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Mourning and creativity: Sylvia Plath's work

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I am divorcing daddy – Dybbuk! Dybbuk!
I have been doing it daily all my life ...

(Anne Sexton, "'Daddy!' 'Daddy!'")

O thou that sleepest, what is sleep? Sleep resembles death; oh, why not let thy work be such that after death thou mayst retain a resemblance to perfect life, rather than during life make thyself resemble the hapless dead by sleeping.

(From the manuscript of Leonardo da Vinci)

Sylvia Plath was persistently preoccupied with her father's death when she was eight years old, and her grief in losing him arose frequently: "Crying and crying with this terrible pain; it hurts, Father, it hurts, oh, Father I have never known; a father, even, they took from me" (*J*, p. 124). The traumatic loss of her father in her childhood had a great effect on Plath's subsequent development, and her father's death was possibly the most traumatic occasion in her life. She was psychologically injured by this fact. Object-relations theorist Susan Kavaler-Adler writes: "If the father fails the daughter as an adequate oedipal-stage father, or if he dies, the little girl may not be able to mourn him, to separate from him, and to internalize him as an integrated good enough object."[1] But does this hold true of Plath?

In "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," Melanie Klein (whose key concept is

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[1] Susan Kavaler-Adler, *The Compulsion to Create: A Psychoanalytic Study of Women Artists* (New York/London: Routledge, 1993, p. 73).

the "paranoid-schizoid position"[2]) claims that the work of mourning is a reliving of the early "depressive position."[3] I would like to quote Klein's account:

> My experience leads me to conclude that, while it is true that the characteristic feature of normal mourning is the individual's setting up the lost loved object inside himself, he is not doing so for the first time but, through the work of mourning, is reinstating that object as well as all his loved internal objects which he feels he has lost. He is therefore recovering what he had already attained in childhood. (*Love*, p. 362)

According to Klein's hypothesis, the loss of the present object in the external world brings with it the mourner's "unconscious phantasies" of having lost one's internal "good" objects as well. One is afflicted by the pain of the inner loss in addition to the outer loss. Every time grief arises, it "undermines the feeling of secure possession of the loved internal objects" (*Envy*, p. 77). If one reinstates the external loved object successfully, at the same time one can regain the loved internal objects. On the other hand, in mourning, one reinstates not only the actual lost objects but also one's original objects, the parental imagos, which make up one's inner world. When the actual person has died, one feels in

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[2] From Melanie Klein's point of view, in the "paranoid-schizoid position," the infant sees her/his mother (and the other people around it) through "phantasies" (Melanie Klein uses the word "phantasy" for unconscious fantasies to distinguish them from conscious fantasies and to clarify the definition of her theory) which are structured from external reality modified by the infant's own feelings. Out of the interaction between her/his feelings and her/his perception of the external and internal world, the infant creates "phantasies" in order to understand that world. For the infant, there is little distinction between "phantasies" and reality. On the basis of "introjective" and "projective" processes, the reality of the infant's internal world is structured by these "phantasies." In the "phantasies," the impulses of the infant are pre-Oedipal manifestations of the "life drive" and the "death drive." The former manifestations are often gratifying or beneficent, and produce a loving relationship with parts of the mother. The latter manifestations are often aggressive or envious, and produce a fear of annihilation.

In the first stage of the infant's life, in the "paranoid-schizoid position," the mother – first of all, her breast (called a "part-object" because the infant takes the breast for the whole of the mother at first) – needs to be split by the infant into "good" and "bad," ideal and persecuting. A "phantasy" of a loving and good breast/mother needs to be kept separate from "phantasies" of a dangerous and terrifying breast/mother which gives rise to anxiety. As a result of that, the breast/mother is experienced as a "good" object and a "bad" object in turn by the infant. At one time, the infant's aggressive and envious impulses are directed toward the "bad" breast/mother, and at another time, the infant's self-preservative impulses towards the "good" breast/mother. The infant does not recognize that the two feelings are directed to the same person. This is the stage before the infant connects these objects with the real and whole human being.

[3] The "depressive position" is another of Melanie Klein's key concepts. In the "depressive position," the "splitting" and "projection" of the infant decrease. As the infant feels that her/his ego is becoming stronger, s/he begins to recognize a whole object and relate herself/himself to this object. As the mother becomes a whole object, so the infant's ego becomes a whole ego. Conflicts inside the self are solved not by "splitting" and "projection," but by holding them within the self.

The infant begins to distinguish between what is "good" and what is "bad," and the mother turns out to be the object who can be at times good, at times bad, and who can be both loved and hated. The infant worries that her/his own destructive impulses have destroyed or will destroy the mother that s/he loves and depends on. As a result of this, the infant begins to feel loss, guilt and mourning acutely.

According to Klein, in the "paranoid-schizoid position," anxieties are related with fears of annihilation by the object. In the "depressive position," the main source of anxiety is for the object. When the infant makes contact with reality, s/he knows that s/he has destroyed the breast/mother (the external object) in "phantasy." The feelings of guilt and self-reproach arise from the sense that s/he has lost the mother through her/his own destructiveness. These feelings of guilt awaken in the infant the wish to reconstruct her in order to regain her. But at first the breast to the infant is the infant's whole world, and the infant also knows that s/he is too small and helpless to repair the damage to such a huge mother. The infant begins to discover her/his dependence on the mother. However, through the repetition of experiences of loss and "reparation," the "good" mother becomes better assimilated into the ego of the infant's self in "phantasy."

danger of losing one's original parents as well. The mourner attempts to reinstate the "good objects," and to reconstitute the parental imagos. I would like to quote another account of Klein's:

> It is by reinstating inside himself the "good" parents as well as the recently lost person, and by rebuilding his inner world, which was disintegrated and in danger, that he overcomes his grief, regains security, and achieves true harmony and peace. (*Love*, p. 368)

"The attempts to save the love object," writes Klein in "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," "to repair and restore it, attempts which in the state of depression are coupled with despair, since the ego doubts its capacity to achieve this restoration, are determining factors for all sublimations and the whole of the ego development" (*Love*, p. 270).

Borrowing Freud's insights, Klein reformulated his original idea which states that "an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss."[4] In "Mourning and Melancholia,"[5] Freud explains how the subject internalizes the lost object when the object is lost through death or absence. Freud focuses on the pathological aspects of failed mourning here, which is related to what he terms "melancholia." To counter Freud's norm, Jahan Ramazani contrasts Freud's "normal" mourning with the melancholic mourning of many modern poets and dilutes "Freud's overly rigid distinction between 'mourning' and 'melancholia' to a matter of emphases within mourning – while still allowing for the kind of 'melancholia' or 'depression' not occasioned by death."[6] Ramazani asserts that the concept of "melancholia" based on Freud's theory may help to clarify what he calls "Plath's sadomasochistic mourning" (he conflates the speakers in Plath's elegies with Plath herself). In the light of ambivalence towards the lost object, Freud's idea of "melancholia" verges on Klein's idea of "manic defence," which I shall explain later in this article. Both ideas deal with unsuccessful mourning which never ends. However, while Freud maintains that ambivalence caused by "melancholia" turns normal mourning into pathological mourning, Klein maintains that "manic defence" is not necessarily pathological.

