the same time her actual mother". Yorke (1991: 5) sees 'Medusa' as an "attempt Plath is making to detach and separate herself from the damaging pattern of her emotional dependence on her mother ... The mother/daughter connection must be severed". Moses (2010: 43) identifies the revelation this poem triggered where she states "Plath spent her entire adult life trying to trace the ego boundaries for herself that her mother's example neglected to impose". Phillips (1973: 146) asserts that Plath develops the theme of guilt in 'Medusa' where she "communicates with her unconscious", a delving into her inner unconscious and archetypal³⁷ vision.

The identification, and subsequent catharsis this poem enabled, shows how writing was a tool for Plath to confront and cope with, the problems barricading her individuation. As a tool in the process of self-discovery, writing for Plath was also significant because Aurelia also sought to become a writer but failed to do so after sacrificing her independence and goals for her children. Plath (2000: 401) also refers to the confrontation of her writer's block in 1958 as a "Medusahead"³⁸. This largely unconscious reference indicates how Plath was leading up to identify the negative side of her relationship with her mother in 1958 by labelling it 'Medusa',

³⁷ Jung explains, in connection with Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (1942) about archetypal projections, where an archetype of the mother is evoked by the child's projection of the archetype onto his/her mother, not from the mother herself. This archetypal projection, like that of 'Medusa', "gives her [the projected mother archetype] a mythological background and invests her with authority and numinosity" Jung (1982: 126). Here, what is depicted in using (mythological) archetypes is "those corresponding to traits of character or attitudes actually present in the mother" as well as "those referring to traits which the mother only seems to possess, the reality being composed of more or less fortunate (i.e., archetypal) projections on the part of the child" (Jung, 1982: 127).

³⁸ Plath (2000: 401, emphasis added) writes in her diary "I am evidently going through a stage in beginning writing similar to my two months of hysteria in beginning teaching last fall. A sickness, frenzy of resentment at everything, but myself at the bottom. I lie wakeful at night, wake exhausted with that sense of razor-shaved nerves. I must be my own doctor. I must cure this very destructive paralysis & ruinous brooding & daydreaming. If I want to write, this is hardly the way to behave - in horror of it, frozen by it. The ghost of the unborn novel is a *Medusahead*. Witty or simply observant character notes come to me. But I have no idea how to begin".

which became a poem in itself in 1962, connected with her mother. It also shows how her writing and her success as an individual were connected to her relationship with her mother.

In this poem the poignant feelings of resentment towards the mother, self and mother-daughter dyad as well as the guilt and frustration that follow, can be explained by Jungian analyst Mary Briner (2010: 119) where “[t]he more intense a daughter’s feelings about her mother, negative or positive, the more closely bound she is to her. Hate is an active emotion that drives us to do something, while love lulls us into a comfortable unconsciousness”. Thus the *active* hate, specifically the activation thereof, also shows a confrontation or desire to confront the mother-complex because it motivates the resentful to prompt identification and possible resolution with the resented. Plath attached this hate to the archetypal mother-Medusa and, in the poem, attempts to kill her. Since archetypes reside in the unconscious, Jung (1974: 96) states about the role of the unconscious that its “first creative act of liberation is matricide”. The unconscious is freed through the metaphorical killing of the mother, or what the mother represents. Further, “[c]onsciousness can only exist through continual recognition of the unconscious, just as everything that lives must pass through many deaths” (Jung, 1974: 96). When applied, this could explain Plath’s continual unearthing of her unconscious mind (for material for her work as well as herself) and how, in the process, the mother archetype and her proxy, the moon, arose.

Aurelia and Plath shared a private joke about the connotations of the name ‘Aurelia’ a pun for “golden” and “jellyfish” (Stevenson, 1989: 266), which Plath later used as material to depict a dark, usurping picture of her mother. Judith Kroll (see 2007: xxx) was the first critic to make the titular connection between ‘Medusa’ and Plath’s mother (Kroll was consequently discouraged by Ted Hughes to include it in *Chapters of A Mythology* (2007) for fear of hurting Aurelia) which sheds light on the confessionalism of the poem. Given the above association of mother and moon in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ and ‘Elm’, I would extend³⁹ Kroll’s identification further to include the subspecies of the genus *Aurelia*, *Aurelia aurita*, because it is also known as the “moon jellyfish”, “moon jelly” (Rodriguez, 2014). This points to a deeper archetypal association between mother, nature and landscape in Plath’s poetry, specifically here in ‘Medusa’ where the previously overruling moon-mother is likewise an overruling jellyfish.

³⁹ This extension, of the moon-jellyfish-mother connection, is plausible given Plath’s meticulous and well-read craftsmanship when writing poems. Ted Hughes asserts (in Kroll, 2007: xxxix) that Plath was indeed a “well-read entomologist”, familiar with word meanings, their origins and adaptations over time.

Lastly, before turning to the poem to see how this dynamic and the corresponding aspects of identity operate, Jung's description of the third type of mother-complex, namely 'Identity with the Mother' (discussed in Chapter 1), resonates starkly with 'Medusa' given the "psychic osmosis" (Plath, 1975: 36) between mother and daughter as well as the attributes that characterise 'Medusa'. Jung (1974: 135, emphasis added) states that a daughter with this mother-complex "leads a shadow-existence, often visibly *sucked dry* by her mother, and she prolongs her mother's life by a sort of *continuous blood transfusion*" where the unconscious functions through "veritable *octopus-tentacles*". This is depicted through the characterisation and setting in 'Medusa' which involves the parasitic and devouring, the underworld and sea creature depiction as mother.

'Medusa' begins with the speaker painting a picture of the addressee's presence: "stony mouth-plugs", "Eyes rolled", with "sea's incoherencies", an "unnerving head", where the last line of the first stanza discloses how the speaker feels the addressee perceives her, with a "Lens of mercies". This reveals the sacrificial role the hearer has played in the speaker's life. This gargantuan, horrific portrayal is furthered in the second stanza, where the hearer's behaviour and actions are described as "Plying their ["Your stooges"] wild cells into my keel's shadow". The "shadow", similar to "Love is a shadow" in 'Elm', is a malevolent and parasitic presence. The keel, as the speaker's vessel/body, is infected with the penumbra or shadow of the hearer's "wild cells" acting eagerly yet unpredictably on their own. Again the speaker and hearer are not discrete entities, they are connected and the infiltration of the hearer on the speaker's behalf pushes "by like hearts". Perhaps the "hearts" effectively disguised the previously unknown depths of insidious infiltration.

The "Red stigmata" drag "their Jesus hair", a further depiction of the hearer as sacrificial saviour. This prompts the speaker to ponder "Did I scape, I wonder?" which is answered by the euphony of the line, "My mind winds to you" in stark contrast with the cacophony of "Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable". The coupling of euphony and cacophony in the rhythm heightens the disunion's ambivalence. The aged "umbilicus" that connects hearer and speaker, with its many barnacles charting the years of the connection, is as strong and resilient as an "Atlantic cable". Upon reflection, the speaker realises that this umbilicus keeps "itself, it seems, in a miraculous state of repair". This infers the idea that the connection/umbilicus between speaker and hearer has, after its creation and establishment, managed to retain and nurture itself autonomously where neither speaker nor hearer are conscious of or have control over it.

After pondering how the umbilicus has managed to maintain itself, the speaker realises “you were always there, / Tremulous breath at the end of my line”. The hearer implies that the speaker is ubiquitous and indefatigable, constantly waiting on the speaker’s every action. The speaker at the beginning of the line; the hearer at the “end of my line”. Yet a nurturing side is juxtaposed to this “barnacled umbilicus”/ “Atlantic cable”/ “line” as the “Curve of water upleaping/ To my water rod, dazzling and grateful, / Touching and sucking”. This reveals that the speaker too has nurtured the hearer and profited in some way from the “Touching and sucking”, like that of a child, the role of caregiver-child inversed. “Dazzling and grateful” could refer to how Aurelia sacrificed her time and money to allow Plath to study piano lessons and any other extra mural activity she liked, as well as Aurelia’s own dreams for herself, in order to raise her children.

This concession is corrected by the repetition of “I didn’t call you. / I didn’t call you at all. Nonetheless, nonetheless” which echoes a similar situation yet different perception of love/attachment in the speaker’s observation in ‘Elm’, “How you lie and cry after it “Listen: these are its[“Love[‘s]”] hooves: it has gone off like a horse”. The immediacy with which the hearer responds to the speaker is not deterred by distance “You streamed to me over the sea, / Fat and red, a placenta”. The “umbilicus” has transformed into a “placenta”, the extra attachment of an organ. Once needed to provide nutrients to the baby, the placenta becomes useless after birth. This implies that once the hearer has served her purpose in the life of the speaker, she wishes to discard her like one would a placenta since the once fostering and nourishing organ has turned (after birth) leeching and detrimental.

The placenta begins “Paralysing the kicking lovers” which points to “the attempt Plath is making to detach and separate herself from the damaging pattern of her emotional dependence on her mother ... The mother/daughter connection must be severed” (Yorke,1991: 58). The description of “kicking lovers” in the relationship between daughter/speaker and mother/hearer appears too intimate not to suggest a degree of an incestuous type of love. Rose (2001: 80) sheds light on this assertion by delineating how conflict arises when the boundary between mother and daughter has been repetitively blurred:

The problem can equally arise, not when protagonists are at odds with each other, but rather when they are too nearly identified, when communication becomes dangerous or fails in its purpose because the participants come too close. Mother as trusted confidante, mother as lover and soulmate ... What Plath seeks in, already enjoys with, her lover is a sharing of souls.

Communicating that desire to the mother is to enact it – to situate the mother in, or declare as already occupied, that very place

Thus, the quality with which the hearer “paraly[s]es the kicking lovers” is serpentine and rapid, “cobra light”. The serpentine quality of the hearer is similar to those mentioned in ‘Elm’ and ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’. Its constricting, asphyxiating effect “Squeez[es] the breath from the blood bells/ Of the fuchsia” where the speaker can no longer breathe (“I could draw no breath”). The speaker is alarmed (“blood bells”) by and becomes aware of her closeness with the hearer when she realises she struggles to breathe; such is the all-encompassing nature of the hearer. She is reduced to a “[d]ead and moneyless” state, her sources depleted. The colours ideally associated with love and life-giving in connection with one’s nurturer “red”, “blood” and “fuchsia” become depictive of a bloodbath massacre instead. This depicts the duality of mother nature, here both destructive and cruel as opposed to creative and kind.

In this depleted state she is also “[o]verexposed, like an X-ray”. Her reduction to such an empty state has stirred a vehement reaction. This realisation compels the speaker to challenge the hearer, “Who do you think you are? / A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?” where the allusion to Mary recalls that in ‘Elm’, “She is not sweet like Mary”. The speaker describes the hearer according to taste in ‘Elm’ (“sweet”) as well as in ‘Medusa’ (“Communion wafer”). This depiction, in terms of the sense of taste, implies the once physical closeness of the speaker to the hearer, so much so that such a recollection is stated in terms of its physical closeness. The religion of the catechism and the refusal to take a “bite”, a change in dynamic until now, would most likely result in the starvation of the speaker. The once idealised body, with its religious deity (Mary) associations, is now as repulsive as the placenta. The body, from which it is implied the speaker was created, is rejected in order to reject the individual. The tenses indicate that this decision is yet to come (“shall take”) because the speaker currently exists inside this body. The body is presently the “Bottle in which I live”, which recalls the statement of “I live here” in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’ where here is the moon’s “O-gape of complete despair”. The yonic/saccular shape of the bottle is similar to that of a jar (*The Bell Jar* 1963) where Esther lived metaphorically during her depression (“The air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn’t stir” (Plath, 1963: 178)) until she was relieved (“All the heat and fear purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head” (Plath, 1963: 206)).

The supposedly peaceful and sovereign ruling of the hearer is inverted to that of a “Ghastly Vatican”, indicating the “male femaleness” (Holbrook, 1976: 26) or animus of the hearer to

which the speaker responds with equal *male* femaleness: aggression, attack. The hearer is again related to the patriarchal ruling of the church, in terms of an exorcism, “I am sick to death of hot salt”. The “salt”, with similar colouring to the “white” and “light” mentioned previously, infers expulsion: meaning, white expels and reflects; black absorbs and retains, the same way the speaker feels she needs to expel the hearer’s entwining presence from her surroundings as well as her body. The “hot salt” wounds the body/mind of the speaker as it would a demon, a gross inverse of the conventional religious use of salt in sacramental rituals to cleanse newborns, heal disease, bless holy water and sprinkle in prayer. Salt is also a sign of goodwill, yet in ‘Medusa’ it is offensive and antagonistic.

The “wishes” or intentions of the hearer, are “[g]reen as eunuchs”, they “[h]iss” at the speaker’s sins. The speaker also feels judged by the hearer’s sanctimonious way of life which condemn the “sins” of the speaker that fall short of this standard. This recalls instances in *TBJ* where Mrs Greenwood imposes her intentions and teachings on Esther (which Esther intentionally defies in return) such as the article from *Reader’s Digest* promoting women’s chastity until marriage. The “sins” could also refer to Mrs Greenwood’s attempts at teaching Esther shorthand, which failed, as well as her embarrassment and shame when Esther was severely mentally ill. The speaker rejects this pious attitude with the command: “Off, off, eely tentacle!” and finally disengages with the statement: “There is nothing between us”. The present tense of this statement equals the present tense of the observation, “you are always there” which belies the speaker’s actual ability, or desire, to permanently sever relations with the hearer.

The statement, “there is nothing between us”, as well as the overall flux of inclusion/separation of the mind/body of the speaker and hearer indicates the complex nature of Bowlby’s attachment theory. This illustrates an ambivalent push/pull or “anxious resistant attachment”, a “pattern” where “the individual is uncertain whether his parent will be available or responsive or helpful when called upon. Because of this uncertainty he [sic] is always prone to separation anxiety, tends to be clinging, and is anxious about exploring the world” (Bowlby, 1988: 124). This uncertainty and latent separation anxiety, present in the amplified degree of vehemence with which the speaker describes her relationship, exposes her dependence upon the hearer and questions her ability to sever ties effectively.

These three poems depict the complex and contradictory relationship between mother and daughter. Although possibly fuelled with the intensity of love, the poems are fraught with ambivalence and frustration over the speaker’s connection with and dependence on her mother.

Mother becomes all that is malevolent in the world, the mindscapes depicted are gothic and fuelled with emotion or equally severely disconnected and disdainful; from the small birds of prey to the larger moon, jellyfish. This extensive analysis shows how the complex feelings and associations of the mother-complex are portrayed.

3.2 The female body and children

“I, sitting here as if brainless wanting both a baby and a career but god knows what if it isn't writing. What inner decision, what inner murder or prison-break must I commit if I want to speak from my true deep voice in writing ... and not feel this jam up of feeling behind a glass-dam fancy-facade of numb dumb wordage” (Plath, 1975: 469).

Plath's poems that are specifically about children, childrearing and childbirth, are arguably her most ambivalent poems. Progressing from daughter to mother herself, these poems are often characterised by a surplus of anxiety and tension (due to the inevitability of such a stage of life, especially in the 1950s). Yet, they often balance this anxiety with hope. The poems dispute the customary reduction of woman as mere procreative object on a personal and public level. As such, they endorse the validity of the fundamental significance of woman's existence as well as her experience (of this) in connection with her identity as a woman/mother. They highlight woman's experience of the loss/adaption of identity upon the birth of her child as well as the accompanying changes she experiences in her body and mind. This section analyses Plath's late poems where the speaker is a (new) mother; the hearer or addressee the child. I will discuss the conceptualisation and portrayal in Plath's selected 'child' poems: 'Morning Song' (1961), 'The Night Dances' (1962), 'Event' (1962) and 'Child' (1963), as well as the commonalities and changes in perception during the course of these poems.

In such child poems the speaker most often inflects the destabilisation of her own identity upon the arrival of her newborn child where such natural female processes of midwifery, menstruation, and so forth are often seen as a curse and sacrifice to the mother. This tends to jeopardise and/or compromise the mother's relationship with her own body and mind. The mother's identity splits upon the creation of the mother-child dyad, in the traditionally natural process of procreation, the mother feels effaced. Plath was prodigious in drawing attention to and highlighting the experience of this overlooked negative albeit natural difficulty in childbirth and childrearing, especially in connection with the mother and her own body.

Plath was *avante garde* because she wrote the female body. She validated woman's experience in a time that overlooked and forwent the complexity and compromise childbirth and rearing had on a woman's body and identity. In doing so she confronts the static, established and idealised view of the 'eternal feminine' and highlights woman's complexity; Plath confronts de Beauvoir's (1949: 176) observation that "[w]oman's fecundity is regarded only as a passive quality". She brings attention to the many complex emotions mothers feel towards their children as well as the multifarious stages of experience and development during, for example, pregnancy, miscarriage (Plath had a miscarriage herself), accouchement, breastfeeding, infertility, post-natal depression, and so forth as experienced through and manifested in her mind and body. She explores such feelings and experiences in her writing to argue society's negation of the complexity and significance of woman's experience. As a corrective, such poems seek to qualify the value of women by showing their invaluable function in society.

Like Anne Sexton, Plath was one of the first women to write about birth and equate the experience of birth with artistic creativity (Lauro, 2006: 150). Of the late poems surrounding pregnancy and birth, critics state that the depiction of motherhood where "[m]otherhood and identity come into conflict – so much so that one effaces the other" (Kendall, 2001: 62). Kroll (2007: 73) observes the paradox that, in the late poems in particular, "[t]he childless woman resembles a work of art that cannot reproduce itself", while Perloff (1973: 96) stresses that "[i]n Plath's poetry, pregnancy is usually regarded as a temporary suspension of anxiety, for carrying a child gives the poet a sense of being, of having weight, of inhabiting her own body". Either way, the birth of new life is a highly ambivalent experience that threatens the poet's identity.

Plath juxtaposes her theme of life/death in her child poems. The life of the child, the beginning life of her new self as mother, the death of her old self as mere woman, the death of her bodily shape and previous lifestyle, the death of a previous mindset; these and many more are all beginnings and endings that occur naturally with a newborn child. It is an adaptation for the mother. Plath (1975: 495) confesses in her diary:

It is not when I have a baby, but that I have one, and more, which is of supreme importance to me. I have always been extremely fond of the definition of Death which says it is: Inaccessibility to Experience, a Jamesian view, but so good. And for a woman to be deprived of the Great Experience her body is formed to partake of, to nourish, is a great and wasting Death. After all, a man need physically do no more than have the usual intercourse to become a father. A woman has 9 months of becoming something other than herself, of separating from this otherness, of

feeding it and being a source of milk and honey to it. To be deprived of this is a death indeed. And to consummate love by bearing the child of the loved one is far profounder than any orgasm or intellectual rapport. (Written 13 June 1959).

The sacrifice a mother is expected to make as well as the adaptation to her new life is ordinarily overlooked. Plath personifies Death in the above quote and notes the effects of a new-born on the mind/body. Similarly, Jung and Kerenyi (1949: 187) highlight, of this expectancy of motherhood (life/death and creation/destruction), an understanding of this natural process where:

A woman's life is close to blood. Every month she is reminded of this, and birth is indeed a bloody business, destructive and creative. A woman is only permitted to give birth, but the new life is not her creation. In her heart of hearts she knows this and rejoices in the grace that has fallen to her.

Plath explores the inevitable and counterintuitive consequence of negative and frightening anti-/un-maternal emotions, such as angst and heightened ambivalence in childbirth and childrearing. Above all, effacement and the loss of identity are thematic in connection with childbirth, which creates division to presuppose creation within the self.

Critics have noted the instability that children bring to Plath's poems. Kroll (2007: 11) highlights that "Insofar as motherhood is part of a male-dependent and entrapping domesticity, it constitutes a negative kind of creativity". This "negative creativity" becomes problematic for the true self. To recall the hypothesis that Plath sought unity of the self (as the basis of Jungian theory) and that for Esther in *TBJ*, like Plath, birthing children was not only inevitable but unavoidable, the countering of this "negative creativity" as a writer was unavoidable. The problem arises, however, when this inevitable conflict obstructs and creates conflict with the true self (Plath was continually seeking inward for this identity, as thematic to her pilgrimage). To clarify this conundrum, Kroll (2007: 10-110) asserts:

The true self (the positive, whole, reborn self) is associated with artistic creativity, and with the autonomy possible only if one is not defined primarily in relation to an other. When the true self has emerged fully, the heroine will not be defined primarily in relation to a man – particularly since she considers her attachment to (now-absent) males to be responsible for the origin of the false self. When wifehood, daughterhood, and motherhood appear primarily as male-defined roles ... then these roles are negative and may be considered forms of the false self.