After reading Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Sylvia Plath also applied Freud's essay's insights to her own case, not to her father but to her mother:

> An almost exact description of my feelings and reasons for suicide: a transferred murderous impulse from my mother onto myself: the "vampire" metaphor Freud uses, "draining the ego": that is exactly the feeling I have getting in the way of my writing: Mother's clutch. (*J*, p. 279)

Although Plath did not do self-analysis using Freud's idea of mourning and melancholia, she seems to have been much influenced by Freud's idea as we see from Plath's elegies.

Next, we will move to a consideration of the connection between mourning and creativity. Melanie Klein explored the basic conception of aesthetics and creativity first in her paper, "Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse" (*Love*, pp. 210-218). Klein comments on the sources of the creative impulse and the creative process in this paper, in which she describes it in relation to a destructive attack on or by persecutors in "phantasy" in the "depressive position." The creative effort is a subsequent attempt to restore the damage to external and internal objects. For Klein, creativity is regarded as a manifestation of "reparation." Further, in "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," Klein connects creativity with mourning:

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[4] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in James Strachey trans. *Standard Edition*, vol. 14 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956, p. 159).

[5] Steven Gould Axelrod discusses the relationship between Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and Plath in his book, *Sylvia Plath: The World and the Cure of Words* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990, pp. 26-27).

[6] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 29).

> We know that painful experiences of all kinds sometimes stimulate sublimations, or even bring out quite new gifts in some people, who may take to painting, writing or other productive activities under the stress of frustrations and hardships. [...] Such enrichment is in my view gained through processes similar to those steps in mourning. [...] That is to say, any pain caused by unhappy experiences, whatever their nature, has something in common with mourning. It reactivates the infantile depressive position; the encountering and overcoming of adversity of any kind entails mental work similar to mourning. (*Love*, p. 360)

Through painful experiences of all kinds which are similar to mourning, creativity is stimulated. This idea has been developed and revised by Klein's followers, among whom two of the best known theorists are Hanna Segal and Adrian Stokes, who transform Klein's insights into systematic aesthetic principles. The former's most famous paper on this theme is "A Psycho-Analytic Approach to Aesthetics." The latter's books include *Three Essays on The Painting of Our Time* and *The Invitation in Art*. Hanna Segal writes on Stokes' book:

> In *Invitation in Art* Adrian Stokes makes the, to me, very convincing point that part of the difficulty in art is that it is to satisfy both the longing for an ideal object and a self merged with it, with the need to restore a whole object realistically perceived, a separate mother not merged with the self. He suggests that the particular feeling of being drawn into and enveloped in a work of art has elements of the original pre-depressive merging with the ideal object.[7]

Developing Klein's conception, Segal explains the process through which an artist produces a work of art. In her paper "A Psycho-Analytic Approach to Aesthetics," Segal remarks that the work of art is an artist's way of reassembling the inner world, felt to have been destroyed by aggressive "phantasies" arising out of the "depressive position," and of recreating something that is felt to be a whole new world.

Segal refers to Marcel Proust as her instance of an artist who describes the creative process. According to Segal, Proust depicts how the process of mourning leads to an artist's wish to recover the lost world. The dead people represent his internal objects, and their loss reactivates the original loss of his parents. Segal comments: "Through the many volumes of his work the past is being recaptured; all his lost, destroyed and loved objects are being brought back to life: his parents, his grandmother, his beloved Albertine." Segal quotes Proust's words:

> And indeed it was not only Albertine, not only my grandmother, but many others still from whom I might well have assimilated a gesture or a word, but whom I could not even remember as distinct persons. A book is a vast graveyard where on most of the tombstones one can read no more the faded names.[8]

As a result of this, we can regard the characters of his novel as symbols of his own inner characters, and, collectively, as an image of his whole internal world. Segal points out that Proust insists that the lost past and the lost or dead object can be made into a work of art. He acknowledges his loss, mourns it and finally reinstates its object internally. And according to Segal, "on realizing the destruction of a whole world that had been his, he decides to write, to sacrifice himself to the re-creation of the dying and the dead."[9] Segal observes that Proust could fully experience "depressive" mourning:

> This gave him the possibility of insight into himself, and with it a sense of internal and external reality. Further, this reality sense enabled him to have and to maintain a relationship with other people through the medium of his art."[10]

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[7] Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London/New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991, p. 98).
[8] Hanna Segal, "A Psycho-Analytical Approach to Aesthetics," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, (1952), vol. 33, p. 198.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 199.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

In the novels of Virginia Woolf as well, as Maud Ellmann claims, "the invasive presence of the dead weighs on the living."[11] Segal also comments as follows on the case of creating a tragedy:

> In creating a tragedy I suggest the success of the artist depends on his being able fully to acknowledge and express his depressive phantasies and anxieties. In expressing them he does work similar to the work of mourning in that he internally re-creates a harmonious world which is projected into his work of art.[12]

Segal concludes that creative activity is achieved through a process of mourning which is a reliving of the "depressive position" in which one realizes that the early lost objects are damaged. This gives rise to intense feelings of loss and guilt, and attempts to restore and recreate them outside and within the self.

Subsequently, a creative work lets the reader experience the writer's depression in which s/he has lost those whom s/he loves, and the writer's joy in which s/he has re-created and reinstated her/his loved objects to her/his internal world that seems to be whole and complete.

For Sylvia Plath, the grief from the loss of her father was profound. Whenever the mourning of the lost father was revived, every loss, every grief was experienced. It seems that the mourning of her father gave her a chance to move to the "depressive position." According to Melanie Klein, the early mourning in the "depressive position" is "revived whenever grief is experienced later in life" (*Love*, p. 344). We can recognize that Plath must have felt that what had been lost in her father's death was not only the person but some parts of her own self. It left a "hole" in her inner world (*LH*, p. 289). The fact gives us some clues to why she was so absorbed in writing. Since she acknowledged the loss, in her literary texts she had struggled to reinstate her father and her internal "good" objects in her inner world. It was to fill in the "hole," to close the wounds. Writing poetry was for her like the work of mourning. "Reparation" arising from the mourning of the loss was a constituent of the creative process. Plath thought of writing poetry as reparation not only for the loss of her beloved father but for her lost past with her father. Plath writes in her journal: "I rail and rage against the taking of my father, [...]. My villanelle was to my father; and the best one. I lust for the knowing of him" (*J*, p. 129). She attempted to restore the lost loved object by writing poetry. For Plath, it was a means of reinstating the lost loved object as well as the lost internal "good" objects. Thus, writing about her father not only enabled her to make contact with and reincorporate her lost father, but also to rebuild her shattered inner world. Therefore, her internalization and reinstatement of her lost father was the source of her creativity – for her, he was "the buried male muse" (*J*, p. 222). Her father leads her on to full participation in poetic life. To capture him, to give him permanent life, she must write poetry. By virtue of her art, she could give her father an eternal life in her literary texts.