This shows how, through writing poems about children, a focus foreshadowed in *TBJ*, Plath sought to find herself through dividing herself: *individuation*. One can observe the prevalence

of this preoccupation in Plath's poetry by the frequency⁴⁰ with which the topic of children arose throughout her work and, still consistent and durable in her last days. Consistent with Plath's previous organisation of *TBJ*, where the narrative opens in summer and ends with winter, Plath arranged her final manuscript to begin with the word "Love" (in 'Morning Song') and end on "spring" (in 'Wintering')⁴¹. This points to her theme of birth/death and creativity/destruction, but above all, her search for unity and perfection within the self. This is not completely negative, as Kroll asserts, because Plath was aware that such a disintegration of her identity was as necessarily unavoidable as the integration it necessitates; written on 7 December 1961 (written in-between the 'child' poems 'Morning Song' and 'Event') "I feel dreadfully lazy myself. I really write terribly little. I remember before Frieda came, I was like this; quite cowl-like and interested suddenly in sappy woman's magazines and cooking and sewing. Then a month or so afterwards I did some of my best poems" (Plath, 1975: 439). Thus children do not only pose a "negative creativity" for Plath; their function is to herald a new identity and open a space for her growth through her adaption to the new circumstances. Even more so, Plath is aware of this process.

Moreover, if we examine Plath's thought processes charted in her diary prior to her creative outburst of 1961-1963, it is evident that Plath sought to understand, and even prepare herself, for the connection between her (womanly) body and mind in relation to children. She anticipates her 'new self' and explores the many phases of the female mind/body: infertility, pregnancy, menstruation, post-partum depression, the effects of birth on the shape of her body; as well as the aftereffects on her individuality: such as her profession/ writing, her obligation to acquiescence to this role within society and her relationship with her husband upon the arrival and accommodation of a child. She realised early on that to be true to herself she need have children, as this was her desire, but this would be problematic to her self-concept, "Children might humanize me. But I must rely on them for nothing" (Plath, 2000: 519) (written 19 October 1959). She describes menstruation symbolically as the "grumpy fruitless cramps" (Plath, 2000: 485), where "fruitless" for a woman is equally as significant and problematic (for

⁴⁰ The word 'child' and its variations (grandchild, childhood, children) appear 53 times in *The Collected Poems* (1960).

⁴¹ The arrangement according to season, seen in Plath's anthology as well as *TBJ*, is by no means a fluke. Jung (1974: 6, emphasis added) believes these seasons are projected, which indicates the development of "[a]ll the mythologized processes of nature, such as *summer and winter*, the *phases of the moon*, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection—that is, mirrored in the events of nature".

a perfectionist and idealist) as infertility “I cried and cried. Last night, today. How can I keep Ted wedded to a barren woman? Barren barren” (Plath, 2000: 501) (written 20 June 1959). She acknowledges how a child would force her to relocate and balance her identity as a writer:

I need the reality of other people, work, to fulfil myself. Must never become a mere mother and housewife. Challenge of baby when I am so unformed and unproductive as a writer. A fear for the meaning and purpose of my life. I will hate a child that substitutes itself for my own purpose: so I must make my own. (Plath, 2000: 525).

She acknowledges and justifies the need/natural desire to be a mother and how this conflicts with her urge to write, “I have even longed for that most fearsome first woman's ordeal: having a baby - to elude my demanding demons & have a constant excuse for lack of production in writing. I must first conquer my writing & experience, & then will deserve to conquer childbirth. Paralysis.” (Plath, 2000: 395) (written on 20 June 1958). And lastly, in 1962, she brazenly acknowledges her lack of acknowledgement at the birth of her son Nicholas, “We had a son. I felt no surge of love. I wasn't sure I liked him” (Plath, 2000: 647), who was born on 17 January, a possible indication of postpartum depression. This shows how Plath strove to reconcile her ambivalence.

The unavoidable (for Plath) arrival of a child anticipates changes within her self-concept and forces her to adapt. Yet, this adaption spurs greater creativity and further enables her writing (seen as initiated by the poem ‘Event’) as it provides her with new subject matter and experience to add to her *magnum opus*, extending her vision, her craft. The new phase of childbirth within her pilgrimage was an impetus that forced her to reconcile the facets of her identity, pre-eminently un-silence her experience as a woman (which, in the development of feminism, essentially “made her name”) and fuse her perception with her experience of children, attend to her characteristic perfectionism, is ultimately becoming a positive experience for her as a woman and writer.

To recall the significance of writing in Plath's life, which she herself predicted in ‘Stillborn’ (1959) (discussed in Chapter 1), childbirth posed a threat to Plath's identity. To recap, the crux of ‘Stillborn’ is the (then seen as inevitable) effacement of the writer and the alignment of her value as an individual/woman/writer with the value of the poem/child. This was the challenge Plath faced later on in her ‘late’ poems where, paradoxically, unforeseen in this crossroad was Plath's greatest exigency for adaption; her greatest opportunity for growth. During the time of the abovementioned chary speculation, Plath identified that “... writing is still used as a *proof*

of my identity” (Plath, 2000: 460, emphasis added), as validation of her existence and *raison d’être*. Yet we shall see how these qualms, wrought with ambivalence, necessitated and aided her self-concept.

As the rudiment of Plath’s pilgrimage, identity, in connection with the child, can be explained in connection to Jung, Butler and Friedan. As previously explained in Jungian theory, Plath’s individuation and the increasing conflicts towards her death are indicative of her confronting her shadow and, above all, her confrontation with the mother-complex. Also, Plath began to explore her personal unconscious after the birth of her child, when interacting with her. These steps were necessary for her to near the attainment of self. Furthermore, Jung (1975: 98, original emphasis) attends to feminism when he validates the “effacement” Plath so notably describes in her child poems: “Finally, it should be remarked that emptiness is a great feminine secret. It is something absolutely alien to man; the chasm, the unplumbed depth, the yin”. As such, one can deduce a number of assertions from this statement that Plath herself promotes. Firstly, that woman’s experience has not yet been fully explored in history, literature, general human consciousness and that this negation requires attention. Secondly, “emptiness” is a valid and unavoidable phase within woman’s growth, it is neither whimsical nor egotistical, but egocentric and intrinsic. Plath experienced this “emptiness” as effacement, the extreme imbalance of ambivalence as complementary and similar to an empty vacant space: either way, there is instability due to an over- (ambivalent) or under-(empty) load. This is traceable in the “woman’s ideal” she describes in her diary, the ‘eternal feminine’ Simone de Beauvoir posits, the ‘emptiness’ Jung identifies, and the ‘feminine mystique’ Friedan pinpoints.

Briefly, for example, Friedan’s manifesto is highly relevant to Plath specifically in terms of the timing and placement. *TBJ* and *The Feminine Mystique* were both published in 1963, and both women attended Smith University. Hence, the views Friedan expresses directly reflect Plath’s predicament, and the predicament of women of the 1950s/60s. The commonalities are copious; however, I will mention the main influences in connection with the child poems of this chapter. Friedan (1963: 55) states, “Over and over again, stories in women’s magazines insist that woman can know fulfilment only at the moment of giving birth to a child” (like the *Reader’s Digest* article Mrs Greenwood posted Esther) until this point women are empty and invalid and serve no real function. Friedan attempted to distinguish this ‘problem with no name’ among the women of this generation in her interviews and found that “Sometimes a woman would say ‘I feel empty somehow... incomplete.’ Or she would say, ‘I feel as if I don’t exist.’” This reflects Esther’s own existentialism (“I felt very still and very empty” (Plath, 1963: 2)) as well

as the inevitable, self-defining function of this prospect (when Mrs Tomolillo gives birth at Buddy's university):

I didn't feel up to asking him [Buddy] if there were any other ways to have babies. For some reason the most important thing to me was actually *seeing the baby come out of you yourself* and making sure it was yours. I thought if you had to have all that pain anyway you might just as well stay awake.

I had always imagined myself hitching up on to my elbows on the delivery table after it was all over - dead white, of course, with no makeup and from the awful ordeal, but smiling and radiant, with my hair down to my waist, and reaching out for my first little squirmy child and saying its name, whatever it was. (Plath, 1963: 63, emphasis added).

On the other hand, Judith Butler can be connected with Plath's conceptualisation of woman's identity in its making as construed contingently/inadvertently through repetition and power. Both highlight the fragile construction of identity (of gender) through its expectation and reinforcement, its performance (to be discussed in 3.4). On top of this, implicit in Butler and Plath's text is criticism of the idealism of the nuclear family, much like Sexton's reproval of the picturesque "white picket fence" paragon. Relevant to this current discussion, too, is Butler's scaffolding of de Beauvoir's 'eternal feminine' in connection with the child. Butler (1990: 8) posits that "Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex* (1949) that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one." For de Beauvoir, gender is "constructed," but implied in her formulation is an agent, a cogito, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender". As such, Butler scaffolds feminism's second wave by adding a performative aspect on top of the identification of inequality in gender. Furthermore, Butler (1990: 33) adds:

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.

The point here is that Plath sought to appropriate the 'eternal feminine' by expanding the conception of the status quo to include a performative aspect: agency. She achieves such simply because she challenges the silent status quo: she voices the experience of childbirth and childrearing (such adverse, "anti-/un-maternal" confessions are still considered taboo), she documents this and speaks on behalf of those unwilling to challenge the norm. She reconstructs the hitherto subject formation of woman('s identity) as a static and largely mysterious concept

to a multi-faceted and human one. This augmentation provides a platform for readaptation, reconstruction of woman, in woman's own eyes and the eyes of society.

*

The child in these poems is the addressee, the narrative follows the mother's rumination as she attempts to define, localize and explore the child and attune and modify herself in connection with him or her. This is reinforced by the tone, colour and imagery used in these poems.

The first stanza introduces an enclosed fate where the speaker has no agency, she feels slave to her circumstance. The "elements" "solidify" themselves and she and her child lie in another's "rift" "back to back" ('Event'), a "smile" falls on its own accord "in the grass" and immediately becomes "irretrievable!" ('The Night Dances'), the child is equated to a daunting ticking "gold watch" set off by "Love" and a "bald cry" (unfamiliar, without connection to the mother) takes "its place among the elements" ('Morning Song'). Yet, in 'Child' the speaker initiates "Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing". The speaker is powerless and overwhelmed by the arrival of her child, who is alien yet beautifully pure and enticing.

The speaker feels immured by her new status as mother. She oscillates between tension and anxiety, hope and aspiration. This is exacerbated by the lack of interaction and dialogue between mother and child. For example, in 'Event' the noises the child makes are "[i]ntolerable vowels [that] enter my heart", while in 'Morning Song' the same "vowels" are a "handful of notes;/ The clear vowels rise like balloons". The child opens his/her mouth to communicate with the speaker but all the speaker feels is a compulsion to see to him/her, "The child in the white crib revolves and sighs, / Opens its mouth now, demanding" ('Event'), "Your mouth opens clean as a cat's" ('Morning Song'). Likewise, the voice or "breath" of the child is audible but nonsensical and therefore alien to the mother, and like the "bald cry" it is without attachment. The speaker states in 'The Night Dances' that the child has a "small breath", elsewhere "All night your moth-breath/ Flickers among the flat pink roses." and adds her openness to connect where "I wake to listen: / A far sea moves in my ear" ('Morning Song'). Although there is no dialogue between mother and child, there is communication on a physical level between utterances and physical closeness.

The speaker is in a meditative state, as if pondering how to reconcile her identity with the child. At times she fears her child as a foreign entity, which paradoxically she created in her image. Yet what she fears more is the prospect of adapting to the new change. This ambivalence is evident where very few plural pronouns ("we", "us") are used in the poems, which would

ideally combine mother and child into one entity. Yet the use of the word “one” in almost all the poems could be seen as an attempt to unify the pair. “A black gap discloses itself” where, on the other side, “A small white soul is waving, a small white maggot”. Likewise, the child’s “nakedness/ Shadows our safety”, it is all encompassing (‘Morning Song’). Immediately after the speaker realises she cannot touch the child as “My limbs, also, have left me”; she then states both she and the child are consequently “dismembered” and they “touch like cripples” (‘Event’). Her psychic landscape is affected by this disunity as the “flesh” or the “lilies, lilies” “bears no relation” like “the black amnesias of heaven” (‘The Night Dances’). Lilies also symbolise the departure of a soul.

These poems also make use of mirror/reflective imagery such as “eyes” (‘Event’, ‘The Night Dances’, ‘Child’), “mirror”, “window” and “sea” (‘Morning Song’) and “pool” (‘Child’). The reflective imagery, in connection with the child poems, can be seen as a search for identity with the child (and the speaker’s mother as well, these are linked).

To examine this, In ‘Event’⁴² the speaker states: “I cannot see your eyes” which could mean ‘I cannot see myself (reflected) in your eyes’/‘I cannot see me in you’; ‘I cannot connect with you’. The speaker needs proof of her existence in the child to validate a connection (like the authentication Esther felt she needed to *see* her own baby come out of herself as proof in her reverie of her own birth after seeing Mrs Tomollilo’s). Likewise, “see” could be a homonym for ‘sea’, where the speaker cannot reflect herself, cannot embody the child. The speaker’s unique attributes (“my eyes, my lips, my hair”) become malformed (“Touching and melting”) and are “Nowhere” (‘The Night Dances’). Also, the speaker is threatened by the untraceability of herself in the child as she states: “I’m no more your mother/ Than the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow/ Effacement at the wind’s hand”. Freedman (1993: 153) explains that this confusing description where the speaker:

... acknowledge[s] what it denies. The statement succeeds only in rejecting the maternal identity for one that is identical with it, for that of the vaguely insubstantial image (the cloud) that is ultimately erased from the surface of its other, equally effaced identity as maternal mirror. The escape from mirror and mother to cloud does not permit an escape from their mutual fate as

⁴² In ‘Event’, Plath used her children “for material in a confessional way” for the first time, which apparently “appalled” Ted Hughes (Stevenson, 1989: 244). It was also originally titled ‘Quarrel’ (Kroll, 2007: 117), and shows “images of physical dismemberment [that] reflect the cutting off which, emotionally, death-in-life is ... a longing for wholeness”.

depersonalized victims of erasure. And the ambiguity of "its own" suggests that the mirror as well as the cloud is effaced by the wind that blows the child into the mother's life.

Likewise, the speaker states, "A far sea moves in my ear". She can hear the child's voice, turbulent and enigmatic as the sea, yet it is "far" from her. In 'Child' the speaker examines the child in connection with "Pool in which images/ Should be grand and classical", she would like to see herself in the child as prospering and traditionally maternal, not as she presently is ("Not this troublous/ Wringing of hands, this dark/ Ceiling without a star").

The effect the child has on the mother is described as worrisome to the mother speaker. The child "revolves and sighs", it is "demanding" ('Event'). Its "gestures" are described as "coldness, forgetfulness", "Bleeding and peeling" ('The Night Dances'). This behaviour leads the mother speaker to question existentially "Who has dismembered us?" ('Event').

Paradoxically, by writing about the separation Plath feels between herself and her child, she seeks to bridge the gap. She attempts to bridge this connection by searching for her own self within the child.

3.3 Domesticity

"Then I yielded to my husband's wish that I become full-time homemaker." - Aurelia Plath
(Plath, 1975: 10)

This section analyses how domesticity affects the construction of female identity in the late poems. Women of the 1950s spent a large amount of their time in the domestic setting as their role was strictly that of a housewife. As such, much of their suffering as well as inspiration came from this source due to the large amount of time and energy invested in the kitchen and home, traditionally raising children and attending to their husbands often at cost to their own needs and aspirations. Dobbs (1977: 11) affirms this connection between Plath's domesticity and her ambivalence as "Plath's ambivalence toward men, marriage, and motherhood (in her last poems, abandonment by her husband added other dimensions as well), and the guilt she surely felt help explain the degree to which her domestic poems are associated with suffering". This section therefore analyses Plath's depiction of woman's experience of domesticity and identity in the poems 'The Courage of Shutting Up' (1962) and 'Lesbos' (1962).

These poems portray the psyche of the 1950s silenced female self and how she copes with this silencing. Dobbs (1977: 25) observes "[p]aradoxically, it is out of her domestic relationships

and experiences, which she came to feel were stifling, even killing her that the majority of her most powerful, most successful work was created". The kitchen is depicted through dark irony as a site of violence and discord. The kitchen could stand as a metaphor for society, the double standards women faced at the time at cost to their loss of self and identity⁴³. The existentialism, as well as frustration and emptiness, this silencing produces surfaces through these poems which are more vulgar in subject matter (such as "tits", "baby crap", "crap and puke and cry", "Every woman's a whore") and devoid of social decorum than Plath's other poems, which function to expose taboos and confess the experience inviolately. Given the time period, Middlebrook (1991: 40) states, "In postwar America the concept of woman's place in society had contracted into idealization of the house wife role". As such, the intention of these poems could be to disillusion and challenge the accepted schema of the kitchen as idealised (and inevitable for woman) where the wife is expected to only love/care for her husband and children by cooking and cleaning for them (as Aurelia Plath did). This challenges the accepted conception of what in reality is a role of selfless servitude and sacrifice which, when given no liberty to make other choices, drains and effaces, strips woman of her own pursuits to the singular function of caretaker and child-producer.

Since the feminism of this time was second wave, the function was primarily to bring awareness of the dynamics of gender equalities and damaging stereotypes than to correct them, which would be secondary. Portrayed earlier in the 'fig tree', to have both children and a profession was seen as implausible in the 1950s, outlandish and therefore impossible to accomplish at the same time, much less in the same lifetime. As such, Plath's poetry can be seen as insurgent and avant-garde as it prematurely highlights the discord for women and for

⁴³ In a larger perspective de Beauvoir (1949: 550-551, emphasis added) discusses woman's purpose within "conjugal society" and identity where "The wife's work within the home does not grant her autonomy; it is not directly useful to the group, it does not open onto the future, it does not produce anything. It becomes meaningful and dignified only if it is integrated into existences that go beyond themselves, toward the society in production or action ... it makes her dependent on her husband and children; she justifies her existence through them: she is no more than an inessential mediation in their lives. That the civil code erased "obedience" from her duties changes nothing in her situation; her situation is not based on what the couple wants but on the very structure of the conjugal community. The wife is not allowed to do any positive work and consequently to have herself known as a complete person. Regardless of how well she is respected, she is subjugated, secondary, and parasitic. The heavy curse weighing on her is that *the very meaning of her existence is not in her hands*. This is the reason the successes and failures of her conjugal life have much more importance for her than for the man: he is a citizen, a producer, before being a husband; she is above all, and often exclusively, a wife; her work does not extract her from her condition; it is from her condition, on the contrary, that her work derives its price or not. Loving, generously devoted, she will carry out her tasks joyously; these chores will seem insipid to her if she accomplishes them with resentment. *They will never play more than an inessential role in her destiny*; in the misadventures of conjugal life they will be of no help. We thus have to see how this condition is concretely lived, one that is essentially defined by bed "service" and housework "service" in which the wife finds her dignity only in accepting her vassalage".

men too, speaking for both sexes' inequalities and the damaging expectations of such restrictions. Although Plath lead an "outwardly traditional life" (Art Documentary, 2014), inside she refused to adapt and conform to woman's double standard and constantly addressed this, and other issues, in her poetry.

To revisit this idea of Plath's poetry as revolutionary in its subject matter and function, I will briefly turn back in time to Plath's poem titled 'Two Sisters of Persephone' (1956). This shows that Plath's style was established much earlier on due to her thematic focus on woman's identity and woman's experience (of her mind and body). Here, Plath skilfully sketches the lifestyle and connected function of woman's body and mind; profession and sexuality; ambition and quality of life as discrete and immiscible and essentially impossible to consolidate.

Two girls there are: within the house
 One sits; the other, without.
 Daylong a duet of shade and light
 Plays between these.

In her dark wainscoted room
 The first works problems on
 A mathematical machine.
 Dry ticks mark time

As she calculates each sum.
 At this barren enterprise
 Rat-shrewd go her squint eyes,
 Root-pale her meager frame.

Bronzed as earth, the second lies,
 Hearing ticks blown gold
 Like pollen on bright air. Lulled
 Near a bed of poppies,

She sees how their red silk flare
 Of petaled blood
 Burns open to sun's blade.
 On that green altar

Freely become sun's bride, the latter
 Grows quick with seed.
 Grass-couched in her labor's pride,
 She bears a king. Turned bitter

And sallow as any lemon,
 The other, wry virgin to the last,
 Goes graveward with flesh laid waste,
 Worm-husbanded, yet no woman;

Inscribed above her head, these lines:
 While flowering, ladies, scant love not
 Lest all your fruit
 Be but this black outcrop of stones.