Plath experienced a traumatic loss again when she was deserted by her husband, Ted Hughes, who served as father-figure displacement – her father "risen" from his grave "to be my mate" (*J*, p. 222). As a result, after that occasion, she produced a host of poems during a short period which later are called "October Poems," which many of her most famous and important poems were included: "Daddy," "Medusa," "Lady Lazarus," and "Ariel," for example. According to her letters to her mother and brother, Plath wrote "like mad" (*LH*, p. 466) and "the release" in her energy was "enormous" (*LH*, p. 467) during that period.

We can regard Plath's father as one of her muses. In particular, for her, her father was the "sea-god muse" (*J*, p. 244). Then why did Plath connect her father with the sea? We can find one of the clues in one of the episodes in her autobiographical sketch, "Ocean 1212-W" where she writes a memoir about her early childhood: the episode in which the heroine listens to her mother's reciting of the

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[11] *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, ed. by Maud Ellmann (London/New York: Longman, 1994, p. 146).
[12] Hanna Segal, "A Psycho-Analytical Approach to Aesthetics," pp. 204-205.

poem, Matthew Arnold's "The Forsaken Merman," in which Plath's discovery of poetry's power is shown. In this poem, the merman laments because his mortal wife deserted him for the land and does not come back to the undersea world. Even though he calls for her return, she ignores him. One day, the merman goes to the land in order to search for his lost wife. At the end of the poem, the merman sings sadly:[13]

> There dwells a lov'd one,
> But cruel is she.
> She left lonely for ever
> The kings of the sea.[14]

Plath depicts her reaction to listening to her mother's recitation:[15]

> I saw the gooseflesh on my skin. I didn't know what made it. I was not cold. Had a ghost passed over? No, it was the poetry. A spark flew off Arnold and shook me, like a chill. I wanted to cry; I felt very odd. I had fallen into a new way of being happy. (*JP*, p. 118)

After this occasion, Plath began to write poems, hiding them in her mother's dinner napkin or beneath her butter plate. Arnold's poem made her both find where her lost father – for her, a husband-like figure – dwelt, and discovered the power of the poetry. This seems to be one of the reasons why Plath called the sea her "poetic heritage" (*LH*, p. 345). Through that experience, she seems to have realized that writing poetry is the process of mourning, rebuilding and internalizing "good" parts of her lost father in her self, and the means of reunion with him. For Plath, the sea is "a central metaphor for my childhood, my poems and the artist's subconscious" (*JP*, p. 222). She discovered how to transform her loss into artistic work. Since she acknowledged her loss and experienced the mourning for her father, she reinstated him internally through her art.

Moreover, at the end of "Ocean 1212-W," Plath writes:

> And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle – beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth. (*JP*, p. 124)

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[13] In "Ocean 1212-W," Plath quotes the following passage from Matthew Arnold's Forsaken Merman":

> Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
> Where the winds are all asleep;
> Where the spent lights quiver and gleam;
> Where the salt weed sways in the stream;
> Where the sea-beasts rang'd all round
> Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;
> Where the sea-snakes coil and twine
> Dry their mail and bask in the brine;
> Where great whales come sailing by,
> Sail and sail with unshut eye,
> Round the world for ever and aye.
> (*JP*, p. 118)

[14] Matthew Arnold, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott, 2nd ed. by Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979, p. 105).

[15] The curious thing about that epiphany, as Plath tells it, is that it both reflects her own situations and inverts the genders. The mother recites to her daughter a poem about a father in a watery world, who misses an absent wife. In addition to that Plath finds her lost father there, what also matters is that it is her mother's voice that transmits the poem, and that the first poems were written for the mother to read. It looks like her muse was not all the father then, at least at the start.

Plath spent her early years close by the ocean, and this childhood place was marvelous to her partly because she could enjoy time with her father. The brief statement "My father died, we moved inland" is worth noting. Her vision of a seaside childhood congealed when her father died. Her early years were cut off from her life and enclosed "like a ship in a bottle." Clearly the change was caused by her father's death. I think that that is another reason why the memory of her father's death is strongly connected with the sea. Her fascination with death had sprung from her recognition that the source of her inspiration was her father.

In this article, in addition to the above explanation of the connection between mourning and creativity, I shall demonstrate the speakers' movement from the "paranoid-schizoid position" to the "depressive position" through their mourning of their fathers, and the difficulty of doing this, seen in some of Sylvia Plath's paternal elegies. The speakers have a tendency to keep going back to the "paranoid-schizoid position" in spite of all wanting to get to the "depressive position," to the successful mourning. For the poet, this is related to a "phantasy" that the dead father is inside the Jungian "earth mother's" body: under the ground and in the water, that is to say, the sea, the river, the lake and the pond. For the speakers in Plath's elegies, this maternal matrix is where they can reunite with their fathers and dream all the time in a foetus-like state. They are embraced by the warm outstretched arms of the "earth mother" – not their real mothers'. This is the world where they feel that they can solve the problems of "good" and "bad," inside and outside, subject and object, devoid of all anxieties and stress. It is close to death, but to borrow the speaker's words in "Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond" (*CP*, pp. 134-135), "This is not death, it is something safer." We can find these images in the poems such as "All the Dead Dears," "Full Fathom Five," "Electra on the Azalea Path," "The Colossus" and "Daddy." Because of the speakers' unsuccessful mourning, they result in being obsessed with a wish of watery death in order to reunite with their dead fathers. I wish also to reflect on Plath's speakers' fascination with sexual contact with their fathers in their "phantastic" world, which seems to be the influence of Freud. The father figure appears in Plath's texts as a husband, a beekeeper, a Colossus, a drowned man, a Greek king, and a Nazi.

To analyze the feelings towards her father, Sylvia Plath herself had read some psychoanalytic books – mainly the works of Freud, Jung, and one of Jung's followers, Erich Neumann. It seems that having undergone psychoanalysis triggered Plath's interest in them as well.[16] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford claims that Plath's relationship to Freud and to psychoanalysis is also that of a daughter to a father: "She seems never to have questioned the powerfully seductive and patriarchal claims of psychoanalysis itself."[17] We can say that it is due to the profound influence of Freudian doctrine on the post-war America Plath had lived in. The concept of the "earth mother" is established by Neumann, and the Electra complex, a term used by Jung for a female version of the Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex. Plath construed the speaker's sexual obsession with the father and her hatred of the mother within the pattern of the Electra complex. Plath thought that conflicts between mothers and daughters were potentially as rivalrous and oedipally based following Freud's idea. Though the Electra complex was disavowed by Freud in his paper, "Female Sexuality," Plath seems to have misread it because of her tendency to simplify Freud's insights like most readers who did not specialize in Freud's theories in 1950s and 1960s America (see Plath's comment on her poem "Daddy" which is referred to in the latter part of this article: "Here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex").

What I am dealing with is not Sylvia Plath herself but her representations in her poems. Adopting a mythical frame of reference is generally one way for the poet to distance her work from immediate

[16] Plath had undergone intensive courses of Freudian analysis with Dr. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse.

[17] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "A Father's Prayer, A Daughter's Anger: W. B. Yeats and Sylvia Plath" in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. by Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 245).

autobiographical sources of the poetry. Plath attempts to contain raw emotion within a mythical frame of reference. It functions as a container for her meaning about her personal experiences. I think that in this way Plath achieves distance from her experience. She explores mythical themes, one of which is the story of Demeter and Persephone, the mother and the daughter, and of Persephone and Hades, the daughter and the husband/ father.[18] I intend to use this story here as a pre-text for my analysis of Plath's works on the father-daughter relationship.

The content of the story is this. Persephone is picking poppies (or a narcissus[19]) among the cornflowers. A moment after she notices the beginning of her menstruation, the infernal god, Hades (or Zeus or Dionysus, one of whom may be her own father) abducts her to the underworld to his kingdom, rapes[20] and marries her. The underworld means marriage and death both for Persephone. She reigns there as the queen of the Dead. Demeter goes to seek her daughter. Before being released and going back to her mother, Persephone is persuaded to eat pomegranate seeds which signal her allegiance to her husband. Because of that, Persephone is doomed to descend to and live in the underworld for one part of the year – winter – each year.

Like Persephone, Plathian speakers want to experience love and death as one. Persephone can spend her time above and below the earth, experience both life and death. That is to say, she is both alive and dead. She is a symbol of death and rebirth. Furthermore, according to Erich Neumann, "Kore's [Persephone's] sojourn in Hades signifies not only rape by the male [...] but fascination by the male earth aspect, that is to say, by sexuality."[21] For Plathian speakers, it seems that the word "rape" is not as appropriate as the word "ravishment." Jungian critic Marion Woodman defines the two words thus:

> Rape suggests being seized and carried off by a masculine enemy through brutal sexual assault; ravishment suggests being seized and carried off by a masculine lover through ecstasy and rapture. Rape has to do with power; ravishment has to do with love.[22]

The pomegranate also has a sexual image represented in little red caves and significant seeds. Opening the pomegranate is sometimes construed symbolically as deflowering – because of the bright red color of its flesh, the pomegranate is a symbol of love and blood, and thus life and death.[23]

The Plathian Persephone's sexual union with Hades, however, also signifies the fantastic returning to the "earth mother's" womb. So, in addition to the model of husband and wife, the union represents the model of mother and foetus. In this state, she has two identities at the same time, because she seeks both lover and mother. The father's personality is fused with the dynamic aspects of the "earth mother." Plath describes Hades's posture as dual in this way. Plathian Persephone re-experiences an early symbiotic state where she feels nourished in a mother-infant cocoon of unity. She wants not

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[18] Sylvia Plath wrote "Two Sisters of Persephone" in which, however, we cannot find the figures of Demeter and Hades.

[19] In another version of the Persephone story, Persephone plays among the flowers including a "narcissus." In the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter," this "narcissus" is specially grown for Hades by Gaia, the Earth Mother:

> From its root there grew
> a hundred blooms which had a scent so sweet that all the wide heaven above and all the earth and all the salt swelling of the sea laughed aloud.
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> (Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993, pp. 370-372]).

[20] The word "rape" is originally derived from the Latin word, rapere, which means "to seize and carry off."

[21] Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, p. 308).

[22] Marion Woodman, *Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982, p. 134).

[23] See Herder Freiburg, *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols: Symbols from Art, Archaeology, Mythology, Literature, and Religion* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1986, p. 152).

only to be carried away and loved but also to be saved, taken care of and protected by him and the "earth mother" – she wants sexual love and maternal love simultaneously. He seems to be an androgynous mother-father because of the combination with the "earth mother." We can interpret this both oedipally and pre-oedipally. In classical versions of the myth, at the end of the story, Persephone's allegiance is split between mother and husband/father. However, the Plathian Persephone's allegiance is pledged to her husband partly because of his dual role as lover and mother as a result of the combination with the "earth mother," and partly because of her Electra complex. For Plathian Persephone, the actual mother is not necessary: in her elegies, Plath seldom emphasizes the mother-daughter relationship. Her treatment of the maternal bond motif differs from that of the original versions of the myth. Plath virtually deconstructs the traditional reading of the myth. The Plathian Persephone's experience is based on a paternal point of view, not of a maternal one. Plath's choosing to make Persephone satisfied with Hades is also a significant change from original versions of the myth. Plath offers a reading of Hades as lonely. For the Plathian Persephone, his living alone in the dark underworld seems to be a dismal kind of life, and Demeter is not an example to follow but one to avoid. In Plath's case, why does her treatment of the maternal-paternal bond motif differ from that of the original versions of the myth? One of the reasons seems to be that Plath is also a Freudian daughter in post-war America. Sometimes unconsciously and sometimes consciously, Plath uses Freudian motifs such as the Electra complex motif for her work. The Freudian family romance seems to be similar to the nineteenth-century family pattern. So we can connect this pattern with what Elaine Showalter has found in the lives of women writers, including the Brontës and Virginia Woolf: What happens frequently is "identification with, and dependence upon, the father; and either loss of, or alienation from, the mother."[24]

After this general introduction to Plath's adaptation of the Persephone/ Hades/Demeter myth, I want now to explore her use of it in *The Bell Jar*. Plath uses this myth in two ways. She narrates relations between archetypes of death and rebirth as well as between the sexes.

Firstly let us consider the Persephonian death/rebirth theme in *The Bell Jar*. For Plath, the bath is where death and rebirth happen repeatedly. In the novel, there is a bathing scene. The heroine Esther Greenwood thinks: "I never feel so much myself as when I'm in a hot bath" (*BJ*, p. 21). This has a connection with the imagery of a foetus in the womb water. As Esther takes a hot bath, she feels herself "growing pure again":

> The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt, and when I stepped out at last and wrapped myself in one of the big, soft, white, hotel bath-towels I felt pure and sweet as a new baby. (*BJ*, p. 22)

The white bath-towels are like swaddling clothes.

On the other hand, the bath symbolizes a coffin as well. There has to be death before rebirth. It is a place where Esther attempts to kill herself by cutting her hand:

> When they asked some old Roman philosopher or other how he wanted to die, he said he would open his veins in a warm bath. I thought it would be easy, lying in the tub and seeing the redness flower from my wrists, flush after flush through the clear water, till I sank to sleep under a surface gaudy as poppies. (*BJ*, p. 156)

We have to notice the words, "sleep" and "poppies." Her deed is suicidal. The speaker desires a death which is like sleep. Sleep-inducing "poppies" reminds us of the story of Persephone. Poppies are what Persephone picked from among the cornflowers, when Hades carried her off.[25] And the blood symbolizes

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[24] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton University Press, 1977; London: Virago Press, 1978, p. 61).