This innovative depiction speaks truthfully for women who have been socialised to become passive and prescriptive in their life choices. For example, the first woman pursues a (male) mathematical career (seen as a “barren enterprise”) and in doing so her body decays, its reproductive fiction unfulfilled (“Rat-shrewd go her squint eyes,/ Root-pale her meager frame”) and her sexual identity and biological function to reproduce unexplored (“wry virgin to the last, /Goes graveward with flesh laid waste) which in turn effaces her of her womanhood (Worm-husbanded, yet no woman). This starkly juxtaposes the latter woman who pursues her fertility (“red silk flare/ Of petaled blood/ Burns open to sun's blade”), sexuality and female body delights (“Bronzed as earth”, “Near a bed of poppies”) and traditionally womanly ways only. She also achieves purpose in society because she contributes to it by reproducing an heir (“She bears a king”). Yet what is important in this poem, the message Plath conveys is that neither can achieve both paths (body/mind, profession or career/ childbirth or childrearing) and as such both live an unfulfilled and *incomplete* existence (“yet no woman”). I have shown that ambivalence is characteristic of Plath’s poetry and it is often depicted as a woman’s condition that is unavoidable and innate. The last stanza is a warning or truism spoken to and for women, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. Thus ‘Two Sisters of Persephone’, as one of her first poems, adds insight into Plath’s characteristic ambivalence (and conversely her indifference and apathy) because, due to woman’s inability or extreme difficulty to adhere both to her innate biological/reproductive (emotional/feeling) function as well as her mental

potentialities/science (logic/reason) (animus), she faces effacement and struggles to develop her own identity (individuation).

To turn back to the domestic silencing poems, Dobbs (1977: 20) labels Plath's poems in a domestic setting or "domestic labyrinth" as oftentimes her "most ominous" poems. This is because "[h]er functions have been performed, she has kept the furniture polished; but her personhood has been effaced, her sexuality has atrophied"; in performing her prescriptive biology and sexuality she has been erased by it. The setting of these poems is as unnatural to woman as the abject feelings it evokes, aided by the use of unusual colour ("orange", "pink", "silver") and body part imagery ("tits", "brain", "throat", "fist") (as representative of identity) to that which Plath normally uses. Yet both poems end on the peripheral of nature and/or spirituality (the "mountains" in 'The Courage of Shutting Up' and the "Zen heaven" in 'Lesbos') which could be seen as a comment on both the hope for the future, the possibility of change within the domestic domain, as well as woman's characteristic resilience and adaptability to engender such a change.

These explicitly woman/housewife poems emphasise more Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the 'eternal feminine' and other conceptions of woman given the unnatural setting (of the household, kitchen) and its occlusion to reaching Jungian 'attainment of self' or individuation. De Beauvoir highlights the unquestioned gender roles and the portrayal of woman as a sexualised and desired object until she is mother, as well as her enduring conceptualisation as Other. The double standards with regards to, for example, the stigma of virginity and limitation of woman's professional capability (to only shorthand where she executes others' (mostly men's) work) discussed in the *TBJ* chapter, were highly problematic for women. These standards contribute to the idea of the 'eternal feminine' as static, which propagates the many elusive, desirable yet unattainable images women should fulfil which resulted oftentimes in mental and/or physical illness. Wagner (2000: 124) states that "Plath compartmentalized herself into daughter, wife, poet, mother". Of this compartmentalisation de Beauvoir (1949: 756) states, "She is busy, but she does not do anything; in her functions as wife, mother, and housewife, she is not recognized in her singularity". This captures the essence of the need for identity that Plath and many women still strive to achieve which proves a barrier to one's individual development and 'attainment of self'.

Of the housewife's sense of self, self-worth and individuality, de Beauvoir (1949: 731) explains that:

Her life is not directed toward goals: she is absorbed in producing or maintaining things that are never more than means - food, clothes, lodging - these are inessential intermediaries between animal life and free existence; the only value that is attached to inessential means is usefulness; the housewife lives at the level of utility, and she takes credit for herself only when she is useful to her family ... A woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly. Let a future be open to her and she will no longer be obliged to settle in the present.

Plath's rhetoric (seen in her use of irony, satire and stereotypes in the domestic poems) highlights such double standards and existential discord in woman's psyche. She exposes the destructive dangers of de Beauvoir's myth of the 'eternal feminine' as well as the taboos and stigmas attached to those who choose to deviate from the norm as depicted through the media and performed by woman's ancestry. The stereotypes highlight woman's compartmentalisation of her roles and desires and consequently reinforce her crucial challenge to unify the many sides of her psyche. Although focused on bringing critical attention to current labels (such as 'sad hag', 'pathological liar', 'whore') and connotations/schemas (woman's irascible and volatile emotions, woman as the weaker and less important sex, purity until marriage, her passivity and submission to patriarchal systems) of woman, by highlighting them she provokes the dire need among women to question, contest and modify them.

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'The Courage of Shutting Up' - 2 October 1962

Plath wrote this poem⁴⁴ after visiting a mansion called Millford with Hughes and friend Richard Murphy. She had learned of Hughes' affair (a catalyst for her writing) in July, fell ill in August and at the time attempted to maintain a congenial relationship with Hughes (Stevenson, 1989: 252-255). This tension and conflict can be seen in the allusions to and war tropes used in this poem (such as "artillery", "cannon", "blue grievances", "death rays", "torture", "He has seen too much death, his hands are full of it", "[l]oaded"), possibly to emphasise the relationship between a personal and public war on a large scale (as Plath was a pacifist) given WW2 ended 13 years prior. The war tropes could be seen as an intermediary between men and military,

⁴⁴ Within the same week that this poem was written Plath wrote other poems exploring similar themes and ideas to that of 'The Courage of Shutting Up' (2 October 1962). For instance, the idea of domesticity and ancestry in 'The Detective' (1 October 1962) ("This is the smell of years burning, here in the kitchen, / These are the deceits, tacked up like family photographs") and 'Stings' (6 October 1962) ("Though for years I have eaten dust / And dried plates with my dense hair"), as well as war tropes in 'The Swarm' (7 October 1962) ("It is you the knives are out for / At Waterloo, Waterloo, Napoleon", "Russia, Poland and Germany!", "The white busts of marshals, admirals, generals, / Worming themselves into niches").

women and domesticity (there is no use of natural imagery in the poems until the last line). The poem is in 3rd person which functions to alienate and separate by distancing the speaker; “I” is not mentioned once although the poem’s subject matter indicates the poem is of a personal nature. Likewise, the lack of an “I” speaker could furthermore indicate how the private is also public, how many experienced the same struggle but never shared or voiced it.

Silence is portrayed as courageous given the discipline it costs the speaker to do so. The consonance created emphasises an ‘s’ sound, where the susurrantion implies a dragging or coercion of will as the “artillery” behind the slow, sluggish “worm” “shut mouth” withholds the “artillery” of “black discs”. “[D]isks” appears four times in the poem, a defamiliarising tool that points to the topical repetition of domestic disputes and the frequency of such disputes as a common theme in marriages as well as how such situations/interactions/emotions evoked become unavoidable like a stuck record. The line of the shut mouth is a “line pink and quiet, a worm, basking”. The “worm”⁴⁵, plebeian in the chain of being, however purposeful in the function of nature, is insignificant in the face of such conflict. These disks are “black” and filled with “outrage”, all-encompassing like the “outrage of a sky” with a “lined brain” behind it, pertaining to the deeply-run grooves of repetitive disputes. The “disks revolve, they ask to be heard”, although they are not still in the silence which they are still internalising, still in motion, personified to request acknowledgement.

The “disks” are “[l]oaded” “with accounts of bastardies. / Bastardies, usages, desertions and doubleness” where the consonance and susurrantion emphasise the volume of “artillery” stored behind the point of release. The “great surgeon” then transforms into a “tattooist” (and later a taxidermist) whose hand commands the “needle journeying in its groove”, the two lips of the speaker. This image infers an invasive penetration, like rape, given the phallic sharp shape of the needle which infiltrates the body. He is silencing her; he represents both the oppressor of silence as well as silence itself. He invades her body first through the mouth, imposing and enforcing his will onto her natural state of being, and transforms it into a representation of what he (or society) believes a woman should aspire to be: a voiceless servant. He “tattoo[s] over and over the same blue grievance” which are “[t]he snakes, the babies, the tits” onto “mermaids

⁴⁵ The “worm” imagery is present in similar male-female disputes in Plath’s poems as representative of a struggle of the lowly. For example, in ‘Daddy’, where “The black telephone’s off at the root, / The voices just can’t worm through”; in ‘The Fearful’ it also presents silencing or perhaps discretion where “This man makes a pseudonym/ And crawls behind it like a worm” and an effacing lack of identity “The mask increases, eats the worm, / Stripes for mouth and eyes and nose ... Worms in the glottal stops”; intimidation and choking (on the intimidation); in ‘The Surgeon at 2 a.m.’ the speaker observes her silent state: “I am so small/ In comparison to these organs! / I worm and hack in a purple wilderness”.

and two-legged dream girls”. This repetition (like the repetitive domestic chores in ‘Lesbos’) of “blue grievances” manipulates the natural state/body of women (the “mermaids and dreamgirls”) into his own idealised vision with indelible ink. This reinforces the previous taxidermist’s “needle journeying in its groove”. He administers this ink and ‘rewrites’ the deceptions “snakes”, offspring “babies” and sexuality “tits”. The surgeon (come tattooist come taxidermist) does this in silence, “he does not speak”; he neither requests nor informs the hearer, his patient, of his procedure, he merely exorcises it at will (this recalls Esther’s first ECT session where Doctor Gordon did not inform her of the procedure, after which she was traumatised and “wondered what terrible thing it was that I had done” (Plath, 1963: 138)). Yet the doctor is perhaps just as much a victim in this execution as the victim himself, he is a slave to societal standards; he merely performs what is required of him and he does not remain unsullied. He is aware that “[h]e has seen too much death” because “his hands are full of it”. The silencing is equated with “death”, the death of a voice, of autonomy. He enforces silence in silence. He is a mere stooge, a minion of the system.

The “disks” of the “lined brain” “revolve” “like the muzzles of a cannon”. The “billhook” with its intended purpose as a garden tool is “antique”, it is also a “tongue, / Indefatigable, purple”. The “tongue”, although capable of performing its intended use (“indefatigable”) is “purple” with restraint. Although it functions effectively, it is not/cannot be used. This does not detract from its capability (“And the noise it flays from the air, once it gets going”) of which “[i]t has nine tails, it is dangerous”. The “tails” could be a homonym for ‘tales’, the many story/truth or versions of the same story/truth the tongue is able to tell (for example, as a homonym in ‘Zoo Keeper’s Wife’ the speaker’s “belly is a silk stocking/ Where the heads and tails of my sisters decompose”).

Because it is relentless “once it gets going”, the tongue has rather “been put by”, close enough to reach yet still unused. It is displayed like the hunted “fox heads, the otter heads, the heads of dear rabbits” like a trophy deer in a sitting room. It is displayed to all as a sign of defeat; a glorified conquering. It is “[h]ung up in the library with the engravings of Rangoon”⁴⁶, in the “library” where history is recorded and learning (this history) usually takes place. As such, the tongue is one memorabilia among many, its placement exhibits and reinforces the power and sovereignty of the enemy. It could be with sarcasm that the woman speaker states it is a “marvellous object” due to the irony of the “things it has pierced in its time”. This image of the

⁴⁶ Rangoon refers to paintings of strife and military defeat and colonialism, a collective battle.

animal heads put on show recalls Lenny's apartment in *TBJ*, where his display of hunting defeats "[g]reat white bearskins lay about underfoot, and the only furniture was a lot of low beds covered with Indian rugs. Instead of pictures hung on the walls, he had antlers and buffalo horns and a stuffed rabbit head. Lenny jutted a thumb at the meek little grey muzzle and rabbit ears" (Plath, 1963: 13). Lenny Shepherd too, was a hunter of sorts, predatory in his attempt to court Doreen.

In the sixth stanza the speaker discusses facial markers of the mouth, tongue, and eyes; the mouth and tongue point to what is said/not said and the eyes for what is seen/not seen. These are also markers of identity, the voice and eyes of an individual are unique. The "eyes" could be a homonym for 'I's', the many individuals who have experienced such a defeat, or the many times the speaker has experienced the defeat herself, or even the many eyes that have seen take place. Eyes also infer surveillance, the eyes of the previous victims that watch and peer from their display on the walls. The eyes are "[m]irrors [that] can kill and talk, they are terrible rooms", eyes reflect in their assimilation, they store their experiences in their "rooms", the memory, because what is seen cannot be unseen. This memory replays, like the "black disks" "over and over" again in one's mind "[i]n which a torture goes on [and] one can only watch" (one has no autonomy in this torturous replay); traumatic experience, once endured or observed, cannot be removed from the mind, it replays in the eyes and one sees the rest of one's life through this vision/perception. The memories as mirrors "can kill and talk", they are not silenced in their replaying in the individual's mind. This can age a person in its ceaseless torment as "[t]he face that lived in this mirror is the face of a dead man"; the reflection has aged due to the severity of difficult experiences.

In the last stanza the eyes are "white and shy" with "death rays folded like flags". These flags could be flags of triumph and colonialism (like Rangoon's theme), or conversely (and most likely) flags of surrender and defeat. In its defeat, the whole country, possibly a metaphor for an entire sex (civilisation), is "no longer heard of" as the country's history is effaced. Yet the poem ends on a note of hope where the flags depict "obstinate independency/ Insolvent among the mountains", thus the silencing will possibly be challenged as a sprig of hope, a reminder present in nature "among the mountains". The flag image is similar to Esther's near-rape cleansing ritual in *TBJ* where she used her remaining willpower and independence to strip her clothes and purge them into the winds, "I grasped the bundle I carried and pulled at a pale tail. A strapless elasticized slip which, in the course of wear, had lost its elasticity, slumped into my hand. I waved it, like a flag of truce, once, twice. . . The breeze caught it, and I let go" (Plath,

1963: 107). The flags signal a present defeat but the “obstinate independency”, like Esther’s attempt to purge herself of her own near defeat, signals hope. In *TBJ* as is in this poem, the speaker/narrator is almost silenced yet attempts to cope with her silencing with whatever means are accessible to her.

In this poem, although spoken on the part of the silenced/victimised, silence is portrayed as an individual but also collective experience. It is likened in its intimacy and trauma to the disastrous effects of a war on the psyche, where the private experience (although not discussed) is actually public in its regularity among women. Men are also effaced by this, although they are the ones who reinforce such oppression; they too are coerced into a system they find cruel. Identity is shaped and distorted by disputes and violence, yet the senses are nonetheless adaptable and in this there is a small promise or hope for the future.

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‘Lesbos’- 18 October 1962

Written three weeks after ‘The Courage of Shutting up’, ‘Lesbos’⁴⁷ was inspired by an American couple that visited Plath and Hughes at Cornwell (Stevenson, 1989: 266). Holbrook (1976: 184) views the poem as a “memory of a lesbian affair, associated with the appearance of a bloody moon”. The speaker(s) seem to be competing, scornful women who satirise their situation and various roles as a woman. ‘Lesbos’ depicts violence within the home, more specifically the kitchen, although inferences are made to hospitals, prisons, asylums and grocery stores (as well as the film industry/media). This shows how the private relations and occurrences within the household infiltrate all areas of life. The many references to disease/mental illness (“ulcers”, “TB”; “pathological liar”, “schizophrenic”, “kleptomaniac”) and possible side-effects or treatment (“sleeping pill”, “crap and puke and cry”, “doped”) reinforce the idea of a rife and contagious sickness in society. It is satirical because it debunks and disillusiones the societal idealisation of marriage and children as the widely held idyllic idea of marriage and happily ever after. The vulgarity and distastefulness of the situations presented, such as arguments, impotence, sickness and disharmony, are realistic because they are largely

⁴⁷ Other poems written around the time of ‘Lesbos’ (18 October 1962) show Plath’s preoccupation with domesticity, children and familial servitude at cost to woman’s identity. For example, in ‘The Jailer’ (17 October 1962) the speaker states “My night sweats grease his breakfast plate”; in ‘Stopped Dead’ (19 October 1962) “It’s violent. We’re here on a visit, / With a goddam baby screaming off somewhere. / There’s always a bloody baby in the air”; in ‘Amnesiac’ (21 October 1962) “Name, house, car keys, / The little toy wife - / Erased, sigh, sigh. Four babies and a cooker!”.

unavoidable in relationships. The situations are depicted in a narrative of irascible and disturbing imagery. The poem inverts normal, neutrally innocent images (“kittens”) into unsettling and perverted (“stuck her kittens”, “drown the kittens”, “sick cats”) dark ones. As such, it criticises the power that consumer culture and film/media has on the minds of women and men, although the focus is on women and the stereotypical standards of beauty and occupations they feel compelled to fulfil. The imagery and verbs emphasise this bigotry for women in particular, especially through/by the body (“wincing”; “fist”, “throat”), which is reinforced by the highly agitated, confrontational and provocative tone. It is a highly performative poem similar to the “unholy union” (Kroll, 2007: 125) of ‘The Courage of Shutting Up’.

In the first stanza the setting and mood is established through “Viciousness in the kitchen!” although it is similar to a concentration camp or testing lab where the “potatoes hiss” and the “fluorescent light winc[es] on and off like a terrible “migraine”. The idyllic “Hollywood” is juxtaposed with its empty “windowless” reality (also in the following line of “Stage curtains” and “widow’s frizz”), the transparency pointing to how different the advertised and filmed version of a home and cooking therein is from reality. The “wincing” lights increase the tempo and foreshadow a kind of rising action (Such as in ‘Fever 103’ “Darling, all night/ I have been flickering on and off” to “the beads of hot metal fly”, or the ECT sessions Esther underwent in hospital in *TBJ*). The speaker then discounts her montage by stating, “And I, love, am a pathological liar”, either sarcastically or truthfully. Her condition or unhappiness appears to be assimilated⁴⁸ too by her daughter who lies “face down on the floor,/ Little unstrung puppet, kicking to disappear” who has also been diagnosed with the mental illness schizophrenia (either by the “pathological liar”, the speaker, or possibly a doctor). Here, two significant observations can be made: firstly, that mental illnesses as well as ideals are passed from mother to

⁴⁸De Beauvoir (1949: 347) relates how daughters adopt the role of housewife from their mothers from a young age which Plath addresses when she calls her child “unstrung puppet” and later predicts “She’ll cut her throat at ten if she’s mad at two”: “In addition to this hope made concrete by playing with dolls, a housewife’s life also provides the little girl with possibilities of affirming herself. A great part of housework can be accomplished by a very young child; a boy is usually exempted from it; but his sister is allowed, even asked, to sweep, dust, peel vegetables, wash a newborn, watch the stew. In particular, the older sister often participates in maternal chores; either for convenience or because of hostility and sadism, the mother unloads many of her functions onto her; she is then prematurely integrated into the universe of the serious; feeling her importance will help her assume her femininity; but she is deprived of the happy gratuitousness, the carefree childhood; a woman before her time, she understands too soon what limits this specificity imposes on a human being; she enters adolescence as an adult, which gives her story a unique character. The overburdened child can prematurely be a slave, condemned to a joyless existence. But, if no more than an effort equal to her is demanded, she experiences the pride of feeling efficient like a grown person and is delighted to feel solidarity with adults. This solidarity is possible for the child because there is not much distance between the child and the housewife”.

daughter/child who absorbs them without question and performs them themselves. Secondly, that the speaker herself cannot be trusted because she doesn't trust herself. Thirdly, she could be reflecting how wives are portrayed as histrionic and unstable or she could be echoing a label she had been given at a time, most likely by her husband. Either way children are "puppet[s]" to the system of sexism and the stigma of mental illness just as their mothers are. The speaker then tells the hearer the reason for the daughters' "red and white" "panic"/fit: her "kittens" have been "stuck outside your window/ In a sort of cement wall". This prison-like enclosure barricades the child from her kittens. "Kittens" could stand for the childlike innocence before an ego has developed, before he/she has been socialised into the morals and rules of society, in other words, the addressee has stripped the child of her innocence and she is therefore in a state of critical "red and white" unhappiness, "unstrung" and "kicking to disappear". The kittens "crap and puke and cry", the pain erupting through their bodies via the orifices of mouth, eyes anus, and the daughter cannot hear, she is not able to reconnect with the innocence of the kittens/her inner child.

The speaker seems to be the cause for the speaker's eruption. She attacks his intolerance of the girl (kittens) by accusing "you say you can't stand her", most likely because she was born (from a man who is) out of wedlock as the "bastard's girl". Yet the addressee is a woman because she has "blown" her "tubes like a bad radio". It is unclear which woman is talking when, and to whom, the voices could possibly be from the same (as mentioned also schizophrenic) woman and/or from the many facets of her identity, in other words, as spoken from the mother, wife, widow, lover and so forth that she adopts for the relevant roles given to her (remembering the lack of choice woman had). Her "blown" "tubes" could be a crude inference to promiscuity, having had many childbirths, infertility, abortion, or any other reason for a malfunctioning uterus. This deficit seems to leave the woman's reproductive organs infertile, "clear" from any "[n]oise of the new". The same "[y]ou" who "stuck her kittens out of the window" and confessed intolerance, "you say you can't stand her" has also instructed the speaker to "drown the kittens", "drown my girl".