[25] See Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam/London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974, p. 372).

the beginning of the menstruation of Persephone or her defloration by Hades. In this scene, it seems that Esther links herself to Persephone, who wants to be taken away to the underworld where her father/ lover lives. Plath's poem, "Poppies in July" (*CP*, p. 203), also narrates the Persephone story:

> Little poppies, little hell flames,
> Do you do no harm? ...
>
> And it exhausts me to watch you
> Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.
>
> A mouth just bloodied.
> Little bloody skirts! ...
>
> Where are your opiates, your nauseous capsules?
>
> If I could bleed, or sleep! –
> If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!
>
> Or your liquors seep to me, in this glass capsule,
> Dulling and stilling.

The speaker calls poppies "little hell flames" which is related to Persephone's torch. The description of the poppies as the "bloodied" mouth and "little bloody skirts" implies the speaker's bleeding genitals, that is, her menstruation or defloration.[26] The speaker wants the poppies to send her to sleep, and wants the "opiates" – extracted from the seeds of poppies – to reduce her pain or let her sleep. Poppies are also related to forgetfulness, because they grow by the river Lethe (the meaning of which is originally "forgetfulness" in Greek), one of the rivers of the Underworld. One can forget the suffering of the real world with poppies.

In another of her "poppy" poems, "Poppies in October"[27] (*CP*, p. 240), Sylvia Plath depicts the poppies thus:

> Even the sun-clouds this morning cannot manage such skirts.
> Nor the woman in the ambulance
> Whose red heart blooms through her coat so astoundingly – ...
>
> O my God, what am I
> That these late mouths should cry open
> In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers.

---

[26] Jan Montefiore's analysis of "Poppies in July" gave me a hint for my analysis:

> [The speaker's] vision of the blooms as bloodied mouths and "little bloody skirts" suggests that she is imagining a whorish lipsticked, perhaps bruised mouth, and bleeding genitals: menstruation, defloration or violent rape are evoked. (*Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing* [London/ New York: Pandora Press, 1987, p. 17])

According to Montefiore, the reading of the poem here, while seeing the poppies as alluding to a sexualized female body, reads the poem as being about violent sexual jealousy, reading the speaker's desire for the poppies" "liquor" – their colourless extract – as an intertextual reference to Iago's "Not poppy nor mandragora.... Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep/ Which thou ow'dst yesterday" (*Feminism and Poetry*, p. 17). To put this argument in biographical/psychoanalytic terms, this poem seems for Montefiore to be fantasizing a female rival in the act of sexual possession – or being possessed.

[27] October has special meaning for Sylvia Plath. It is the month of her birthday, and the month she entered the mental hospital in 1953. Besides, it is the month her father's leg was amputated because of his illness, which was a traumatic experience for Plath.

The first stanza evokes the speaker's bleeding genitals. The implication of "mouth" is same with the above poem, "Poppies in July." The speaker's bleeding genitals draw Hades's attention. The "forest of frost" represents the season of winter, and "cornflowers" Persephone's field where she picks poppies.

We can also find the Persephone story in another part in *The Bell Jar*. Before her last attempted suicide in her mother's cellar, Esther Greenwood visits her father's grave which she has never before seen. She bemoans her father's death:

> At the foot of the stone I arranged the rainy armful of azaleas[28] I had picked from a bush at the gateway of the graveyard. Then my legs folded under me, and I sat down in the sopping grass. I couldn't understand why I was crying so hard.
> Then I remembered that I had never cried for my father's death. [...]
> I laid my face to the smooth face of the marble and howled my loss into the cold salt rain. (*BJ*, p. 177)

The rain represents Esther's tears. It seems to be a symbolic form of bereavement. Melanie Klein explains tears:

> Through tears, the mourner not only expresses his feelings and thus eases tension, but, since in the unconscious they are equated with excrements, he also expels his "bad" feelings and his "bad" objects, and this adds to the relief obtained through crying. (*Love*, p. 359)

Through tears, Esther attempted to externalize her "bad" feelings and her "bad" objects, but it seems that her tears do not have the effect Klein expects them to have or, at least, that result is delayed because immediately after she visits her father's graveyard, she thinks, "I knew just how to go about it" (*BJ*, p. 177). Visiting her father's grave triggers her decision to die. The suicide attempt issues from a desire for reunion with the father. Esther goes down into her mother's cellar – "an underground chamber" where "a dim, undersea light filtered through the slits of the cellar windows" (*BJ*, p. 178). She squeezes her body into an "earth-bottomed crevice" (*BJ*, p. 179) there, and "crouched at the mouth of the darkness like a troll" and on her "knees, with bent head, crawled to the farthest wall" (*BJ*, p. 179). After she gulps down a bottle of sleeping pills, "[t]he silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. Then, at the rim of vision, it gathered itself, and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep" (*BJ*, p. 179). This scene is filled with sea imagery. This description represents Esther's process of returning to the state of a foetus that is sleeping embraced by the "earth mother" – the sea, the earth.

From the darkness into the light that "opened," Esther is "transported at enormous speed down a tunnel into the earth." Unconsciously she calls her mother: "through the thick, warm furry dark, a voice cried, "Mother!"" (*BJ*, pp. 180-181). Ironically, Esther's mother plays the role of Demeter, who brings her daughter back from the underworld. According to classical versions of the myth, Persephone refuses to cooperate with Hades in the underworld and longs for her mother. It is not unlikely that on the conscious level, Esther refuses her mother, but on the unconscious level, she longs for her.

Persephone story is also connected with "Berck-Plage" (*CP*, pp. 196-201), in which the images of the sea, the father, and the dead recur.

> A wedding-cake face in a paper frill.
> How superior he is now. ...
>
> And the bride flowers expend a freshness,
>
> And the soul is a bride
> In a still place, and the groom is red and forgetful, he is featureless.

[28] Biographically, Sylvia Plath's father's tomb is located in "Azalea Path" cemetery.

Anne Stevenson, who has written Plath's biography, analyzes the contents of this poem:

> The funeral has a sense of the bridal ("the soul is a bride") while "the coffin on its flowery cart [is] like a beautiful woman,/ A crest of breasts, eyelids and lips/ Storming the hilltop." The coffin, with its dead man and its woman of flowers (an image of Sylvia's father-love), goes down into the hole in the earth, "a naked mouth, red and awkward."[29]

The coffin goes to the underworld with the image of a wedding. The line, "a naked mouth, red and awkward" also suggests the Persephone story. Death day is both birthday and wedding day. In "Little Fugue" (*CP*, pp. 187-189) as well, "I survive the while,/ Arranging my morning./ .../ The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor." The speaker also arranges her mourning here.

Like the above poem, the theme of marriage with the father which is related to the Persephone story recurs in Sylvia Plath's literary texts. The poems whose themes are sexual reunion with the father are "Full Fathom Five," "Electra on Azalea Path," "The Beekeeper's Daughter" and "The Colossus." In some poems, the marriage is enacted and the others hint at it.