The "orange linoleum" which the speaker mentions afterwards in a scattering of thoughts could point to the embellished covering of the floor, as well as other furniture or decorations which hide the underlying disruption and disorder in the household. The speaker states, "You say your husband is no good to you/ His Jew-Mama guards his sweet sex like a pearl" which recalls how Mrs Willard lived through and still "guarded" Buddy with her values and opinions that he repeated like a puppet. In this way Mrs Willard was taking possession of Buddy's sexual

choices because he lived by her dictations about woman's purity and the role a woman plays in a man's life (woman as the mat; man as the arrow). "You have one baby, I have two" seems to show a mother comparing her children to another, bragging that she has more and fits the standard better. The speaker then mentions what she "should" do, she "should sit on a rock of Cornwall and comb [her] hair", she "should wear tiger pants", and she "should have an affair". These little freedoms are what she would be able to do in an ideal world, she "should" essentially be able to do what she chooses, all these stigmatised taboos relating to presentation and behaviour. This is not possible, the world and social system do not allow such left wing interests and ways of living, so the speaker decides, "We should meet in another life, we should meet in air, / Me and you" where "another life" located in "air" would be and free from the restrictions of gender roles and other discriminatory restrictions in society including as homophobia and misogyny. Only in "another life" could their impulses, desires and needs be met purely.

The speaker returns from her idyllic reverie in the third stanza and observes the view and smell in the present: "Meanwhile there's a stink of fat and baby crap"; she returns to the reality of her household state. Like the housewives that Betty Friedan interviewed (1963: 18,28) who take sedatives and tranquilisers to avoid the anxiety and depression of their futile position, and suffer physical pain from what Friedan termed "the housewife's blight" or "housewife's fatigue", the speaker is "doped and thick from [her] last sleeping pill". She continues her chores and duties in a schizoid state; she needs to separate her body from her mind in order to carry on. The "stink" is also "thick" like the "smog of cooking, the smog of hell" which portrays a devilish heat and stench imaginable in hell. Using synaesthesia, the kitchen is likened visually and aurally ("smog") as well as olfactory ("stink") to hell (similar to the depiction of "tongues of hell" in 'Fever 103'). This parallelism is then complemented with another, "Our bones, our hair". The elements (nature) is ruthless because it is outside the kitchen/household, possibly representing an unattainable freedom, "The sun gives you ulcers, the wind gives you T.B.". The speaker then depicts how circumstances have stripped the hearer from her natural beauty ("Once you were beautiful") although this was, at the time, in a pretentious aesthetic area ("In New York, in Hollywood". The once addressee was "rare", she had not yet been tainted and burdened by the "kittens", the "unstrung puppet". Unburdened, the addressee pretended ("You acted, acted, acted for the thrill") and her behaviour was well-received. This also emphasises how the addressee is in a fallen state due to her choices. Yet this discrimination, stereotyping and the consequences of fixed gender roles are not limited to women only because men suffer

as well, even the “impotent husband slumps in for coffee”. The couple’s sexual practices have also diminished to the woman speaker “try[ing] to keep” her husband in simply from habit (“An old pole for the lightning”), where the “lightning” or passion in their relationship is still present yet diminished to banal etiquette. The husband that “slumps” earlier on in the poem then “lumps” the “skyfalls” “down the plastic cobbled hill”, like a “[f]logged trolley”. The “blue sparks [that] spill” and split “like quartz into a million bits” could refer to the earlier “old pole for the lightning”, the (electric) charge in the couple’s relationship which diminishes again into a “million bits”. The susurrant echoes the earlier hissing of the potatoes; a dragging, venomous sound which accompanies the erosion.

The fourth stanza appears to be a brief reprieve from the described entrapment of domestic life. The speaker exclaims, “O jewel! O valuable!” and recalls a previous experience where the moon “[d]ragged its blood bag, sick/ Animal/ Up over the harbour lights”. The natural moon, juxtaposed with the manmade setting of the household, is as foreign and parlous as the “sun” and “wind” mentioned earlier. The moon’s “normal” state is “[h]ard and apart and white”. The moon, in ‘Lesbos’, alienates the speaker even though she attempts to connect with it by picking up handfuls of the susurrant “scale-sheen” reflection of the moon “on the sand”, the speaker was “loving it [the handfuls of sand]”. The speaker attempted to mould the reflections “like dough, a mulatto body” in an attempt to connect with an outsider with which she identifies (mulattos are neither purely white nor black; they are heathen and therefore do not fit into a strict discrete division).

The fifth stanza is climactic. The speaker has reached her threshold, she states, “Now I am silent, hate/ Up to my neck, / Thick, thick. I do not speak”. Similar to the pernicious “black disks” and charged “artillery” in ‘The Courage of Shutting Up’, the silence paralyses and consumes the speaker. It is “[t]hick, thick” like the “smog of cooking, the smog of hell”, the silence and hate consumes the speaker. She repeats anaphorically, in the present continuous tense (possibly to reinforce the frequency of domestic disputes), “I am packing the hard potatoes like good clothes, / I am packing the babies, I am packing the sick cats” which charts the narrative of the poem from the “potatoes” in the first line, then the “babies” then “sick cats”. The “packing”, moving objects from one place to another, like the vigour of household chores, allows the speaker to mediate/displace her anger through her body but also gives her purpose and autonomy. The irony is that “[t]he housewife regains independence in her work, in caring for the children: she draws a limited but concrete experience from it” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 752), she has been acculturated to demonstrating her power only through that which she has learnt

(through her mother): chores. In her attempt to retreat from the violence of the domestic situation she ironically enacts the methods she has internalised from it to create distance from it. The simple simile used where the speaker packs the ('hissing') "potatoes like good clothes" infers attachment through socialisation. Here, the speaker has become acculturated to cooking and baking and these activities have formed part of her identity, wearing it "like good clothes". The addressee then becomes a "vase of acid". 'Acid' is mentioned twice in 'Lesbos', first in connection with "baths"; second with a vase. To replace this line concerning acid in the poem with 'water' ("The [water] baths", "O vase of [water]"), it is clear that water, like the elements and nature of the "sun" and "moon" previously mentioned, is also inimical.

The natural elements hurt the speaker. The addressee is a "vase of acid" because he/she is full of "love" and he/she "knows" who she/he "hates". The strength of love is balanced and/or emphasised by the oppositional extreme of its counterpart, "hate". The loved and hated individual is "hugging his ball and chain down by the gate"; he too is chained and restricted although he is also predatory and occludes the entrance and exit "[t]hat opens to the sea". The sea is also inimical because it is restricting, it "drives in, white and black, / Then spews it back"; it incarcerates the couple from freedom. The speaker observes that the hearer spends her days catering for her husband and this servility empties her, ("Every day you fill him with soul-stuff, like a pitcher. / You are so exhausted"). The "soul-stuff" she fills her husband with is at cost to her own soul. She serves merely to hold the "soul-stuff" (as a "pitcher" does), not use it herself. By her design, like that of a pitcher, she is designated to fill others up, to supply and provide for everyone but herself. Due to their servile habits ("Your voice my ear-ring"), this sacrifice echoes the many women Friedan (1963: 18, 17) interviewed who confessed the feelings of emptiness and being non-existent, which was not voiced in the 1950s and 1960s although it was shared by countless women in America. The voice is a "flapping and sucking, blood-loving bat" (like the bat and other nocturnal animals in 'Elm' and 'The Moon and the Yew Tree'), a draining, blood depleting curse for all women who (must) simply accept such uncontested norms and carry on ("This is that. That is that"). The voice of exhaustion is a "[s]ad hag" who generalises that "[e]very woman's a whore" and immediately admits her limitations ("I can't communicate"). To compare the first and last line of this stanza ("Now I am silent with hate", "I can't communicate"), it is apparent that silence is a 1950s predicament that isolated women from one another; they suffered from a common condition in silence.

In the third last stanza the speaker notes, "I see your cute décor/ Close on you like the fist of a baby". It would seem she is addressing the appearance of a house of which the garnishing outer

cover implodes, the “fist of the baby” could allude to Jung’s warning that the un-lived parts of the psyche should not be ignored because they will inevitably arise from the unconscious. This “fist” is likened to anemone (this image of a parasitic and highly mobile sea creature recalls the predatory and venomous jellyfish in ‘Medusa’) from which the speaker is “still raw”.

The speaker then contradicts herself, which reinforces her desire to leave as well as her inability to do so from “I am packing” to “I say I may be back/ You know what lies are for”. This reiterates the earlier confession of “I, love, am a pathological liar”, which again undercuts the credibility of this venomous dialogue. The speaker ends by stating, “Even in your Zen heaven we shan’t meet”, which also contradicts the earlier statement of “We should meet in another life, we should meet in air, / Me and you”. The Zen reference as opposed to a Christian or Jewish heaven, for example, highlights Plath’s eclecticism (see Kroll 2001: 216,278) as she was (unconventionally) familiar with other religions.

Plath highlights two main problems for woman within the umbrella of identity. She depicts stereotypes as incongruent to the abundance of emotions and potentialities that lie in the body and mind of woman; she demonstrates the need and dangerous schizoid consequences of failing to access and release such capacities. The overall idea is she infers, through the depiction of a heinous environment and separated soul, how woman cannot reach ‘attainment of self’ in current society, given the cultural restrictions (especially those of American 1950s).

For example, the imagery in ‘Lesbos’ of the “[c]oy paper strips for doors / Stage curtains, a widow’s frizz”, “polished lozenges of orange linoleum” and “cute decor” refers to the overt deceptive allure of the lifestyle of the housewife. Yet, when the speaker begins her monologue it is evident that the speech is a long resisted catharsis/outburst of not only her frustrations and defeats, but it is also spoken on behalf of other women (who cannot or will not speak for themselves). This recalls Plath’s contemporary, Anne Sexton’s (Middlebrook, 1991: 35, emphasis added) statement of how idyllic marriage appears from the periphery when she remarks, “I was trying my damndest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted of me. But one can’t build *little white picket fences* to keep the nightmares out. The surfaces cracked...”. At this time, Friedan (1963: 64,68) wrote “American women no longer who they are. They are sorely in need of a new image to help them find their identity” and “Culture doesn’t allow women to grow and fulfil their potentials as human beings”. Therefore, ‘Lesbos’, like ‘The Courage of Shutting Up’, depicts this illusion as a symptom of a larger cultural problem because it is reactive, aggressive and expositional.

Due to the vulgarity and extremity of emotional response, it challenges ideological assumptions and can also be seen as an appeal to women to speak out and to speak to one another⁴⁹.

The tone, atmosphere and mood of 'Lesbos' underscore the 'problem with no name' that "burst like a boil" (Friedan, 1963: 19). The setting and thought process reinforce this as the speaker seems frantic and coerced into insanity. This analysis shows how Plath draws attention ironically to the different roles of woman through the stereotypes held of them. She histrionically satirises and exacerbates the stereotypes attached to housewives by depicting the "sad hag", "whore" and "pathological liar" in order to demonstrate the destructive beliefs held about women as the 'Eternal Feminine'. This perversity can be seen as rebellion, where:

Rebellion is even more violent in the frequent cases when the mother has lost her prestige. She appears as the one who waits, endures, complains, cries, and makes scenes: and in daily reality this thankless role does not lead to any apotheosis; victim, she is scorned; shrew, she is detested; her destiny appears to be the prototype of bland repetition: with her, life only repeats itself stupidly without going anywhere; blocked in her housewifely role, she stops the expansion of her existence, she is obstacle and negation. (de Beauvoir, 1949: 367).

This effacement is either a static stereotype or, conversely, a generalisation. Either categorisation eschews woman's individuality. De Beauvoir (1949: 758) states, "But what they [women] suffer from the most is being swallowed up in generality: a wife, mother, housewife, or one woman among millions of others".

Lastly, because Plath's work prefigures and questions gender roles and restricting ideology, it can be seen as oracular. That Plath felt such restrictions all the more severely towards the end of her life is also indicated in her increasing interest in religion.

3.4 Wife and marriage

"I am afraid that ... marriage ... might make me "lose myself in him," as I said before, and thereby lose the need to write as I would lose the need to escape. Very simple." (Plath, 2000: 100)

⁴⁹ It could also be seen as an appeal to women to get educated. Harking back to the time period, Friedan (1963: 22) states education is the "source of unhappiness" in connection with the suffragettes' initiation for the right to vote. Other multifaceted manifestations of this that infiltrated the education include Friedan's observations that 7/10 American women married before the age of 24; when they did study, women were offered subjects such as 'Marriage and Family', 'Mate selection', 'Adjustment to Marriage' and 'Education for family living' (146-147), as opposed to any other real disciplines; many women pursued a 'Ph.T' – Putting Husbands Through degree (14). Friedan points out, as is so striking in Plath's compulsion towards individuation and identity, as well as her descriptions of effacement and emptiness, that this standard "stunts actualisation" (1963: 269).

The above is a diary admission from a younger Plath. Indeed, from a young age Plath was aware of both her need for and the consequences that marriage would have on her identity as a woman and, more importantly, on the poet she desired to be. Yet, in choosing to marry a writer she unconsciously/consciously in turn made the decision to bind herself to her work. Marriage and wifehood only became overtly topical in the poems within Plath's *oeuvre* towards the end of her career as a poet, triggered mostly by her suspicions about Hughes' infidelity. Above all, the explicitly marriage poems, which surfaced towards the end of her career, are markedly retributive and assertive. They attempt to place the female speaker in a position of power and agency, to perform typically masculine traits. This agency is reinforced by the change in her poems' deliverance towards the end of her career; the late poems were written to be performed and spoken out loud, the oracular and performative intention can also be seen as typically masculine.

To briefly give some background on Plath and Hughes' marriage, they married on 16th June 1956. They were married for 6 years and separated a few months before Plath's death (significantly, Aurelia Plath joined them on their honeymoon; she and Warren were the only people informed of their marriage before the ceremony). Frieda was born 4 years after their marriage, thus husband and wife bonded alone for 4 years sans children. As with the other occurrences in her life Plath used the negative and disillusioning aspects of marriage as a creative impetus for her late poems. Kroll (2007: 51, emphasis added) observes that:

When her marriage collapsed, the sacrificing and submission it had incurred no doubt seemed betrayed, but more importantly aspects of the role she had accepted seemed in retrospect a self-betrayal, a false self. This theme, which is the subject-matter of the most powerful poems of her most *prolific period* ('Lady Lazarus', 'Stings', and 'Purdah'...).

The theme of finding a true self by exposing the false self is a quest in the feud between husband/male speaker and wife/female speaker in the late poems. The attempt to expose and deconstruct the false self follows Jung's 'attainment of self'. To become aware of one's shadow is to unearth the archetype, bring it to consciousness and integrate it in the psyche. To recap on the shadow: the aspects detested and admired in another are a direct reflection of those within oneself. As such, the fundamental goal to marry (as well as bear children) is implicit within the narrative of *TBJ*⁵⁰ as well. The reader is aware that Esther will inevitably succumb to the

⁵⁰ Esther states "...but I knew that's what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard's mother did from morning till night..." (Plath, 1963: 80), which is reinforced by the earlier discussed kitchen mat metaphor.

normative role of the 1950s woman (Aurelia Plath). Esther rebukes woman's acceptance of her submissive and sacrificial role in marriage. She despises this outcome. This is seen in Esther's view of the behaviour and choices of the (anti)role models of Mrs Willard and Mrs Greenwood, which she inadvertently and inevitably follows. Thus, Kroll's identification of the false self within the marriage poems can also be seen as an indication of the shadow surfacing.

To illustrate this further within the mother-daughter dyad, Kroll (2007: 232) states how Aurelia was concerned with Plath's submission to her husband⁵¹ because Plath "put her husband's career ahead of her own". Ironically, this reflects how similar Plath and Aurelia's attitude and behaviour towards their spouses are, within the context of marriage. Aurelia sees behaviour in Plath that she herself performed/failed to perform. If we examine Aurelia's perspective of her identity and role within her marriage she asserts, "I was totally imbued with the desire to be a good wife and mother" (Plath, 1975: 10). In a letter to her mother, Plath's own became curiously similar: "The baby's feedings and keeping the house clean, cooking, and taking care of Ted's voluminous mail, plus my own, have driven me so I care only for carving out hours where I can start on my own writing" (Plath, 1975: 384). Both women confide their worry and dislike of each other's similar treatment of themselves within their marriage. Their own shadows are a direct reflection of the other's.

During a tumultuous time in her marriage Plath transcribed 'Marriage as a Psychological Relationship', an essay Jung wrote (Kroll, 2007: 77-80). Apart from Jung's observation of the anima and animus (see pages 57-60) the significant observation he makes (which Plath herself transcribed) relevant to this discussion is the connection between the behaviour of the parent (seen in the behaviour of the child within his/her marriage) and the effect the parents' unfulfilled choices have on the child's choices in marriage. Like Freud's 'Oedipal complex', but more holistic and with less emphasis on the sexual explicitly, Jung (1954: 7834) states that marriage is a "psychological relationship", shaped by the experience of the parents:

It is the strength of the bond to the parents that unconsciously influences the choice of husband or wife, either positively or negatively ... Generally speaking, all the life the parents could have lived, but of which they thwarted themselves for artificial motives, is passed on to the children

⁵¹ Kroll (2007: 232) states "In an unpublished draft version of her commentary for *Letters Home*, Sylvia Plath's mother expressed the opinion that Plath was eager always to put her husband's career ahead of her own as long as she believed in the solidarity and mutuality of their marriage but when it became clear that her husband was alienated from her, the long-repressed frustration showed itself in a fierce and bitter anger. Plath burned many old manuscripts and concentrated her energies on her children and writing".

in substitute form. That is to say, the children are driven unconsciously in a direction that is intended to compensate for everything that was left unfulfilled in the life of the parents.

This explains how Plath indeed followed her mother's choices of marrying a professor and over-compromising, as well as her attempt to surpass these choices by writing on top of them. Aurelia wanted to write but did not; Plath did. In this sense, Plath followed and augmented Aurelia's "unfulfilled" life of becoming a writer.

However, Plath's marriage, unlike Aurelia's, was tainted and burdened by Hughes' affair with Assia Wevill and possibly a student of his (see Kendall (2001) pages 89-90 for the autobiographical element of Hughes' infidelity in her poems). Thus the poems that can be interpreted within a marital framework express adultery, infidelity and betrayal or alternatively servitude and subjugation. This impacts the way the female speaker constructs, represents and enacts her own identity. Butler (1990: vii), prompted by and building on de Beauvoir's "source of mystery and unknowability to men" (that is, the idea of the 'eternal feminine'), states, "For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency of the female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position". By exploring marital disharmony in her poems, prompted by the husband's enacted renegation of his marital vows, Plath becomes an agent and attempts to reverse the male gaze. In an act of retribution and defiance, the speaker in these poems "contests the place and authority of the masculine position". She inverts gender roles in her rhetoric by voicing the female's perspective regarding the impact such infidelity has on her view of herself. In doing so, the female speaker performs male associated traits of assertiveness, unsilencing the previously silenced woman's side of the story. She objectifies herself as well as the male hearer. Although not feminist within today's standards, this is typically second wave as it aims to locate and highlight the discrepancy between gender construction, within a cultural perspective.

As such, Plath demonstrates the challenge for women to integrate their identity in their marriage. Plath, like many other women, experienced the disillusionment of the discrepancy between the representation of marriage and the actual experience of marriage. This was not an unknown plague among women of the time. For example, Friedan (1963) describes this as "housewife's fatigue" (28), "housewife's blight" (18) and "housewife's syndrome" (18), where women identified themselves by writing "Occupation: housewife" (36) in the forms they needed to fill in at the doctor's, schools, and so forth. Friedan asserts that "American women no longer know who they are. They are sorely in need of a new image to help them find their

identity” (64), but more importantly, that “[c]ulture doesn’t allow women to grow and fulfil their potentials as human beings” (68). Explicitly for women, marriage involves an inevitable role or occupation as housewife.

To return to Butler before proceeding to a discussion on why the above is evident in the poetry analysis, as a cultural expectation the performance of identity is interconnected with gender, which is enacted through the body. Butler (1990: xiv-xv) defines this in two parts as:

In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.

In these poems especially, as we shall see, the female speaker’s identity is firstly anticipated to be (typically and culturally) submissive and passive; yet occasionally the female speaker is an agent and attempts to overthrow the implicit male speaker. The poems end on a note of separation among the female speaker’s body/mind/spirit, this is ritualistic in Plath’s poems; such an ending is inevitable. This could comment on the impossibility to alter the cultural imposition of the housewife label on women. More in these poems than any other, Plath includes a variety of subjects typically within a familial setting, such as “cousin”, “bridegroom” (‘Purdah’), “wife”, “babies”, “brother-sister” (‘Amnesiac’), “women”, “virgin”, “queen” (‘Stings’). This could also be seen as an attempt to reinforce the standards set on people in general and how no one is unaffected by the expectations of their identity as constructed through their gender performance.