In "Full Fathom Five" (*CP*, pp. 92-93),[30] where a theme of bereavement appears, the drowned-father motif is used: the dead father is in the region beneath the water. The part of Ariel's song in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is used as the title.

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made:
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell: ...
> (l. i. 394-400)

As in "Nick and the Candlestick," the cave is made from the organic remains of "coral." "Pearls" as well as "coral" suggest death because they were once part of living organisms. I think that there is a connection between "Sea-nymphs" and river's nymphs in "Lorelei" in Sylvia Plath's mind. Both of them drag the human being under the water. This part is sung in the play, when one of the characters, Ferdinand, is convinced of his father's death. Judith Kroll comments on this aspect of the poem:

> It refers to the retelling of the speaker's life in obviously Shakespearean terms: her father, by dying, has undergone a "sea-change," becoming a sort of underworld king whose daughter, exiled from his kingdom, is condemned to life. The allusion both states that her father is dead and intimates that, like Ferdinand's father, he still lives.[31]

Full Fathom Five was another title for Plath's first published book, *The Colossus*:

> It [*Full Fathom Five*] relates more richly to my life and imagery than anything else I've dreamed up: has the background of *The Tempest*, the association of the sea, which is a central metaphor for my childhood, my poems and the artist's subconscious, of the father image – relating to my own father, the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted, to the sea-father Neptune – and the pearls and coral highly-wrought to art: pearls sea-changed

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[29] Anne Stevenson, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (London: Viking, 1989; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p. 250).

[30] According to Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath wrote "Full Fathom Five," reading one of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's books "about the submarine world" (*CP*, p. 287).

[31] Judith Kroll, *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976, pp. 54-55).

> from the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull outine. [...] I shall begin by setting myself magic objects to write on: sea-bearded bodies – and begin thus, digging into the reaches of my deep submerged head, "and it's old and old it's sad and old it's sad and weary I go back to you, my cold father, my cold mad father, my cold mad feary father..." – so Joyce says, so the river flows to the paternal source of godhead. (*J*, pp. 222-223)

Thus, this muse-god father had lived in Plath's poetry. Another possible reason for Plath's using the motif of *The Tempest* is that she wanted to reveal the enclosed world of father and daughter – the world of Prospero and Miranda – where the wife/ mother is absent.

In "Full Fathom Five", we can find the vision of the Neptune-like man in the sea. On the surface of the sea appears an enigmatic old white-haired man: "Miles long/ Extend the radial sheaves/ Of your spread hair." The hair stretches out like a net, threatening to draw the speaker near. Later we are informed that this old man is the speaker's father. The father is as "cold" as "ice-mountains": he resembles glaciers. He also resembles "whirlpools": the daughter is pulled down towards the bottom of the sea, unable to escape. He is a kind of menace, retaining power over her. As Robyn Marsack has pointed out, "old man" is a slang for both father and husband.[32] The line, "Your shelled bed I remember," has a sexual image. The speaker's wish to return to the sea expresses the idea that to reunite with her dead father would be death:

> I walk dry on your kingdom's border
> Exiled to no good.
>
> Your shelled bed I remember.
> Father, this thick air is murderous.
> I would breathe water.

There is a hidden incest wish that strangles the speaker from within as she attempts to become her father's bride and to have her sexual wish in the unconscious. We can see that the fantasy of merger with the father leads to the speaker's death. It is a death marriage with the father. Jahan Ramazani explains that the poem's final stanza suggests "that perhaps an incestuous bond has caused his death and "Exiled" her from his kingdom."[33]

Here I would like to discuss in detail Sylvia Plath's other poems with the drowned-father theme. The speaker in "All the Dead Dears" (*CP*, pp. 70-71) can see her beloved father under the surface of the pond:

> From the mercury-backed glass
> Mother, grandmother, greatgrandmother
> Reach hag hands to haul me in,
> And an image looms under the fishpond surface
> Where the daft father went down
> With orange duck-feet winnowing his hair –[34]

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[32] Robyn Marsack, *Sylvia Plath* (Backingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992, p. 38).
[33] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 268.
[34] Ilgrid Melander identifies important stanzas omitted in the final version:

> The poem was probably written as early as 1956 and was later included in the "Cambridge Manuscript." The most striking difference between the original version in "Cambridge Manuscript" and the final one in The Colossus is the omission of three stanzas: the early poem includes nine stanzas, the revision only six. [...] The fifth and sixth stanzas of this version, which were omitted in the final version, present the picture of a man, whom we recognize as the poet's father. I quote them in full:
>
> A man who used to clench
> Bees in his fist
> And out-rant the thundercrack,
> That one: not known enough: death's trench

The dead father lies looming below the surface of the water, where the mother, grandmother and great-grandmother would drag her below the watery surface after him. She ends this poem with the image of the speaker going "to lie/ Deadlocked with them, taking root as cradles rock." In this image, she slumbers in her mother's, grandmother's and great-grandmother's embrace, descending deeply under the water. In "A Life" (*CP*, pp. 149-150) as well, which depicts an egg-shaped glass paperweight and a woman who lives "like a foetus in a bottle," the motif of the drowned man figure appears: "Age and terror, like nurses, attend her,/ And a drowned man, complaining of the great cold,/ Crawls up out of the sea."

In another of Plath's drowned-father-theme poems, "Electra on the Azalea Path" (*CP*, pp. 116-117), the speaker's dominant obsession with the Electra complex and her yearning for her father is shown. Plath got the inspiration from this poem from a visit to her father's grave in the Azalea Path cemetery. In this poem, too, the dead father is in the underworld. The speaker is filled with feelings of loss, shocked by the sight of her father's grave. Her father's death is superimposed on the Greek Electra myth to reveal the daughter's relation to her father and mother. This poem depicts her father as Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and the leader of the Greek forces in the Trojan War; her mother as Clytemnestra; and herself as Electra. During the war, the ship cannot set sail because of a persistent calm. To obtain a favorable wind, Agamemnon obliges himself to obey an oracle and sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. He sacrifices her to the perceived demands of the patriarchy. The daughter is treated as her father's possession. When Agamemnon returns, his wife, Clytemnestra, murders him in the bath in revenge for his killing Iphigenia. Later, Electra and her brother Orestes plot the assassination of their mother as their own revenge. Electra's plan to kill her mother and participation in matricide is motivated not only by revenge but also by an intense hatred of her mother. What is shown here is not closeness to the mother but a shift of allegiance to the father. The resurrection of the father is accomplished by his daughter. She supports the paternal law and upholds her father's sacrifice of Iphigenia to the demands of the patriarchy. Electra virtually chooses paternal identification, even though she is abandoned to her madness.[35]

Julia Kristeva writes about the issue of woman's place in patriarchal culture in her book, *About Chinese Women*: "That the father is made a symbolic power – that is, that he is dead, and thus elevated to the rank of a Name – is what gives meaning to her [Electra's] life, which will henceforth be an eternal vendetta."[36]

Luce Irigaray's idea that western culture is founded not on patricide, but on matricide is based

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Digs him into my quick:
At each move I confront his ready ghost

Glaring sunflower-eyed
From the glade of hives,
Antlered by a bramble-hat,
Berry-juice purpling his thumbs: o I'd
Run time aground before I met
His match. Luck's hard which falls to love

Such long gone darlings...
(*The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A Study of Themes* [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1972, pp. 35-36])

The allusion to the father's relation to bees implies that the dead man beneath the surface of the water is assumed to be Plath's own father. These manuscript stanzas are clearly the description of her father shown in biographical details.