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The poems selected are clustered around the October period of 1962 and they follow the same theme mentioned above by Kroll. I will discuss how the female speaker localises her identity within her relationship with the male subject. This rhetoric is presented through the use of imagery (bodily and other). Often the female speaker’s identity is localised in a reflection of the male’s.

The imagery used is often of body parts as well as animals, plants and elements. The latter either falls higher on the chain of being when equated with man and lower when equated with woman, although this is contested at the end of the poems. To look at how the body of the female is portrayed in these poems, I will demonstrate how her identity is predicated on the

male speaker firstly by highlighting the positioning of the male and female, and secondly by looking at how the female speaker enacts her identity and gender.

The female speaker's identity is constructed in conjunction with the male's. In 'Stings', the speaker described the relationship between herself and the presumably male hearer, "He and I/ Have a thousand clean cells between us", of which she states proudly, "I enamelled it". The "cells" could be either biological or jail cells, both implying a complementary inseparability. The enamel signifies a binding that is both adhesive and reflective. Likewise, in 'Purdah' the speaker is "The agonized/ Side of green Adam, I/ Smile", she states, "A concatenation of rainbows. I am his./ Even in his absence I/ Revolve in my/ Sheath of impossibles,/ Priceless and quiet". The wife is but a "side" of her husband. Although separate, woman and man are situated next to each other, physically and emotionally.

Man is reflected in the woman. This is seen in the reflective imagery; the enamel by which they are bound, in woman's fragile "wings of glass" ('Stings'), where the female speaker "gleam[s] like a mirror. / At this facet the bridegroom arrives", who is "Lord of the mirrors!" ('Purdah'). Their physical adhesion is initiated and perpetuated by the "Lord of the mirrors". Initially the male subject is in control of the pair's representation.

The female speaker is depicted as mysterious and unknown, the Other. Like the 'eternal feminine', her identity is not fully shown. She is depicted as "enigmatical", "Priceless and quiet", a "concatenation of rainbows" with a "Sheath of impossibilities" ('Purdah'). Her inactive state and her function to reflect and entice by implication associates the masculine with activity and authority. She is the "little toy wife-/ Erased, sigh sigh." ('Amnesiac'). Yet the Other enacts her gender through service. She states, "Though for years I have eaten dust/ And dried plates with my dense hair." ('Stings'), such are "old happenings" ('Amnesiac'). This repetitive act reinforces her secondary position; gender is a ritualistic act reinforced through its behaviour.

In the end, the female speaker "reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position" (Butler, 1990: vii). She becomes either a lion or a lioness, she is the hunter: assertive and predatory. Contestation can be seen as reinforced by the colour "red", used in combination with the lion imagery. As such, she initiates the "gaze" and she "contests" her current secondary position. In 'Lady Lazarus' she gains retributive justice where "Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air". In 'Stings' the "queen" who needs to "recover" has a "lion-red body". In 'Purdah' the speaker "shall unloose" "the lioness".

In the marriage poems Plath demonstrates Butler's 'gender performativity' where "[t]he view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 1990: xv). She depicts the female speaker as servile and without agency, who later gains restitution by overthrowing her male counterpart.

3.5 Profession and vocation

"My life is a discipline, a prison: I live for my own work, without which I am nothing. My writing. Nothing matters but Ted, Ted's writing & my writing." (Plath, 2000: 347)

"What horrifies me most is the idea of being useless: well-educated, brilliantly promising, and fading out into an indifferent middle-age. Instead of working at writing, I freeze in dreams, unable to take disillusion of rejections. Absurd." (Plath, 2000: 524)

Plath's poems are not explicitly about writing as a career or profession. It is more the act of writing: that she wrote, and wrote poetry, and continuously sought to integrate this vocation into her multi-faceted identity, is of importance. There is a notable link in her poems between writing and God, writing and perfectionism, writing and health and, most importantly, writing and children. That is, her poems are the metaphorical 'children'; the products of her mind. Taking these metaphorical parallels as hallmarks in her poetry of her career and profession, writing in Plath's late poems is implicit in references to God, perfectionism, health and children. In doing so, she also feminised poetry in a masculine manner by challenging existing ideologies that presupposed woman's writing in her subjects.

To begin with, Plath's 'fig tree' crossroads with regard to her career and profession, in *TBJ* Esther states "...and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor" (Plath, 1963: 73). These three figs fall under the category of writing. More than any other 'fig' or choice, as discussed previously, writing was to be a quintessential defining factor in Plath's identity from very early on in her life. It was consistently an aspiration she yearned to fulfil. Esther's ambitions, then seen as overreaching, caused her internal strife. She states:

When they asked me what I wanted to be I said I didn't know. "Oh, sure you know," the photographer said.

"She wants," said Jay Cee wittily, "to be *everything*."

I said I wanted to be a poet". (Plath, 1963: 97, emphasis added).

Also discussed previously were the limitations imposed on women, occluding their self-actualisation. This is essentially Friedan's (1963: 68) thesis: "... our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings...". Plath's 'figs' as "potentialities" aimed for roads untaken previously, neither by her mother, those surrounding her nor her culture. The all-inclusive identity she sought reached its nexus at her vocation, the hiatus of her ambitions, was indeed *terra nova*. Therefore, if we take Kroll's (2007: 12) observation that "[t]he late poems represent various attempts to resolve conflicts between true and false selves" in light of the above, the late poems represent attempts to coagulate/amalgamate these multi-facets of identity into one whole in an individual way.

Plath fulfilled this potentiality by adding unique insight unto women in the existing body of poetry. She feminised poetry in such a way as to vividly describe woman's experience of herself, her body and her identity in an active and validating manner which is uncharacteristically female. To further illustrate this, critic Al Alvarez (1960: 12) describes her method as steering "clear of feminine charm, deliciousness, gentility, supersensitivity and the act of being a poetess. She simply writes good poetry", and Rose (1991: 13) adds "The *Ariel* poems are totally without pathos, expressive only of a certain pride, which may seem the more active emotion, except that this same pride is the pride of total surrender asking (the man, inevitably) for death". While Rose's observation may appear as "surrender", a martyring of the self, to turn to this observation in light of the animus shows that the activeness and presence of the animus is in itself of greater importance than the outcome. This shows that while it may seem an anti-feminist narrative when the female protagonist is repeatedly trumped by a despotic masculine antagonist in the poems, in actuality the female recognises the masculine traits within herself because she identifies with the masculine antagonist.

To explain further, I will first recap on the function of the animus as one of the prime archetypes (in woman) and the indication of its presence as "... the animus as the function mediating between conscious and unconscious: the unconscious contains pictures which are transmitted, that is, made manifest, by the animus, either as fantasies or, unconsciously, in the patient's own

life or actions” (Jung, 1974: 197). Jung (1974: 197) states further that “The animus-projection gives rise to fantasied relations of love and hatred for "heroes" or "demons””. Thus, the male antagonist in Plath’s late poems (such as ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Daddy’ and ‘Ariel’), who Rose (1991) contends perpetuates the submissive female position, can in fact be a projection of the protagonist’s animus (in male form). Whether the antagonist is male or absent, he is conceived through the female speaker’s presence and described within her frame of reference. She is the creator of his image and his actions in the narrative of the poem, thus she is in more control than Rose’s observation implies. Plath’s increasing awareness of her animus⁵² and its presence in her late poetry indicates her identification with masculine qualities as a projection of her own. The masculine antagonist is inversely an image of Plath’s animus.

The function and presence of the animus do not only indicate an identification and enaction of the speaker’s masculine ‘yang’, according to Jung. This function is ambiguous and can be linked to the mother. Butler (1990: 83-84) asserts (in reference to Julia Kristeva’s ‘[s]ymbolic language’) that “[p]oetic language thus always indicates a return to the maternal terrain, where the maternal signifies both the libidinal dependency and the heterogeneity of drives”. In its ambiguity this poetic language allows the identification and activation of the animus equivocally through a maternal point of reference. Paradoxically, by conceiving the masculine position in connection with the feminine, Plath strengthens the feminine standpoint. This would explain why “poetic language becomes especially threatening when uttered by women” (Butler, 1990: 86), as the seemingly masculine profession becomes ambiguous due to its “libidinal dependency” and “heterogeneity of drive”.

Moreover, to add to Rose’s observation of the pattern of surrender in Plath’s late poems, a brief discussion of repetition is required. As discussed in connection with defamiliarisation and domesticity in 3.3, this repetitive defeat can be seen as reinforcing female submission. Butler (1990: 140) believes that “...the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated” where “[t]his repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation”. Given the insight of the animus as a psychological projection, on a sociological level this appears to reinforce submission. However, Butler’s second function of this repetition, in connection with the characteristic identification of gender discrepancies of second wave feminism, is more fitting in Plath’s poetry. Butler (1997: 301, emphasis added) states that

⁵² Plath declared in her journal “I am part man” (Plath, 2000: 55).

“...identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the *rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression*”. The latter perspective fits in with Plath’s innovative attempt not only to include more facets in her identity but also to speak on behalf of those that, like Friedan’s thesis, have not yet realised that their limitations are self-imposed and the need for a new general life *modus operandi* is emerging.

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As mentioned above, the presence of god, perfectionism, health and children in Plath’s late poems parallel her profession and vocation. Writing is godly in that it is a powerful, assertive act. It is also a recreational act. In *TBJ*, Esther describes Marco as a god (“Womanhaters were like gods: invulnerable and chock-full of power” (Plath 1963: 103), where a god, in her view, is characterised by omnipotence and immunity. As such, this sacred and divine ability endowed to the gods, is a capacity equated to and evident in writing.

To turn to Plath’s journals to fortify this nexus, Plath (2000: 511, emphasis added) asserts the following:

To write for itself, to do things for the joy of them. *What a gift of the gods*” (511).

“Yet I hunger after nebulous vision of success. Publication of my poetry book, my children's book. As if *the old god of love* I hunted by winning prizes in childhood had grown more mammoth and insatiable still” (518).

“...But today, fortunately, *I could write ten novels and vanquish the gods* ... and I must read...” (232).

“...: I fear oppressive and crushing forces, if I do not plot and manage and manipulate my path, joining: academic, creative & writing, and emotional & living & loving: *writing makes me a small god*: I re-create the flux and smash of the world through the small ordered word-patterns I make. I have powerful physical, intellectual and emotional forces which must have outlets, creative, or they turn to destruction and waste... (232).

Plath becomes godly when she feels she writes well, she was given the gift of writing by the gods and she requires of herself to execute the godly responsibility of writing she has been endowed with. Likewise, if this gift is not nourished and maintained, if her writing becomes weak and idle and does not meet its expectations, then the god is malevolent and threatening, in need of vanquishment.

To connect this view with the presence of god in Plath's late poetry, god is representative of both worldly and self-knowledge. To be godly is to be sacrificial and to burden oneself with others' sin ("I am too pure for you or anyone. / Your body/ Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern", 'Fever 103') and contrition ("The grasses unload their griefs on my feet as if I were God, / Prickling my ankles and murmuring of their humility", 'The Moon and the Yew Tree') even when punitive ("Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free. / The box is only temporary", 'The Arrival of the Bee Box'). God is as life-giving as he/she is demanding that the purpose of the gifts he/she endowed the speaker with be carried out, "[i]t happens. Will it go on? / My mind a rock, / No fingers to grip, no tongue, / My god the iron lung/ That loves me, pumps/ My two/ Dust bags in and out," ('Paralytic'), where the failure to use one's gifts and serve one's purpose results in a numb, apathetic state. Implicit in this example is writing, where the speaker's fingers ("No fingers to grip") are withered and weakened. The voice is silenced ("no tongue"), yet the body is still alive albeit in a death-like state. This reminder of immobility, an inability to write as a result of idleness, is reinforced in 'Mystic' as irreversible ("Once one has seen God, what is the remedy? / Once one has been seized up/ Without a part left over, / Not a toe, not a finger, and used,"). As such, God can be a weight of responsibility in the parent poems. In 'Medusa' the speaker is threatened by judgement ("You house your unnerving head—God-ball, / Lens of mercies"). In 'Daddy' this pending judgement weighs on the speaker's conscience ("Marble-heavy, a bag full of God") as much as it is a warning ("Not God but a swastika").

In the above, Butler mentions the ambiguity of poetic language as maternal. Previously discussed was the mother archetype presented through the underworld, emptiness, and of the mouth and consumption, as well as the animus. In 'Widow' God is ethereal and ever-present: "The voice of God is full of draftiness, / Promising simply the hard stars, the space/ Of immortal blankness between stars/ And no bodies, singing like arrows up to heaven". Implicit in the "draftiness" of the "voice of God" is its ambiguity, its emptiness and mystery. This "voice" exits from the mouth, the orality visualised in a masculine, phallic, animus-like manner ("like arrows up to the heaven"). Orality is a godlike characteristic; it is consumptive ("What do wheels eat, these wheels/ Fixed to their arcs like gods", 'Getting There'; "God-bit in him/ Dying to fly and be done with it?", 'Years'). One enacts god and one sees god in oneself, seen in 'Mirror' where the mirror is "not cruel, only truthful—/ The eye of a little god, four-cornered.; as a "Lens" in 'Medusa', which cannot be unseen ("Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?", 'Mystic').

Jung stated that the animus manifests in “love and hatred for "heroes" or "demons””, where both the hero and demon are addressed in succession in ‘Lady Lazarus’ (“Herr God, Herr Lucifer/ Beware/ Beware”). Both good and evil are threatening to the speaker because of their immortality, more so, because they are both projections of the speaker. To their presence she recounts her rebirth and states, “And I eat men like air”. One can infer that both God and Lucifer are representative of opposite sides of a morality spectrum as male figures. Yet to “eat” them would not merely destroy them, rather it would paradoxically combine both during their ingestion. In other words, the act of eating (as opposed to shooting or decapitating) them would not in fact remove their presence as a threat to the speaker, rather it would bestow their qualities upon the speaker, augmenting her identity to include masculine traits. The speaker in ‘Lady Lazarus’ is boastful and full of bravado. Likewise, Lucifer is a fallen angel due to his pride while God is humble. This oxymoron combines a masculine and feminine quality (pride and humility).

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Perfectionism in Plath’s poems is equated with death, duality, immortality and victory. Perfectionism is a bodily quality; it is nonpareil because it is inimitable. In *TBJ* and the poems, perfectionism is injurious when it is imposed by an (external) male yet it is ideal and even natural when the female speaker is an agent, in isolation within her own body and attains what she seeks without male assistance. Perfectionism is synonymous with sexuality and gender performance.

To progress from girl to woman in *TBJ* requires Esther to have sexual intercourse with Irwin. Yet the necessary act for this progression changes and damages Esther’s body, “I wanted to brood over my new condition in perfect peace. But the towel came away black and dripping” (Plath, 1963: 219). Yet, when she had removed all connection with Irwin post the act, she became “perfectly free” (232). In Mr. Manzi’s chemistry class, even words that had once been “perfect” were tainted when modified by man (“all the perfectly good words like gold and silver and cobalt and aluminium were shortened to ugly abbreviations with different decimal numbers after them” (33).

Plath acknowledges that she is a perfectionist (2000: 195,208). She describes perfectionism as a “black cloud which would annihilate my whole being with its demand for perfection and measure, not of what I am, but of what I am not” (620). It is also a part of her, “I cannot ignore this murderous self: it is there. I smell it and feel it, but I will not give it my name ... It's [sic]

biggest weapon is and has been the image of myself as a perfect success: in writing, teaching and living” (618), which could be viewed also as an inclination to unify the facets of herself. It is also godly and demanding “I have this demon who wants me to run away screaming if I am going to be flawed, fallible. It wants me to think I'm so good I must be perfect. Or nothing.” (619).

In ‘The Munich Mannequins’, “Perfection is terrible, [because] it cannot have children”. The flaw in the state of perfectionism is the very quality that makes it perfect: that it is inimitable and it cannot be replicated. Woman is perfect when she does not fulfil her biological function to house and reproduce children. This idea is reinforced in ‘The Fearful’ where the speaker “hates/ The thought of a baby—/ Stealer of cells, stealer of beauty—/ She would rather be dead than fat,/ Dead and perfect, like Nefertit”. Here, the veracious observation of the effects of childbirth on a woman’s body is mentioned, as the growing foetus is likened to a thief that steals the mother’s “cells” and “beauty”. Nefertit, the Egyptian queen, was celebrated for her sovereignty and beauty. The speaker admires this immortality due to its singularity.

Moreover, an untitled woman becomes perfect in death in ‘Edge’ where “The woman is perfected./ Her dead/ Body wears the smile of accomplishment”. Her lifeless body is personified as victorious and successful. Similarly, in ‘The Surgeon at 2 a.m.’, the speaker has perfected an effigy-like body, a statue, where “The body is a Roman thing./ It has shut its mouth on the stone pill of repose./ It is a statue the orderlies are wheeling off./ I have perfected it”. The bodies symbolise perfection because the state is irreversible and speaks for itself.

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In an interview with Peter Orr (1966) Plath alludes not only to the religious connection between writing and health (“like water or bread”) but also, implicit in the dialogue, are the psychic transformations that occur when writing:

ORR: But basically this thing, the writing of poetry, is something which has been a great satisfaction to you in your life, is it?

PLATH: Oh, satisfaction! I don't think I could live without it. It's like water or bread, or something absolutely essential to me. I find myself absolutely fulfilled when I have written a poem, when I'm writing one. Having written one, then you fall away very rapidly from having been a poet to becoming a sort of poet in rest, which isn't the same thing at all. But I think the actual experience of writing a poem is a magnificent one.

Writing alleviates and exacerbates the writer (“And writing is my health”, (2000: 523)). Yet, as a tool, it can also be used to transform the writer into something he/she desires. This occurs through identification. Plath states (2000: 199) “And I identify too closely with my reading, with my writing. ... I depend too desperately on getting my poems, my little glib poems, so neat, so small, accepted by the New Yorker”. Thus writing not only has a therapeutic property (as much as it has potential to damage upon rumination), it also provides an opportunity to become something or someone else. The imaginative aspect writing entails provides a platform for the writer to add and explore dimensions that he/she would not feel able to do in real life.

*

Plath was emotionally and psychically invested in her writing. As discussed, she equated her poems with her self-worth and value as an individual. Her writing is a production of her body through her mind; her poems and novels like children. She calls her children the “symbolic counterpart” to her vocation: “I have two university degrees and now will turn to my own profession and devote a year to steady apprenticeship, and to the symbolic counterpart, our children (2000: 195). Plath was pregnant with her first child at the time of writing this entry and we know from the Journals that she equated the writing of poetry with motherhood, as in ‘Stillborn’.

By interchanging children with the act of writing as a metaphor in Plath’s late poems, the effects writing has on the mind and body of a woman can be seen. The need to write, and to write from as young an age as Plath did, is to be continuously connected with the production of life.

Oftentimes when children are present in the presence of flora there is an implicit or explicit dualism. This fortifies their representation/reflection of the mother/speaker as well as their connection with her body and her body’s fruition. Children are mentioned in connection with “roses” in ‘Kindness’ (“The blood jet is poetry, / There is no stopping it. / You hand me two children, two roses”); in ‘Edge’ they are petals of a rose (“Each dead child coiled ... She has folded/ Them back into her body as petals/ Of a rose close ...”) and in ‘Among the Narcissi’ (“The flowers vivid as bandages ... The narcissi look up like children, quickly and whitely”). “Narcissi” is ambiguous and as such it evokes the threat and “maternal terrain” according to Butler. Firstly, it can refer to the narcissistic Greek God who met his death due to pride by gazing relentlessly at his reflection in a pond until he starved and turned into a flower, fixated by his mirror image. Secondly, according to *The Chambers Dictionary* (2006: 1001, original

emphasis), it could refer to the flower group “narcissi”: “a plant of the daffodil genus *Narcissus* of the Amaryllis family, especially *Narcissus poeticus* (the poet’s narcissus)” with, thirdly, a capacity to poison the body “... the connection with *narkē* numbness (with reference to this plant’s supposed effects on the body) ...”. In this poem the children who look at the speaker, “quickly and whitely”, as if anaesthetised, could be a reminder of the “poet’s narcissus”, the poet’s pride. In their eyes the speaker’s pride is reflected, like Narcissus.

This idea of the speaker’s/poet’s reflection is reiterated in the poem ‘Child’ where, like Narcissus, the addressee/child’s “clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing. ... Pool in which images/ Should be grand and classical”, like classic Greek mythology. Similar to the “eye” in ‘Child’ are the other facial features of children struggling or smirking. In ‘The Detective’, the speaker states “There was no absence of lips, there were two children, / But their bones showed, and the moon smiled”. In ‘Event’ the child’s dependence on the speaker for survival is draining and disturbing, “Intolerable vowels enter my heart. / The child in the white crib revolves and sighs, / Opens its mouth now, demanding”. In ‘Berck-Plage’ the speaker mentions her heart again where she states “I am not a smile./ These children are after something, with hooks and cries,/ And my heart too small to bandage their terrible faults”. In the last two examples, the speaker’s heart is penetrated by “hooks and cries” as well as the “[i]ntolerable vowels [that] enter” her heart. As the “heart” of the children she is physically and emotionally connected to them; she is responsible for their development and sustenance, she is their life source.

Lastly, in ‘Ariel’, the factors alluded to above (health, perfectionism, god, children) can all be identified. Describing a resurgent identity and its rebirth, ‘Ariel’ develops with increasing phonetic and homonymous “I”/“eye” sounds, that could be seen as highlighting the awakening and rebirth of the self. In chronology these are: “lioness”, “I”, “Nigger-eye”, “Thighs”, “White”, “I”, “I”, “I”, “cry”, “I”, “flies”, “drive”, “Eye”. The speaker’s health is not explicitly mentioned, yet if one takes into account that “Motion in Plath’s poetry is almost always positive” (Kendall, 2001: 181), then the pace at which the speaker moves (from “[s]tasis” to “flies”) would indicate growth.

Likewise, the speaker transforms from a vague “substanceless blue” to something pure and perfect. She rids herself of the skins and forms from her previous state, seen in the “Flakes” shed off her heels, the “[d]ead hands, dead stringencies” which she “unpeel[s]”. With this force and momentum, she activates her animus and shapes herself into “the arrow, /The dew that

flies”, much like Esther’s attempt to ski in *TBJ*. She is “at one with the drive”, where “drive” could be viewed according to Jungian libido as life energy, meaning she is connected and congruent within herself on an emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual level.

The speaker riding her horse transmutes into “God’s lioness”, a hallowed and fearsome predator. She is both animal and human; the velocity with which she moves is spirituous and holy. Like “*Godiva*”, a countess who rode her horse naked through a city to rally support against her husband, the speaker’s power can be seen in her independence as well as the sacred and pure colour of “White” (“White/ *Godiva*”).

In many of the previously discussed poems, the impact and shaping ability of the child on the speaker is marked. Oftentimes, the child’s actions shape the speaker’s actions and trajectory. In ‘*Ariel*’, “The child’s cry/ Melts in the wall”. The speaker is unaffected by the demands or distress of the child, she continues her quest irrespective and of these, and continues to gain momentum.

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By drawing connections among the ideas of symbolism, identity and the animus, Plath’s late poems can illustrate the connection between her identity and her health, perfectionism, children and god.

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To make some closing remarks on the various identities Plath sought to unify, as discussed in connection with selected poems, critics note “Her writing – both in the *Journal* and in the poetry – continually works towards constructing a polyvalent identity, one which the poet herself knew to be radically traversed, multiform and fragmented” (Yorke, 1991: 51). This “polyvalent identity” was affected by external and internal forces. Yet writing was a means to unearth both external and internal expectations and become the woman she desired, “By exposing the different faces of identity imposed on her by social and paternal expectations, her writing tries to free her to revel in everything that is woman” (Schwartz, 2011: 59). This need was an internal struggle relative to all women in the era. Butler (1990: 6) highlights the crux of this problem, still relevant today, as a limiting and psychologically disruptive standard:

there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those

whom it purports to describe and represent, women, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety.

In conclusion, Jung, de Beauvoir and Butler's concepts have been discussed here in connection with Plath's numerous conceptualisations of woman. These constructs form the various facets of woman's identity as potentialities which Plath sought to unify, like the figs of Esther's fig tree.

Chapter 4: The perpetuated self: Eye/I: “Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children” to “The woman is perfected”

4.1 Development and maternal muses

“Oh what a poet I will flay myself into.” (Plath, 2000: 381)

Your moon was full of women.
 Your moon-mother there, over your bed
 The Tyrolean moon, the guttural,
 Mourning and remaking herself
 ...
 Phases
 Of your dismal-headed
 Fairy godmother moon. Mother
 Making you dance with her magnetic eye.

Ted Hughes, ‘Night-Ride on Ariel’ (1998)

The final chapter of this study examines Plath’s overall development, maternal muses and their symbolism in the late poems as well as how Plath attempted to make a new mythology for women by highlighting her experience with her mother and her own experience. As such, I will examine the complexity of rebirth, feminine creativity, the dominant symbolism and the use of colour in Plath’s late poems.

As this study examines the late poems early, it is favourable to first look at critics’ overall view of how her late poetry aided her self-discovery. Rose (1991: 145, 4) contends “Plath’s search for an authentic selfhood ... reach[ed] its completion only with the writing of *Ariel* itself” as the “myth of self-emergence” was “achieved in her poetry, if not in her life - an allegory of selfhood”. Hughes (1982: xi-xii) observes that this was “the death of the old self in the birth of the new real one. And this is what she finally did achieve, after a long and painful labor ... *Ariel* and the associated later poetry gives us the voice of that self”. Alvarez (1972: 38) asserts similarly, “The decision to abandon teaching was the first critical step towards achieving her

identity as a poet, to vindicate her as a woman. In these last poems the process was complete: the poet and the poems became one.”

As the final phase in her literary career, interconnected with her life, the late poetry represents the apotheosis of her quest. Critics believe that Plath’s work exhibits a perpetual inquisition to discover the self. However, some believe she did not succeed in attaining the raw core she intended to penetrate. For example, Annas (1980: 324) believes “her individual quest for rebirth failed”. Similarly, Kroll (2007) observes that the poems sought to “establish authentic existence” (12) but failed to “achieve wholeness” (220); Kendall (2001) believes although Plath was “constantly remaking herself” (ii), she never “sett[ed] on a stable and monolithic identity” (51). Stevenson (1989: 238) points out the process in particular as “Her entire development as a writer had consisted of steps, in a halting progress ... toward the revelation of the elusive vision at the very core of her being”, where she “proved” her identity in the last few years of her life (xii). Overall, most believe, like Rose (1991: 8) that Plath’s poetry is an “expression of transcendent selfhood”.

Rebirth then can be seen as the prepotent theme in Plath’s life and works. This is a complex proclivity, as this disposition takes many forms in Plath’s work where the overall narrative quest for individuation, soul-searching, pilgrimage, *cherchez la femme* and the like is evident in the protagonist/speaker’s self-communion, adaption, transformation, creation and destruction. To better examine this rebirth as an inherent exigency in terms of one critic’s astute observation in line with Jungian thought, Smith (1972: 315) believes Plath’s poetry exhibits a distinctive “unitive urge”. Smith believes Plath not only sought to marry the various dimensions of her psyche; she also sought to marry her life and her work. As a “process of self-discovery, a process of becoming wholly herself” (Smith, 1972: 315), Plath’s writing “wanted, at last, unity which can spiritualize, consecrate” (337). Smith (1972: 331, emphasis added) postulates that “matrimony [of her life and work] would have settled the frantic unitive urge which is *stimulus for Plath’s art*”. However, Smith believes that Plath’s investigation into the various facets of her identity and her attempts to create it was, ironically and/or counterproductively the very act that terminated her quest:

The psychognostic plunge of Sylvia Plath’s last writing resulted in a “crossing over” As perverse daughter, spiteful wife, resentful mother, bitch, and martyr, she found herself unbearable. In an excruciating, frenzied attempt at spiritualization – and absolution, it would appear – she transformed herself into a scapegoat ... Mining the nightmare recess of her unconscious, she struck a vein in the “collective unconscious” and epitomized its uncontrol as the Armageddon of

World War II ... Eviscerated, raw ("I am red meat," she announces in "Death & Co."), she "put together entirely" her life, self-knowledge, history, misanthropic vision, her art, and death". (Smith, 1972: 338).

This "unitive urge" for rebirth is epitomic of Jungian thought where the apotheosis of this quest is most marked in Plath's late poems. Further, this creative, unitive urge, as a personal quest, is also linked to the mother in the unconscious mind. Mother is indeed an all-encompassing and enigmatic presence, a metaphysical, eternal, omnipotent and hallowed entity, within the self and surrounding the self. Meaning, mother is a presence in Plath's work that is both personal and collective, inherent and foreign. As such, mother is inseparable from rebirth/death and creation/destruction. According to Jung (1960: 121)

The creative process has a feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths – we might truly say from the realm of the Mothers. Whenever the creative force predominates, life is ruled and shaped by the unconscious rather than by the conscious will, and the ego is swept along on an underground current, becoming nothing more than a helpless observer of events. The progress of the work becomes the poet's fate and determines his psychology.

We can affirm that Plath's writing was highly creative, given the use of World War II imagery and the anachronism of Greek mythology. Yet this quote infers, on top of the creative connection with the mother, a shamanistic idea where the writer is but a tool or vessel for his/her unconscious mind (assuming that he/she has reached this level of psychic engagement as Plath did, through techniques such as 'active imagination'). This oracularity is discussed in Plath's work by Smith and Perloff. Smith (1972: 315) observes that through her process of self-discovery through "the gradual realization of the unconscious intrusions and manifestations in the compositions she wanted to be so terribly conscious", where the transition is indicated by (shamanistic) performance: "she moves towards enacting her own poetic dramas" (329). This enactment Smith (1972: 325) associates with Stanley Burnshaw's idea of "being used". By the same token Perloff classifies Plath's poetry as 'oracular'. By this she means, of the first-person speaker in the *Ariel* poems in particular, that "The oracular poem, the poem of ecstasis, is by definition one that centres on the self, a poem in which "objectivity" is impossible because the seer, unable to detach himself sufficiently to describe things outside himself, can give voice only to the emotional responses" (Perloff, 1973: 60). Furthermore, she states: "In the poetry of process, catharsis is replaced by ecstasis: the poet as "the medium of the oracle" as in a "trance-like state"; "autonomous" voices seem to speak through him, and as he is concerned to utter rather than to address, he is turned away from his listener, so to speak, in a state of rapt self-

communion” (1973: 58-59). Plath was aware of the dangers this “self-communion” could potentially incur, as seen in one of her most famous quotes: “I desire the things which will destroy me in the end” (Plath, 2000: 55). Also, Plath (2000: 545-546) was aware of the present obstructions to this quest as a woman writer attempting to penetrate the writing sphere of the male literati, and how this provided a challenge to her urgent exigency:

The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt. And you are so obsessed by your coming necessity to be independent, to face the great huge man-eating world, that you are paralyzed: your whole body and spirit revolts against having to commit yourself to a particular roll [sic], to a particular life which Might Not bring out the Best you have in you. Living takes a very different set of responses and attitudes from this academic hedony ... and you have to be able to make a real creative life for Yourself [sic], before you can expect anyone Else [sic] to provide one ready-made for you.

Plath’s poetry reflects her quest to discover the raw core of her inner self. This process is as evident in Esther’s quest for self-knowledge and existential resolve as it is in the subject’s shedding and rebirthing process in the late poems. Plath (2000: 47) wrote her goal as a writer was to “... work, work, work to build yourself into a rich, continually evolving entity!”. Similarly, Hughes (1982: xi) observes this intrinsic exigency in her life and work, “There was something about her reminiscent of what one reads of Islamic fanatic lovers of God – a craving to strip away everything from some ultimate intensity, some communion with spirit, or with reality, or simply with intensity itself”.

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Plath incorporated specific symbols and colours into her work which she scaffolded over time. Whether through conscious or unconscious effort, the repetition of these symbols reinforces their significance and indicates their residing preoccupation in her work. As such, I will briefly comment on the symbolic value and relevance of the dominant reflective symbols: the sea, mirror and moon.

These symbols share common attributes: they are feminine, duplicative, reflective and mostly passive. Due to their reflective quality the mirror, moon, sea and other water imagery can be seen as replicas of each other and of the same purpose: to see within the self and the psyche. Jung (1959: 177-178) states that “[t]he sea is the favourite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives”. The sea embodies mystery, capriciousness and beauty. It is turbulent, uncurbed and timeless. In ‘Medusa’ the sea separates and connects the mother to the daughter

(“Nevertheless, nevertheless/ You steamed to me over the sea”) where its “incoherencies” make it unpredictable, similar to the whimsicality in ‘Contusion’ where “The heart shuts, / The sea slides back”. In ‘Elm’ the sea is a restive resource within the speaker, that appears to act autonomously (“Is it the sea you hear in me, / Its dissatisfactions?”). The sea operates within the speaker again in ‘Morning Song’ as an intuitive connection between herself and her daughter (“A far sea moves in my ear. / One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral”). As the speaker gains velocity and approaches her transformation in ‘Ariel’, she describes herself as “a glitter of seas”. The sea localises the speaker to her female kin, whether it is her mother, child, or intuitive female self.

As a manmade reflective imagery (unlike the natural sea and moon symbolism), the mirror symbolises a search for self, although it is a more complex symbol. Its function is to validate the female speaker’s existence and purpose, yet it often conflicts with her already self-made identity by situating her in connection with man and/or child. This reinforces her condition as inescapable and inevitable, dependent on others to affirm her existence. For example, Freedman (1993: 153) states “The image of woman as reflector functions in several ways. As mother or woman, the mirror’s principal and imposed obligation is to reflect infant and other--that is, she must present herself as the image mirrored in man’s eyes” while de Beauvoir (1949: 217, emphasis added) similarly states woman is compared to water because “she is the *mirror* in which the male, Narcissus-like, contemplates himself”. In ‘Purdah’ the speaker is merely a reflective tool that reinforces submission of woman to man: “I gleam like a mirror. / At this facet the bridegroom arrives/ Lord of the mirrors!”. Such inescapability and passivity is equally explicit where “Mirrors can kill and talk, they are terrible rooms/ In which a torture goes on one can only watch” (‘The Courage of Shutting Up’). The “terrible rooms” suggest a confined situation as inevitable as the reflection of a mirror, the passivity a general one (suggested by “a torture” as opposed to “the torture”) where the only option is to observe and inevitably inculcate the subservience.

Freedman and de Beauvoir’s observations are indeed plausible. However, in connection with Plath’s late poetry, the other relations present in conjunction with the mirror imagery need not necessarily efface the speaker’s identity but reinforce her purpose and assist her self-discovery; to know thyself. Jung (1959: 20) states:

True, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his [sic] own face. Whoever goes to himself [sic] risks a confrontation with himself [sic]. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we

cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.

Thus, above all the mirror symbolises confrontation and introspection. Likewise, in 'Mirror', the neutrality and objectivity of the personified mirror (that "faithfully shows whatever looks into it", as Jung stated) is evident in the opening stanza where the mirror states:

I have no preconceptions
 Whatever I see I swallow immediately
 Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
 I am not cruel, only truthful-

 I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

The mirror, in its veritability, is sexless and genderless. Elsewhere mirrors serve a different function and fortify the speaker's identity and/or autonomy. In 'Childless Woman', the speaker states: "Spiderlike, I spin mirrors, / Loyal to my image," where she intends to strengthen her identity by replicating it (possibly through procreation). In 'For a Fatherless Son' the mirror reflects nothing but the speaker's face ("And I love your stupidity, / The blind mirror of it. I look in/ And find no face but my own, and you think that's funny").

The moon is by far the most prevalent symbol in Plath's work. As the supra-emblem it naturally controls the flow and ebb of the sea, water, and other reflective imagery (for example, the "pool" in 'Child' and 'Words'). The word "moon" appears 10 times in *TBJ*, in various forms ("moonlight", "moon-faced", "moonlit"); the moon was mentioned as early as 1950 in Plath's 3rd journal entry (Plath, 2000: 8). Critic Judith Kroll has written the most about the moon symbol in Plath's work. As such, she states that its "proxies" can be seen in objects like "mannequins, darning-eggs, rivals, ova" (2007: xviii). Kroll likens the shape of the moon with the female reproductive organs, "a natural affinity between the moon and the ovum" (2007: 34). Elsewhere Philips (1973: 147) observes Plath's connection in mood and 'shadow' to the moon where as "a parallel between Plath's being subject to changes as is the moon, with both hiding their dark sides" and Wagner (2000: 178) recounts that Hughes "identified the moon as

Plath's baleful muse" as "he links [in 'Edge'] its image with the women Plath looked to for guidance – and also, at some level, resented".

Kroll connects the moon symbol with its various proxies; Hughes with Plath's afflatus and role models. To further extend the moon symbol, I want to draw a connection between the moon and another proxy, the mandala. To return to Hughes' literary criticism, in his forward in *The Collected Poems* (1960: 16, emphasis added) he states of her *oeuvre*:

One can see here, too, how exclusively her writing depended on a *supercharged system of inner symbols and images*, an enclosed cosmic circus. If that could have been projected visually, the substance and patterning of these poems would have made very curious *mandalas*. As poems, they are always inspired high jinks, but frequently quite a bit more. And even at their weakest they help chart the full acceleration towards her final take-off.

A mandala is a circular diagram which represents unity and wholeness. Originally Eastern and introduced to Western thought by Carl Jung⁵³ himself, they are used for meditative purposes by reaching the psyche. Of mandalas, its functions and symbolism, Jung (1989: 196) states "The mandala represents this monad ... the mandala is the center. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the center, to individuation", "[m]andalas are birth-places, vessels of birth in the most literal sense" (1953: 75) and lastly "[b]ecause of the protection it implies, the magic circle or mandala can be a form of mother archetype" (Jung, 1982: 125). Therefore, the moon can be seen as the monarch; the supra-symbol. Given Jung's assertions, the discussed symbolic properties of the moon/mandala can be augmented to include that of individuation, rebirth and maternity. (these connections have been discussed in connection with Plath throughout this study). This, of course, has a spiritual/religious undertone⁵⁴ which interconnects it with the idea of a personal quest or pilgrimage, a "hero's journey", as Joseph Campbell titles it.

The moon is ever-present in the late poems. At times the speaker attempts to identify and unite with the moon, other times the moon is a baleful reminder of the speaker's melancholy and isolation. Nonetheless the moon is always relative to the speaker because it localises her and grounds her due to its pervasive presence, like a yardstick or anchoring device. Like the dark

⁵³ Carl Jung states how he drew a mandala each day, as a daily reflective practise, "I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing ... which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time. ... Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is: ... the Self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well is harmonious" (1962: 195-196). We can equate this inward search with Plath's daily practise towards the end of her life of waking early each morning, meditating on and writing her poetry.

⁵⁴ As discussed in Chapter 3 in connection with the act of writing, Plath's late poetry shows an increasing interest in God and religion. Likewise, Kroll (2007: 220) found Plath underwent a "religious crisis" towards the end of her life with the increasing references to God.

side of the psyche, the 'shadow', the moon embodies the qualities the speaker sees in herself but chooses to keep in the dark. Perhaps the moon is a reminder of her femininity, as the ultimate monarchical figure it represents a reminder to be true to her womanhood, for example, de Beauvoir (1949: 181) states "The moon appears as a source of fertility; it appears as 'master of women'". As 'master of women', the moon is portrayed as feral, irreformable, self-governing and allied; independent of her surroundings and loyal only to her own intrinsic nature. Ambiguous and unpredictable due to her undisciplined temperament, the moon often affects the speaker deeply.

The moon can function to remind the speaker of her overseeing presence as in 'Edge' "The moon has nothing to be sad about,/ Staring from her hood of bone"; in 'Parliament Hill fields' "The moon's crook whitens,/ Thin as the skin seaming a scar"; in 'Stings' "To scour the creaming crests/ As the moon, for its ivory powders, scours the sea."; in 'Insomniac' "A bonewhite light, like death, behind all things./ Under the eyes of the stars and the moon's rictus"; in 'Lesbos' "That night the moon/ Dragged its blood bag, sick/ Animal/ Up over the harbour lights"; in 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' "I walk among sleepers in gauze sarcophagi. / The red night lights are flat moons. They are dull with blood." and in 'The Detective' "There is only the moon, embalmed in phosphorus". Here, when the speaker's gaze turns to the moon it emboldens itself. In these examples, the moon is present in the speaker's surrounding psychic landscape and external to her being. It illuminates the speaker's scene by adding passive light for her to see her surroundings; it oversees her vision. This illumination could also infer transmission of divinity or enlightenment.

At times the moon physically interacts with the speaker in an attempt at physical connection. For example, in 'Barren Woman' "The moon lays a hand on my forehead, / Blank-faced and mum as a nurse". This physicality is further extended in personification elsewhere, where the moon is endowed with facial features (in 'The Rival' the speaker states "If the moon smiled, she would resemble you.", in 'Heavy Women' "Over each weighty stomach a face/ Floats calm as a moon or a cloud" and in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' "The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,"). The speaker can also identify the moon(-like qualities) in herself, as in 'Fever 103' she states "My head a moon". The shape of the moon is equated with the shape and function of a face, where expressions serve communicative and expressive purposes.