[35] One of Sylvia Plath's last poems, "Daddy," is also concerned with patriarchal authority. But the speaker is full of anti-patriarchal anger.

[36] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p. 152).

on this Electra myth.[37] Irigaray focuses on the patriarchal phase of the myth, which is built over the sacrifice of the mother and her daughters.

The poem re-presents the story of Electra:

> *The day your slack sail drank my sister's breath*
> *The flat sea purpled like that evil cloth*
> *My mother unrolled at your last homecoming.*
> I borrow the stilts of an old tragedy.
> The truth is, one late October, at my birth-cry
> A scorpion[38] stung its head, an ill-starred thing:
> My mother dreamed you face down in the sea.[39]
>
> The stony actors poise and pause for breath.
> I brought my love to bear, and then you died.
> It was the gangrene ate you to the bone
> My mother said; you died like any man.
> How shall I age into that state of mind?
> I am the ghost of an infamous suicide,
> My own blue razor rusting in my throat.
> O pardon the one who knocks for pardon at
> Your gate, father – your hound-bitch, daughter, friend.
> It was my love that did us both to death.
>
> [Plath's own emphasis.]

Here, although the speaker tries to combine her autobiographical facts with the Electra myth, she fails to do it effectively.[40] The speaker borrows "the stilts of an old tragedy" because she wants to idealize her father, imagine him as a powerful god, and devalue her mother as a betrayer, as a cause of his death. However, unlike Agamemnon, her father died like any man (he died of natural causes, gangrene); unlike Clytemnestra, her mother did not kill him. Her begging for pardon implies that she has a feeling of guilt for her father's death: her birth has portended her father's death. She assigns to herself guilt for her father's death, even though she says, in the opening stanza of this poem: "I had nothing to do with

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[37] See Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, pp. 34-45).

[38] This word might have to do with Sylvia Plath's own astrological sign, "the Scorpion." The element of the sign is "water."

[39] The line, "My mother dreamed you face down in the sea," reminds us of the description of one of Sylvia Plath's dreams in her journals:

> It was her [the mother's] daughter's fault partly. She had a dream: her daughter was all gaudy-dressed about to go out and be a chorus girl, a prostitute too, probably. [...] The husband, brought alive in dream to relive the curse of his old angers, slammed out of the house in rage that the daughter was going to be a chorus girl. The poor Mother runs along the sand beach [...]. The father had driven, in a fury, to spite her, off the road bridge and floating dead, face down and bloated, in the slosh of ocean water by the pillars of the country club. (*J*, p. 267)

The dream reveals Plath's obsession with the drowned and floating father figure, which is seen in poems such as "Full Fathom Five" and "Daddy." In addition to the image of a floating drowned father, her interpretation of the dream shows an intense sexual rivalry between mother and daughter as well:

> I have lost a father and his love early; feel angry at her because of this and feel she feels I killed him (her dream about me being a chorus girl and his driving off and drowning himself) (*J*, p. 278).

[40] This poem is superimposing the myth onto Plath's autobiography.

guilt or anything." After getting out from the underworld where she has hibernated, the speaker feels a sense of responsibility for her father's death. From a Kleinian perspective, in the "depressive position," since a loved father is felt to be destroyed by the speaker, she suffers from depressive feelings which lead to an intolerable feeling of guilt. This scene shows the speaker's move from the "paranoid-schizoid position" to the "depressive position" because of the appearance of her strong feelings of guilt.

The Plathian Electra's failed suicide attempt is shown in the latter part of the poem ("I am the ghost of an infamous suicide,/ My own blue razor rusting in my throat."). According to one of Melanie Klein's followers, John Bowlby, motives for attempting suicide can be understood as responses to the loss of an attachment figure. In his view, among motives that lead to suicide is a wish for reunion with the lost object and a desire for revenge against a dead person for having deserted oneself.[41] Bowlby's definition for the motives for suicide can be applied to the speaker. Killing herself to go to the underworld, the speaker wishes for reunion with the lost father.

If we superimpose this Electra myth on the description of the bees in Plath's "The Beekeeper's Daughter" (*CP*, p. 118), which is the next poem of "Electra on the Azalea Path," we see that Plath's choice of the Electra myth is appropriate, because, according to Robyn Marsack, "the royal tombs at Mycenae were in the shape of beehives, and of the best known of them is the Tomb of Clytemnestra,"[42] and there is a fierce feud between mother and daughter in this poem.

In the sexually symbolic, sinister "garden of mouthings," the poem "The Beekeeper's Daughter" presents the speaker's father as a priest-like[43] "maestro of the bee," and a mighty ruler, and the daughter as a passive "sister of a stone" – for Sylvia Plath, "stone" has an image of "foetus." The contrast between the two is obvious. There is an atmosphere of emotional incest in the womblike world of death:

> Hieratical in your frock coat, maestro of the bees,
> You move among the many-breasted hives,
>
> My heart under your foot, sister of a stone. ...
>
> The Golden Rain Tree drips its powders down. ...
> Here is a queenship no mother can contest –
>
> A fruit that's death to taste: dark flesh, dark parings. ...
>
> Father, bridegroom, in this Easter egg
> Under the coronal of sugar roses
>
> The queen bee marries the winter of your year.

The daughter is fascinated by the father who dominates the bee world. Moreover, the resistant daughter implicitly has an intense sexual desire for him. She calls her father "bridegroom." Besides, there is an intense sexual rivalry between mother and daughter ("Here is a queenship no mother can contest – "). Plath writes in her journals:

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[41] John Bowlby, *Loss* (London: Hogarth, 1969-1980, p. 304).

[42] Robyn Marsack, *Sylvia Plath*, p. 42.

[43] In Greece, the bee was considered a priestly creature (see Herder Freiburg, *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols: Symbols from Art, Archaeology, Mythology, Literature, and Religion* [Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1986, p. 21]).

> A woman, I fight all women for my men. [...] There is no loyalty, even between mother and daughter. Both fight for the father, for the son, for the bed of mind and body. [...] And I cry so to be held by a man; some man, who is a father. (*J*, p. 101)[44]

Rose Karmel points out that the last line "the queen bee marries the winter of your year" conveys a hidden threat: "Addressed to the beekeeper as a sexual being, "Father, Bridegroom," the line reminds us that the mating of the queen with the drone leads to the drone's inevitable death."[45] I think instead that this line is related to the Persephone myth which decrees that Persephone has to stay in the underworld during winter. Persephone is doomed to stay there because she was raped by Hades, and ate the pomegranate[46] ("A fruit that's death to taste: dark flesh, dark parings"). Another rape by a god is suggested by reference to the laburnum tree, "Golden Rain" – Danae is raped by Zeus in a form of golden rain.