The moon can be depicted as relative or akin to the speaker, as in 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' "The eyes lift after it and find the moon./ The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like

Mary.” and ‘Purdah’ “The moon, my/ Indefatigable cousin”. The moon can as likely be rival to the speaker and attempt to divert her, for example, in ‘Words’ “Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.”. Inarguably feminine, the moon is seen as homologous to the speaker.

The moon can be portrayed as a usurper, a force that controls the speaker. This is seen in ‘Elm’ as “The moon, also, is merciless: she would drag me/ Cruelly, being barren”; the moon can be malicious and cruel as in ‘The Rival’ where “The moon, too, abases her subjects,” or equally indifferent and detached, “The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild.” (‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’).

In ‘Last Words’ the moon is an inspirational muse (“I do not want a plain box, I want a sarcophagus/ With tigery stripes, and a face on it/ Round as the moon, to stare up.”). The muse-quality is customary to the moon in many other metaphors. Like the governing, overseeing presence, the moon can also represent a grail and inspires the speaker to attain a higher level of being.

As representative of female biology, the regeneration and degeneration of woman’s monthly cycle is equivalent to the cyclic changes in the moon’s form and its own phases of waxing, waning, crescents and quarters. This is depicted in ‘Childless Woman’ as “The womb/ Rattles its pod, the moon/ Discharges itself from the tree with nowhere to go.”, and in ‘The Munich Mannequins’: “Unloosening their moons, month after month, to no purpose/ The blood flood is the flood of love, / The absolute sacrifice.”. In ‘Thalidomide’ incomplete and partial menstruation is viewed as grotesque due to its deficient status (“O half moon-/ ... Your dark/ Amputations crawl and appal”).

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Alongside the thematic symbols in the late poetry, there is a traceable significance in the use of colour. Stylistically, white, red and black became “the characteristic colors of her later poetry” and “served to function as mythic emblems of her state of being as much as they do in the mythologies which she drew upon” (Kroll, 2007: 4). By the same token these colours comprise three of the four colours necessary for an alchemical⁵⁵ transformation⁵⁶, according to Jung. Jung believes there are four stages of an alchemical transformation: nigredo (blackening),

⁵⁵Alchemy traditionally involves a process of transmutating/transforming something banal and unspecific into a something higher and divine (standard metals into gold). It is a refining and purifying process with spiritual significance. ‘Solve et coagula’, a motto in alchemy, means to “dissolve and coagulate”. In Plath’s work, this could be seen in her attempts to first dissect, then unify.

⁵⁶ Similarly, Hughes has compared Plath’s writing to a “process of alchemy” (1982: xi).

albedo (whitening), citrinitas (yellowing) and rubedo (reddening). These stages follow the sequence from black to red.

Plath does not use the colour yellow as frequently as the other colours. The colour arrangement in her poems may be implicit (that is, 'blood' signifies 'red') rather than explicitly stated. Nevertheless, I will briefly demonstrate that the late poetry does indeed follow the sequential alchemical transformation, according to colour, in the poem 'In Plaster' and 'Fever 103'.

'In Plaster'

In 'In Plaster' the speaker opens by stating her duplicity "I shall never get out of this! There are two of me now: /This new absolutely white person and the old yellow one". The narrative follows a kind of cyclic mitosis or reproduction, reincarnation-like process between two individuals who are interconnected. The colour sequence emphasises this circle of life, where the colour black is implicit in the "dark" shadow in which the speaker kept her Other ("And I'd been keeping her in the dark") as well as the termination she wishes upon the Other in the end ("perish" and "emptiness" imply a blackening); white is mentioned five times and implied elsewhere ("cold", "porcelain", "bones", "eyes"); yellow is the "old" person that the speaker is connected to in the beginning, also implied in the colour of the "sun"; red is implicit in "bloomed", "rose", "[b]looms" and "mouth".

The evolution is further typified by inferences of degeneration and regeneration, "And my skin itched and flaked away in soft pieces", as well as changes in form and temperature. Initially the speaker states the Other is "shaped just the way I was", as "a kind of marriage, being so close". At the end, the speaker is transforming ("I'm collecting my strength") in order to separate ("One day I shall manage without her") and discard the Other ("And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me"). Changes in temperature, as, for example, metals gathering energy to transform in structure is also inferred ("cold", "She began to warm up").

This transformation is emphasised through suggestions of divinity, spirituality and holiness ("absolutely white", "real saints", "I gave her a soul", "she may be a saint"). Similarly, the speaker alludes to mythology ("mummy-case", "pharaoh"), sepulchrous imagery ("half-corpse", "coffin", "dead body") and resurrection ("she thought she was immortal"; "superior" is mentioned twice). The last line alludes to Jung's idea of 'emptiness' as a female condition: "And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me".

'Fever 103'

'Fever 103' essentially narrates the speaker's undertaking and cathartic release to form a new identity; a rebirth. A more overt transformation than 'In Plaster', 'Fever 103' nonetheless follows the same transformation modulated through colour.

Firstly, the colour sequence is evident either explicitly or implicitly in the following: nigredo ("night", "Devlish", "hell", "greasing"); albedo ("white", "camellia", "ash"); citrinitas ("tinder", "yellow sullen smokes", "leopard", "Lemon" "lantern" "moon" "gold beaten skin"), and lastly rubedo ("tongues" (repeated twice), "Love, love" "my heat" "flush on flush").

This colour sequence is fortified through changes in form, temperature and alchemy. The narrative follows a degeneration and regeneration process. The speaker recounts the changes in her physical form, she has "aged" and later "grow[s] heavy", which suggests a maturation process where the form of the speaker evolves. The "[h]othouse" necessitates this process. The speaker is also cleaned/made new internally (as well as externally), suggested in the purge: "Water, water make me retch." Also, the speaker changes on a spiritual/sexual level. She sheds her previous form ("My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats) to become a "pure acetylene/ Virgin". The many mediocre and incomplete selves she once comprised of now shatter to form a new, improved and unified self. This is necessitated not only by the "[h]othouse" but also the titular⁵⁷ 'Fever 103' indispensable to a physical (and spiritual, sexual and so on) transformation. The speaker needed to fall ill ("ague", an illness evident through the heat of a fever) in order to rise salubrious and anew.

This process is evident also in the movement and energy of the poem. It is a positive one. There is a marked increase from thick, humid and enervated stasis to vigorous, heated movement. This is precipitated and identifiable through the heat of the burning smell ("The tinder cries./ The indelible smell/ Of a snuffed candle!"), the "smokes" (repeated twice), the "ash", the light "flickering, off, on, off on", and other recounts of heat and movement ("my heat", "my light", "Glowing and coming and going". For an entity to change form it need be given a certain amount of heat and energy in order for the particles to separate and reform in a new configuration. This configuration, unlike some other poems which imply a grotesque, malformed rebirth, is positive. The effectiveness of this rebirth is evident in its ascent, as opposed to descent, seen in the verb "[R]ise", and the recount of this ascension ("I think I am

⁵⁷ 'Fever' is mentioned 11 times in *The Collected Poems*.

going up, / I think I may rise –”). For this also implies a spiritual promotion into a greater, more hallowed being. The state into which the speaker progresses is neither tainted nor confined by gender (“Not you, nor him/ Not him, nor him”), sexuality, and indeed becomes so divine and consecrated it is indescribable to humankind⁵⁸ (“By whatever these pink things mean”). The speaker has shed that which confined her, distinctly sexual constraints (“old whore petticoats”), to become something so pure that it is genderless and inexpressible.

The speaker mentions unambiguous alchemical processes that facilitate the transformation. For example, when she states that the scarves caught in the wheel “make their [the yellow sullen smokes] own *element*” (emphasis added), when “[r]adiation turned it [the “Devlish leopard”] white”, as well as her post-transformative cleansed and purified state (“I am too pure for you or anyone”). Further suggestions of this (“hot metal [that] fly” “pure acetylene”) reinforce the alchemical nature of her transformation, being that of both body and spirit. The most important statement, however, is “My selves *dissolving*” (emphasis added), which illustrates the maxim of alchemy: ‘solve et coagula’ (“dissolve and coagulate”). The speaker’s many selves combine and dissolve to form one pristine, organic and authentic self.

The speaker describes her rebirth in terms of Christian, spiritual, and mythological terminology. She alludes to Christianity, to the trilogy (“triple”, “Three days. Three nights.”), to baby Jesus (“baby in its crib”), to the gardens of Babylon (“hanging garden in the air”), to the Eucharist practice where sinners eat the ‘body of Christ’ (“Your body/ Hurts me as the world hurts God”), to the holy rosary (“beads”) and lastly to the angels (“cherubim”). Likewise, purification is reinforced through contrasting the imagery of both extremes, from “Pure?”, “clean”, “pure” and “Virgin” to “Devlish” and “The sin, the sin” (the latter is mentioned twice in the poem). In terms of mythology, “Cerberus” possesses the “tongues of hell”. He stands at the gate to supervise those who enter. These allusions reinforce the divinity of the transformative process that the speaker undertakes.

⁵⁸ This rebirth is similar to the rebirth in Anne Sexton’s ‘Consorting With Angels’. The speaker announces in the beginning “I was tired of being a woman,/ tired of the spoons and the post,/ tired of my mouth and my breasts,/ tired of the cosmetics and the silks. There were still men who sat at my table,/ circled around the bowl I offered up”. After the setting has been described, the speaker undergoes a transformation in the last stanza “I’ve been opened and undressed./ I have no arms or legs./ I’m all one skin like a fish./ I’m no more a woman/ than Christ was a man.”. Similar to ‘Fever 103’, the speaker has undergone a transformation that liberates her, and promotes her to a new state of being, above that of humankind. Also, not included in the poetry analysis in this study due to the timing, this asexual rebirth is evident in *Three Women: A poem for Three Voices* (1962) where the speaker states: “ I shall move north. I shall move into a long blackness./ I see myself as a shadow, neither man nor woman,/ Neither a woman, happy to be like a man, nor a man/ Blunt and flat enough to feel no lack. I feel a lack.”.

Also, the poem follows an elevatory, ennobling process where the speaker begins at the “gate” which “Cerberus” attends, and ends as the speaker arrives at enlightenment, or “[p]aradise”, in other words. The cyclical quality of this process is inferred through round and repetitive imagery (“wheel”, “round the globe”) and statements (“I have been flickering, off, on, off, on”). Lastly, to briefly comment on the technical development of Plath’s work, her technique grew from the “superficial... showy acrobatics, tense-tightrope tiptoeing bravado” (Smith, 1972:325) of the *Juvenalia* and *The Colossus* to highly-developed artistry using potent and charged symbolism. Many of the late poems are structured in *terza rima*, the form Plath eventually mastered and personalised (this was anticipated in earlier poems, such as ‘The Snowman on the Moor’ (1957)).

4.2 An ‘el duende’ for all women: Adrienne Rich’s “Awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness”

They sing

Of a world more full and clear

Than can be. Sisters, your song

Bears a burden too weighty

For the whorled ear’s listening

Here, in a well-steered country,

Under a balanced ruler.

Deranging by harmony

Beyond the mundane order,

Your voices lay siege. You lodge

On the pitched reefs of nightmare,

Promising sure harbourage.

Sylvia Plath, 'Lorelei', (1958)

In the last section of this study I aim to demonstrate that Plath was a visionary who sought to highlight woman's multi-dimensional identity and overlooked virtues, to validate and assert woman's importance within herself and society. In essence, she sought to *re-do* femininity. Yorke (1991: 81) states "Plath's later work, above all, presents us with the spectacle of femininity in crisis". As such, a meta-reading of her work within a collective perspective provides a vision as well as counsel and warning for women. To illustrate this, I will draw first on Plath's contemporary, Adrienne Rich's "Awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness", where she illustrates the inequality and consequential damage of current inequality to woman's needs. Secondly, I will draw on Estés's archetypal assertions of woman's inherent nature. Further, I will discuss Plath's influence, the performativity in her late works and lastly, the mother/daughter dyad.

Plath brings attention to the prejudice and discrimination perpetuated by society and warns her of the price one pays for un-silencing the self, as well as the price woman pays for keeping silent. She raises questions to this incongruity within society and endorses the many dimensions of woman, for example, by challenging the 'eternal feminine' stereotype. Her poems demonstrate the many identities ('Barren Woman', 'Heavy Women', 'Spinster', 'Two Sisters of Persephone', for example) and roles of women to validate the overlooked/negated importance of their function within society, make the private/taboo public and qualify their unique abilities. In order to do this, she taps into and exposes the many types of women and roles they play; she narrates "multiple living through vicarious experience" (Plath, 1975: 5), a story-telling activity Aurelia Plath practised with her own mother.

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"Born green we were/ To this flawed garden."

Plath, 'Firesong', (1956)

"I borrow the stilts of an old tragedy."

Plath, 'Electra on Azaelea Plath', (1959)

"What ceremony of words can patch the havoc?"

Plath, 'Conversation Among the Ruins', (1956)

Rich's article 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1972) addresses the status quo of how women are seen and see themselves. In this article, inspired by Diane Wakowski and Plath (with whom Rich attended college, as well as Adlai Stevenson's 'commencement speech'), she states they characteristically depict two leitmotifs: man is portrayed in their art through the terror of his power "to dominate, tyrannize, choose, or reject woman" (1972: 19); yet their poetry is also propelled through the female's will to succeed, "... it is finally the woman's sense of herself – embattled, possessed – that gives the poetry its dynamic charge, its rhythms of struggle, need, will, and female energy" (1972: 19). That is, her search for her *self*. I will discuss an overview of Rich's main points in connection with Plath's feminism and the theory used in this study.

Briefly, Rich is a writer of "ovarian texts" (O'Reilly, 2004) who seeks to pioneer a "radical woman's movement" (Rich, 1972: 21) that exhorts the validity and significance of woman's status within society. Rich (1972: 20) observes throughout literary history that "every woman writer has written for men", perpetuating their subservience and secondary status as the Other. Rich also sees the texts that women write as a "drive to self-knowledge ... more than a search for identity: it is a part of a male-dominated society" (1972: 18). As such, the texts that have been written and texts that need to be written speak on behalf of those who cannot, to sensitise and familiarise society by exposing and validating a new kind of woman's literature through recreating the old "woman-wisdom" (Plath, 2000: 450). (Plath sought to become a voice for the voiceless, or a "pure vehicle of others" (Plath, 2000: 511), a "vehicle of the world, a tongue, a voice" (2000: 502)⁵⁹). Through accessing the old voices Rich, like Plath, envisions a new

⁵⁹ For the full version of her desire to speak for and on the behalf of other women, Plath wrote the following entries in her diary: "Novel. Poems. Stories. Then send about. Let no book-wishing show - work. I must move myself first, before I move others - a woman famous among women" (2000: 421) (14 Sept 1957); "If I could cut from my brain the phantom of competition, the ego-center of self-consciousness, and become a vehicle, a pure vehicle of others, the outer world. My interest in other people is too often one of comparison, not of pure intrigue with the unique otherness of identity. Here, ideally, I should forget the outer world of appearances, publishing, checks, success. And be true to an inner heart. Yet I fight against a simple-mindedness, a narcissism, a protective shell against competing, against being found wanting" (2000: 511-512) (29 Sept 1959); "I have hated men because I felt them physically necessary: hated them because they would degrade me, by their attitude: women shouldn't think, shouldn't be unfaithful (but their husbands may be), must stay home, cook wash. Many men need a woman to be like this. Only the weak ones don't, so many strong women marry a weak one, to have children, and their own way at once. If I could once see how to write a story, a novel, to get something of my feeling over, I would not despair. If writing is not an outlet, what is" (2000: 461-462) (10 Jan 1959); "Forget myself, myself. Become a vehicle of the world, a tongue, a voice. Abandon my ego." (2000: 502) (16 Sept 1969).

consciousness that will eventually achieve a standard where the validity of woman's view and experience is normal and expected in society.

Rich also alludes to the 'problem with no name' and to deconstruct the static construct of women. She labels this the "token woman" (1972: 21), which, like the 'eternal feminine', is a "divisive and ultimately destructive... myth" (21) that she believes society needs to destabilise and re-erect. This is evident in Plath's attempts to portray the many facets of woman, as "revelations of ancient truths rather than biographical data" (Kroll, 2007: 91). Also, like Friedan's feminine mystique (the 'problem with no name'), Rich (1972: 20) highlights how the male gaze and patriarchy in general have "... created problems for the woman writer: problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival". It is a general problem within consciousness that requires re-aligning.

This then requires creating a road less travelled through a travelled road, to hint at an attempt to break in a new focus, a new language; as the problem is in language itself. Like the *écriture féminine* that Hélène Cixous coined, which asserts that the problem of sexism is within language itself, among other things. In this sense, Plath attempts to create a new mythology for women, to make women the oppressors (which still reinforces a one-up position but nonetheless is an attempt to equalise the sexes). Women writers need to look through new eyes, untainted by past constructs, to create a new praxis of expression, communication. For example, de Beauvoir (1949: 174, emphasis added) "Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected, they have no religion of poetry of their own: *they still dream through the dreams of men*". Again, this is more a case of highlighting the discrepancy than remedying it, characteristic of second-wave feminism.

Rich highlights the emptiness, ambivalence, helplessness⁶⁰ and general 'unhomeliness' of the 1950s woman. Like Plath, women experienced a "split" (1972: 21), a split in identity, above all. They divided themselves among others, attenuating their potentialities. They served others with cost to themselves ("middle-class women were making careers of domestic *perfection*, working to send their husbands through professional schools, then retiring to raise large

⁶⁰ Rich (1972: 23) states "What frightened me most was the sense of drift, of being pulled along on a current which called itself my destiny, but in which I seemed to be losing touch with whoever I had been". This "sense of drift" is markedly similar to the mood/environment in Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) as well as the "hullabaloo" (Plath, 1963: 3) Esther felt in *TBJ* ("Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself ... I felt very still and very empty" (1963: 2)), where she felt she was being moved along the 1950's woman trajectory without a sense of agency, without determining her own fate as it was predetermined.

families” (1972: 22, emphasis added)), ignoring their own calling. Within the narrative of her own poetry, Rich observes the covert loneliness and emptiness. She elucidates “Life was extremely private, women were isolated from each other by the loyalties of marriage. I have a sense that women didn’t talk to each other much in the fifties – not about their secret emptiness, their frustrations” (1972: 22), where she envisions a resolution to the isolation. She attempts this by reprimanding the widely held idea that woman’s suffering is worthy of being voiced, by instilling a need to make the private public. Critic Diane Middlebrook, like Rich, has also motivated how Plath (and Sexton) are “necessary aids to understanding hysteria as resistance to social programming. Consequently, writing poetry in the manner of Plath and Sexton became a mode of consciousness-raising” (1991: 364). What has been accepted and socially programmed was in fact challenged by writers like Plath, who sought to redirect the public eye to desensitise itself to current ideologies.

Rich highlights the power of writers. They document history and present their own biases, they have the responsibility to give a voice⁶¹ to the voiceless and to be aware of the very limitations they present through their work. Rich herself looked for wisdom from the “older women poets with their peculiar keenness and *ambivalence*: Sappho, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickenson, Elinor Wylie, Edna Millay, H.D.” (1972: 21, emphasis added). In writing their stories, woman validates her experience and implicitly permits other to do so. This existential release and ease, gives meaning and purpose. Rich (1972: 21) states “Our struggles can have meaning only if they can help to change the lives of women whose gifts – and whose very being – continue to be thwarted”. Likewise, Middlebrook (1991: xxiii) observes this service as well, where “The only way that an individual’s pain gained meaning was through its communication to others”.

Among the foreground of “awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness” (Rich, 1972: 18) is the need for woman to declare and assert their sexuality, an overshadowed and underfed aspect of woman’s identity. Rich brings a significant amount of attention to the sexual facet of woman’s identity which is both stigmatised and overlooked. That is, there are glaring double standards surrounding women and men and purity. Plath attempted to empower woman’s body in her novel and in the late poems. Lant (1993: 630) observes that “Plath sought the freedom to expose the female body assertively and positively”. Progressively, Plath empowers woman

⁶¹ Middlebrook (1991: 40) identifies this voice in a woman’s movement, in the form of resistance, “Women’s poetry was to provide a very important form of resistance during the next decades, and much of the most influential was to be written by Seton and some of her Boston friends: Maxine Kumin, Denise Levertov, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich”.

throughout her poetry. Initially the naked female body is “vulnerable in that it is sexually accessible, susceptible to penetration, exploitation, rape, pregnancy” (Lant, 1993: 626); later, this “nakedness has somehow become strongly assertive” (651). I would posit that this marked development is compelled through the activation of the animus (‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Daddy’, for example). In *TBJ*, Esther’s character development is seen in the turning point when she becomes a woman (here, I would not use the negative expressions of “losing one’s virginity”, even “defloration” is negatively connotated). Rich aims to awaken in women their very human feelings of lust and desire to positively assert their sexual identity. She aims to reach this at a collective level, where women acknowledge their needs and encourage their kin to do the same⁶².

Rich attempts to posit the need in women to assert her sexuality and encourage others to do so. At this point Butler identifies sex as a “regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices” (Butler, 1993: 1). As such, highlighting this deficiency in women and collectively challenging women to change their conceptualisation and internalisation of sexual standards is achievable because the constructs through which we operate, socially and culturally are not static. This “materialization”, or performativity, is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of these norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled” (Butler, 1993: 1-2). As this process can never be complete or static, Rich, like Butler, encourages the ideal that women desensitise the stigmas they partake in and with which they label women, and create a space to positively allow others to do the same.

Above all, Rich promotes women writing to and about women, especially within the family. Elsewhere Rich (1976: 225) states:

The cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with the charges than the flow of energy between the two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other.

⁶² Elsewhere, Rich (1976: 255, emphasis added) states Women are made taboo to women—not just sexually, but as comrades, cocreators, conspirators. In breaking this taboo, we are reuniting with our *mothers*; in reuniting with our mothers, we are breaking this taboo”.

As has been highlighted in this study, the connection between mother and daughter and the foundations laid during upbringing have a great impact on how women see themselves, others and their mothers, as well as the manner in which they in turn will raise their daughters.

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On a more abstract level I wish to discuss Plath in terms of Clarissa Pinkola Estés's⁶³ idea of a wild (as in, untamed, unsocialised) woman as well as the virtue of storytelling; the need we have to make and tell our own stories as well as the value of learning from others stories. To begin with, Kroll (2007: 13) observes about Plath's work that "The central motifs of Sylvia Plath's myth are so closely parallel to motifs that occur universally in the history of myth, religion and literature (and, according to Jung, do so because they are expressive of structures that are constituents of the human psyche), that they might be identified as archetypes". Archetypes, as universal blueprints, are collectively present in all humans and include memory antecedent to the current generation. As part of the psyche, Jung, like Estés believes our psyches inherently access primitive knowledge, memories and experiences. As such, she emphasises the role folk wisdom has on woman and her identity.

Storytelling involves a cantadora⁶⁴ and an audience. Estés speaks of unsilencing the self and making the private public as well as accessing the inherent potentiality of women to create spaces which connect and relate other women. Estés (1992: 15) believes "stories are medicine". Plath's many poems concerning taboo subjects unbecoming for women to discuss can then be seen as an attempt at an 'el duende'⁶⁵. Since she "made the mysterious internal realm of the woman external" (Boshkoff-Johnson, 2014: 358), Plath aimed to normalise woman's experience of herself, her body, and make this an acceptable practice for others to do.

⁶³ Estés is a Jungian analyst who wrote the preface to Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (, used in Chapter 3 of this study in connection with the protagonist and her pilgrimage.

⁶⁴ A cantadora is a story-teller who, according to Estés, functions within society to restore woman's impaired psyche. As a "keeper of old stories" (1992: 2) a cantadora (like Plath) encourages woman to heal spiritually and psychically.

⁶⁵ 'El Duende', according to Estés, is the visceral naked force, a medium for creativity, "t is a term used in flamenco dance, and is also used to describe the ability to "think" in poetic images. Among Latina storytellers, it is understood as the ability to be filled with the spirit that is more than one's own spirit. Whether you are the artist or whether you are the watcher, listener, or reader, when El Duende is present, you see it, hear it, read it, feel it underneath the dance, the music, in the words, the art, you know it is there" (1992: 330). In connection with this study, an El Duende can be seen as a connection with the collective unconscious, through woman's consciousness.

To look at the archetypal connection with the mother, as discussed previously all roads lead back to this figure. Yet this has been largely overlooked. Jung (1974: 281) states “The unconscious is the mother of consciousness. Where there is a mother there is also a father, yet he seems to be unknown. Consciousness, in the pride of its youth, may deny its father, but it cannot deny its mother”. As the collective unconscious is shared by humankind, each has the potentiality to make use of his/her collective unconscious and the archetypes that travel through the unconscious to the conscious mind. The duality of the mother archetype has yet to be understood; Estés (1992: 33) observes that “The one who re-creates from that which has died is always a double-sided archetype. The Creative Mother is always the Death Mother and vice versa”. The multifarious form with which mother can represent herself is often abstract and as life-giving as it is death-giving.

Regarding the mother-complex, Estés (1992: 174) states that it is “... one of the core aspects of a woman’s psyche, and it is important to recognize its condition, strengthening certain aspects, arighting some, dismantling others, and beginning over again, if necessary”. As such, the mother-complex is a formidable force within a woman’s psyche which essentially hinders/alleviates the development of a woman’s identity. This warning can be seen in the last stanza of ‘Two Sisters of Persephone’ (1956), where the speaker forewarns her female audience of the impact of her choices:

Inscribed above her head, these lines:

While flowering, ladies, scant love not

Lest all your fruit

Be but this black outcrop of stones.

Given Estés’s idea of passing knowledge through collective archetypal imagery, this stanza tells a story to woman. It can be interpreted as a warning, given the previous stanzas which relate the mathematical/yang/ barren woman to the other discrete emotional/yin/fruitful woman. It could also be seen as a caution regarding the need to incorporate woman’s animus⁶⁶ into her choices, lest this suppressed facet could most possibly deprive/hamper her later development if she ignores it. Most important here, in connection with the mother-complex is the impact a mother’s choices make on the daughter’s development. To examine this, this

⁶⁶ Of the animus, Estés (1992: 62) states “This psychic figure is particularly valuable because it is invested with qualities which are traditionally bred out of women, aggression being one of the more common”.

warning is inscribed above the dead woman's head, the "wry virgin" who "Goes graveward with fresh laid waste, / Worm-husbanded, yet no woman". The speaker warns other women not to follow her example, to "scant love not", to not give all of herself to others and not to be frivolous with her love, energy and efforts. If we were to take the "fruit" imagery as representative of the speaker's progeny, in connection with the mother-complex this could be a poignant counsel of the destructive side of the mother. This could instruct women to, in turn, pass their own wisdom to their "fruit"/children to prevent them from perpetuating the same mistakes. As Persephone is the "Life/Death/Life Goddess" (Estés, 1992: 414) she would appear as the mother of all stories reminiscent of primordial knowledge and wisdom.

For Plath and other women writers, writing is a means of storytelling, a therapy or "medicine", as Estés puts it. Given Plath's status as the "Marilyn Munroe of the literati" (Rose, 1991: 26), as well as feminists' response to Plath's gravestone (see Rose, 1991: 287), Plath's is a story many women identify with. As Schwartz (2013: 344) observes, "For poets like her, storytelling is a form of identity making and maintenance ... a compilation of self-exploration, dramatizing conflicts and drawing upon highly intimate matters that of course also applied to collective issues".

As far as Storytelling, writing therapy and poetry re-enactment, regarding development are concerned, the late poems transition from mere poems to poems of performance. They were written with the intention of oral⁶⁷ delivery. In an interview with Peter Orr (Routledge, 1966) Plath confesses she cannot read her first poems out loud ("...my first book, *The Colossus*, I can't read any of the poems aloud now. I didn't write them to be read aloud"). Later, she read many poems, for example, 'Insomniac' at the Guinness Prize ceremony with Robert Graves on 31st October 1961, her play *Three Women: A poem for Three Voices* on 19th August 1962 on the BBC Third Programme, and other poems for the British Council in association with Poetry Room in the Lamont Library of Harvard on 30th October 1962. The significance in this performative aspect in connection with the pilgrimage thesis of this study is that it is indicative of a shamanistic tradition, with religious emphasis. The verbal confession (even more so than other poetry performances given that it falls under the Confessional movement) as an act that

⁶⁷ Perloff (1973: 60) categorises Plath's poetry as oracular. By this she means, of the first-person speaker in the *Ariel* poems in particular, that "The oracular poem, the poem of ecstasis, is by definition one that centres on the self, a poem in which "objectivity" is impossible because the seer, unable to detach himself sufficiently to describe things outside himself, can give voice only to the emotional responses". Furthermore, "In the poetry of process, catharsis is replaced by ecstasis: the poet as the medium of the oracle" as in a "trance-like state"; "autonomous" voices seem to speak through him, and he is concerned to utter rather than to address, he is turned away from his speaker, so to speak, in a state of rapt self-communion" (59).

permits release is transformative for the speaker and is indicative of individuation and self-communion. Delivering one's prose is a step up from simply writing it. It also functions to connect the poet with the collective, the hearers. Keeping in mind the patriarchal line of writers and listeners existing at the time such a verbal delivery by a poetess is essentially a feat that pioneers and provokes a change in standard, speaking for women by women.

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“O mother of leaves and sweetness

Who are these pietas?

The shadows of ringdoves chanting, but easing nothing.”

Sylvia Plath, ‘Winter Trees’ (1962)

“And this is the kingdom you bore me to,

Mother, mother.”

Sylvia Plath, ‘The Disquieting Muses’ (1957)

“Mother: What to do with your hate for your mother and all mother figures? What to do when you feel guilty for not doing what they say, because, after all, they have gone out of their way to help you? Where do you look for a mother-person who is wise and who can tell you what you ought to know about facts of life like babies and how to produce them?” (Plath, 2000:435)

Given the focal influence of the mother in Plath's writing, I am going to end this study with an overview of the mother-complex. Jungian analysis endows a deeper and richer, albeit more abstract, interpretation of many archetypal influences otherwise unobserved in a work. As I have shown, Plath's work is pregnant with woman/mother/daughter imagery and assertions. I have discussed the duality of mother present in symbols, equally good and evil, destructive and creative, but ever-present nonetheless. As a complex influence on woman's psyche, not completely different from her own, the mother's influence on a conscious and collective unconscious level plays a large role in how woman constructs her own identity, as well as how she sees others. In this dyad the line between where the mother ends and the daughter begins may become blurred:

The psyche pre-existent to consciousness (e.g. in the child) participates in the maternal psyche on the one hand, while on the other it reaches across the daughter psyche. We could therefore say that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter. (Jung; Kerenyi, 1949: 191).

Yet we cannot overlook the impact the mother and the mother archetype has on the psyche. Unfortunately this has often been overlooked in Western society where emphasis has been on the father, the son, and their voices. Although we are far from the time where woman's significance was to produce an heir and maintain the bloodline, the mother-daughter story is still a silent one. Schwartz (2012: 298) identifies this in Plath's work where she states, "Western culture with its patriarchal heritage has silenced the daughter and worked against her accessing her full scope of energy. For generations, a daughter was regarded as the least important member in the family and suppressed". Plath's writings give the daughter a voice and a status; she speaks on behalf of many⁶⁸. She points to an aperture revealing an imbalance within woman's identity.

Friedan (1963: 64) speaks of 'the problem with no name' and the complex relationship between mother and daughter:

In my generation, many of us knew that we did not want to be like our mothers, even when we loved them. We could not help but see their disappointment. Did we understand, or only resent the sadness, the emptiness, that made them hold too fast to us, try to live our lives, run our fathers' lives, spend their days shopping or yearning for things that never seemed to satisfy them, no matter how much money they cost? Strangely, many mothers who loved their daughters – and mine was one – did not want their daughters to grow up like them either. They knew they needed something more. But even if they urged, insisted, fought to help us educate ourselves, even if they talked with yearning of careers that were not open to them, they could not give us an image of what we could be. They could only tell us that their lives were too empty, tied to home; that children, cooking, clothes, bridge, and charities were not enough.

⁶⁸ Mary Briner highlights the need for women to create a new pathway as well as the reason why it is challenging to do so. On the topic of the mother-daughter relationship, she states "It is difficult for [modern] women to find a new point of view, for we have no archetypal feminine pattern in our culture or tradition to guide us. We have no goddesses who reveal themselves to us and differentiate women's nature. Today this shows itself in the struggle of women to free themselves from the bonds of domestication in which many feel that the role of mother and housewife keeps them imprisoned. A woman must also struggle against being imprisoned by man's anima projections onto her. Thus both the instinctual and traditional sides are in conflict with something else struggling to come to life within her" (Briner, 2010: 110).

Lastly, as reflective of the poet's psyche, the late poems show "attempts to approach, through the unconscious, higher states of being and art", which approach "absolute purity" (Shaw, 1973: 166). As further reflective of Plath's attainment of self and individuation, these poems indicate that "... gradually ... discovers the beginnings of an identity – unmistakably female – which will reach its apotheosis in Plath's final work" (Rose, 2001: 130). This creative period represents Plath's *annus mirabilis*, equivalent to Keats' 'wonderful year', where she reached 'imaginative power', the "apotheosis" of her work. Plath's vision for women is implicit in her own story which documents the many facets and potentialities within a woman's identity.

Conclusion

To end this study, I will reflect on the study's analysis, aims, theoretical underpinnings, shortcomings and recommendations for future research. This study aimed to analyse critically the mother-complex in Plath's life and work within a Jungian framework. Many relevant factors were discussed under the penumbra of the mother-complex such as identity, love, rebirth, perfectionism, role models, and most of all, ambivalence. The symbolism indicative of the mother/woman was discussed with regards to seasons, writing, archetypes, *TBJ* metaphors and the body. Further, the secondary effect of shaping the consciousness of future woman through the invaluable need to express and achieve oneself through others was also discussed in connection with other woman writers, within a second-wave focus. Several of Jung's concepts as well as concepts from feminist theory were applied to elucidate the archetypes and symbolism in Plath's work.

In terms of psychoanalytical theory, Jung's concepts of the mother-complex and the mother as the "origin of disturbance" (Jung, 1982: 129) were discussed. Other concepts, such as the persona, shadow, types of mother-complexes, animus, rebirth, alchemical transformation, symbolism, archetypes, personal and collective unconscious, synchronicity, wise old (wo)man archetype, 'active imagination', feminine creativity, colour, regression and progression, libido and the mandala and how they congeal the mother-complex were discussed. When combined, these concepts provided a holistic and congruent framework to examine the mother/woman in Plath's life and work as well as the "psychic osmosis" (Plath, 1975: 32) between herself and Aurelia. The Jungian theory used was fortified by using the tenets of like-minded Jungian writers, Campbell, Estés, and Briner.

Applying John Bowlby's ambivalent attachment theory provides a foundation for the understanding of the nascence of the mother-daughter relationship in terms of modelling behaviour and further psychological development. In connection with this, Plath's sense of worth was inseparable from both her mother and Plath's writing (the 'Sylvia Plath effect'). Joseph Campbell's 'hero archetype' and narrative structure of the protagonist's development, specifically in terms of a sexual and psychological education in Plath's case, validate the idea of *TBJ* as a bildungsroman, a pilgrimage.

With regards to feminist theory Betty Friedan's 'problem with no name' and the symptomatic "housewife's blight" aided a depiction of the privacy, isolation and despair among women in the 1950s. Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performativity' and the repetitive behaviour

women confine themselves to, as well as how power is constructed and negotiated through bodies was discussed. De Beauvoir's concept of the 'eternal feminine', as a social construct and stereotype perpetuated by society was examined in connection with how Plath sought to rearrange and challenge the 1950s status quo. Subsequently, contemporary Adrienne Rich's "ovarian texts" and sexual identity, Susanna Kaysen and Anne Sexton's similar disposition to Plath regarding writing and mental illness as well as Estés's connection between story-telling and the collective unconscious in women was also included. The concepts of these feminists and writers, when applied to Plath, show that gender is a social and cultural construct and it can be challenged and redefined. Furthermore, Plath sought to validate woman's experience and her body, as she challenged these ideas. In doing so, she provided solace to women who have also suffered specifically as women, through miscarriages and hospitalisations and so on, which was previously taboo and negated.

The shortcomings of this study can arise from the limitation of the scope and others. Within Plath's *oeuvre* only her late poetry and novel were included in this study; a wider or varied object of study would provide a greater and more in-depth analysis by including poetry (early poems), prose, short stories and novel, for example. Had the early poems been included, a panoramic view of her technical and thematic development, as well as mythological and symbolic patterning, could be examined. The study also relies heavily on the apparent chronology of Plath's work which, as mentioned, was at many times dubiously recorded by those with rights to her publications. As such, the consequence could include a misconstrued understanding of her work especially regarding chronology. Hughes took it upon himself to group the poems in annual compositions and this was a deviation of Plath's desired placement.

Another shortcoming is the poetry selection. The famous 'bee poems' were omitted due to the past inverted focus on the father, using a Freudian framework. This can be seen as a loss given the animus present in the father-orientated poems. Also, 'Poem for a Birthday' (1959) was excluded. This poem was a major turning point as Hughes (in Rose, 1991: 41) observes it marks "where the self, shattered in 1953, suddenly finds itself whole". Plath's radio play *Three Women: A poem for Three Voices* (1962) was also not included. This is unfortunate due to the salient observations one can make on the three women speakers, their identity and symbolism and frequently discussed ambivalence, shadow, rebirth ("I find myself again. I am no shadow/ Though there is a shadow starting from my feet. I am a wife") emptiness ("Empty schoolrooms, empty churches. O so much emptiness!") and woman's body ("It is she that drags the blood-black sea around/ Month after month, with its voices of failure"). Also, given Plath's many

masks and female perspectives in the play, as in the female characters in *TBJ*, an inclusion of the abovementioned works would have been valuable. However, although the proposed selection limits applicability it also allows greater focus on the selected material within her third and final phase as a writer.

For future research Plath's short stories and prose collection in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (1952)⁶⁹ is highly applicable to Jungian theory and the mother-complex. Within this collection, short stories such as 'The Daughters of Blossom Street', 'Ocean 1212-W', 'The Shadow' and especially 'Mothers' (written in 1962) would provide new material. Also, the children's book *The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit and Other Stories* (1996) could be examined in connection with the above discussed story-telling and archetypes. As a different genre, the short stories and children's books would add more depth and insight to such a study.

I would add that Erik Erikson's theory could be applied. Erikson coined the term 'identity crisis' and developed a model for the 9 stages of (ego) psychosocial development an individual passes through within his/her lifespan (he/she needs to 'promote' each level positively and upon doing so gains a virtue as a precedence for the next level. If the individual fails to accomplish such he/she will remain stunted and unable to develop further on this trajectory until he/she succeeds the level). The 4th stage (age 6-11) of the 'industry versus inferiority' level bestows the virtue of competence and personal identity. This coincides with the central and poignant challenge of identity within Plath's work, and as such this model could prove valuable. This could add to the understanding of perfectionism and the "unitive urge" in Plath's poetry.

Given the characteristic mental illness and relationship volatility within the confessional movement, the mother-complex could be applied to other Confessional poets. The mother-complex is most explicit in Anne Sexton's relationship with her mother, Mary Gray (Sexton stated "Mother makes me sick but I love her ... Such attraction, dependence" (Middlebrook, 1991: 46-47)), Sexton had a vital relationship with her psychologist Dr Ornee, just as Plath had with Ruth Beutsher. Sexton also sought to tell stories and rewrite previous praxes, seen in her rewrite (revision) of the Grimm's stories, *Transformations* (1971). The abovementioned Jungian concepts can aptly be applied to Sexton's poems, such as 'Moon Song', 'Housewife', 'Her Kind', 'You, Doctor Martin', 'In Celebration of My Uterus', 'The Double Image', to

⁶⁹ This would be a profitable object to add to the study, as Hughes (1994: 8) wrote of *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* that it functioned as a "divining work that located and opened the blocked spring".

further illustrate the mother-complex and its effects on a daughter's psyche, identity, and construction of other women. There are many similarities between Sexton and Plath's work.

Theoretically there are many highly applicable Jungian concepts that have not yet been used in connection with Plath, and some (such as the alchemical transformation) have only been applied briefly in this study (there are many other poems that illustrate this colour sequence most poignantly). Given that rebirth is, according to Jung (1975: 116), a "purely psychic reality, which is transmitted to us only indirectly through personal statements", as a "primordial affirmation based on ... archetypes", and thematic in Plath's work, other more esoteric and highly applicable concepts include: the two types of transcendence ("transcendence of life, and that of one's own transformation" or "subjective transformation" (1975: 117, 119)); five types of rebirth (metempsychosis ("transmigration of souls"), reincarnation, resurrection, rebirth ("renovatio") and "Participation in the process of transformation" (1975: 113-115) and numerology (for example, in 'Lady Lazarus', 'Face Lift' and 'Letters in November'). Resurrection is most explicit in poems such as 'Lady Lazarus, reincarnation in 'Ariel' and rebirth in 'The Applicant'. This would prove fortuitous given the evidence that Plath's use of Jung's methods and his work provided a turning point in her writing profession, a significant postulation in this study which essentially catalysed her development and 'attainment of self'.

In conclusion, despite its shortcomings, I contend this study has succeeded in its aim to provide a thorough, holistic and logical examination of the mother-complex in Plath's work. I believe the novel Jungian framework and various applied concepts contribute a fresh and dynamic perspective of Plath's work to the existing body of knowledge.

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