Bee and beehive imagery connected with the image of father[47] is significant in other poems as well: "Lament" (*CP*, pp. 315-316) and "Electra on Azalea Path." In "Lament," written in memory of Plath's father, the heroic, god-like father was struck down by a swarm of bees: "the sting of bees took away my father." In "Electra on Azalea Path," there is a suggestion of the speaker's entering the underworld:

> The day you died I went into the dirt,
> Into the lightless hibernaculum
> Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the blizzard
> Like hieratic stones, and the ground is hard
> It was good for twenty years, that wintering –

For Plath, "bee" is the recurrent symbol of the father. The words, "hibernaculum," "blizzard" and "wintering" imply that the season of the underworld is winter. As I have explained earlier, winter is the season Persephone tends to the underworld to reunite with her husband/ father. Ingrid Melander points out that the "bees" in this poem seem to be synonymous with "bumblebees," because they hibernate in the ground.[48]

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[44] We can find another case of a feud between the mother and the daughter over the father in *The Bell Jar*. There is a scene in which Esther Greenwood wakes up from the electric shock:

> An old metal floor lamp surfaced in my mind. One of the few relics of my father's study, it was surmounted by a copper bell which held the light bulb, and from which a frayed, tiger-coloured cord ran down the length of the metal stand to a socket in the wall.
> One day I'd decided to move this lamp from the side of my mother's bed to my desk at the other end of the room. The cord would be long enough, so I didn't unplug it. I closed both hands around the lamp and the fuzzy cord and gripped them tight.
> Then something leapt out of the lamp in a blue flash and shook me till my teeth rattled, and I tried to pull my hands off, but they were stuck, and I screamed, or a scream was torn from my throat, for I didn't recognize it, but heard it soar and quaver in the air like a violently disembodied spirit.
> Then my hands jerked free, and I fell back on to my mother's bed. A small hole, blackened as if with pencil lead, pitted the centre of my right palm. (*BJ*, p. 152)

In trying to move the lamp which is one of the relics of the father from the mother's bedside to her desk side, Esther receives a great shock by touching the lamp – the plug remains plugged in the mother's bedside. It is as if she receives punishment from the mother for stealing her mother's possession.

[45] Rose Karmel, "'A Self to Recover': Sylvia Plath's Bee Cycle Poems," *Modern Poetry Studies*, vol. 4., part 3 (Winter 1973, p. 310).

[46] In Sylvia Plath's "Maenad" in the sequence, "Poem for a Birthday," the berries in the line, "Feed me the berries of dark," is reminiscent of the pomegranate. I think that the speaker also wants to be taken away to the underworld to rejoin – wed – her father.

[47] Sylvia Plath's father, Otto Plath, was a professor of biology at Boston University, who was involved in his scholarly research on the ways of bumblebees and wrote *Bumblebees and Their Ways* in 1934. From this fact, it is easy to identify the beekeeper's daughter with Plath's alter-ego.

[48] Ingrid Melander, *The Poetry of Sylvia Plaths*, p. 90.

In "Wintering" (*CP*, pp. 217-219), which is one of Plath's bee poems, its complete deathlike space is lived by the speaker:

> This is the room I have never been in.
> This is the room I could never breathe in.
> The black bunched in there like a bat,
> No light
> But the torch and its faint
>
> Chinese yellow on appalling objects –
> Black asininity. Decay.
> Possession.
> It is they who own me.
> Neither cruel nor indifferent,
>
> Only ignorant.

Torch is Persephone's attribute. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford write: "The shining light of the torch in the dark underworld quickens the grain and the poppies she [Persephone] holds in her hand."[49] The etymology of Persephone's name is: "she who shines in the dark."[50]

The bee has often been considered to be symbol of the soul of the dead in Europe.[51] And the bee, which appears to die in winter and return in spring, is sometimes a symbol of the death and rebirth of Persephone.[52] It symbolizes death and immortality. Erich Neumann writes in his book, *The Great Mother*, the bee "was associated above all with Demeter, Artemis, and Persephone."[53]

Next we will move to another of Plath's poems, "The Colossus" (*CP*, pp. 129-130), which is also related to the drowned-father theme. The statue of the Colossus was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. In this poem, the speaker imagines her dead father as the Greek sun-god, and she struggles to repair the broken pieces of the huge statue of the Colossus who is now a floating drowned man. His fragments "are littered/ .../ In their old anarchy to the horizon-line." The daughter wants to bring her father's statue back to life. However, it is so huge that she as an "ant" cannot recover its original form. The speaker has worked to rebuild a grandiose but shattered Colossus for "thirty years." Frustrated, she is still in mourning. It is also an attempt for the speaker to reinstate her shattered internalized father. The speaker attempts to rebuild her destroyed inner world at the same time. She hopes that the fragments of her beloved father will be reassembled within her self. In the Kleinian point of view, putting the dispersed pieces of the father's body back together again is a process of "reparation." By restoring the external object, the inner world of the subject is correspondingly restored at the same time and it can possess the "good" object. In the poem, the speaker is attempting to "glue" not only the fragments of ruins of the vast disintegrating statue but also her shattered self together, hoping that they will return to life. However, since she cannot reinstate the external loved object successfully, she also cannot regain the loved internal object. The process of "reparation" is not successful. In Kleinian terminology, the scene is a dramatization of "manic defence" in manic-depressive states in unsuccessful mourning. "Manic defence" occurs because reparation is so slow and laborious a process. This defence is an in-between phenomenon, including elements of the "paranoid-schizoid position" and the "depressive position". It is a defence

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[49] Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*, p. 368.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 369.
[51] Takashi Watanabe, *Mitsubachi No Bunkashi* (*The History of the Bee*) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1994, p. 45).
[52] See Herder Freiburg, *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 21.
[53] Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 265.

against depressive anxiety, but once more employs mechanisms that are seen in the paranoid-schizoid position such as "splitting", "idealization," and "projective identification." Hanna Segal explains Klein's ideas:

> To protect itself from total despair the ego must have recourse to violent defence mechanisms. Those defence mechanisms which protect it from the feelings arising out of the loss of the good object form a system of manic defences. The essential features of manic defences are denial of psychic reality, omnipotent control and a partial regression to the paranoid position and its defences: splitting, idealization, denial, projective identification, etc. This regression strengthens the fear of persecution and that in turn leads to the strengthening of omnipotent control.[54]

The unsuccessful state of mourning – the "manic defence" state of mourning – makes the speaker feel ambivalently towards her dead father. The feeling is divided into two aspects: praise and contempt for him. Klein writes about the manifestation of this ambivalence seen in the "manic defence": "Idealization is an essential part of the manic position and is bound up with another important element of that position, namely denial" (*Love*, p. 349).

The speaker has to continue the endless, fruitless work of mourning:

> I shall never get you put together entirely,
> Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.
> Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles
> Proceed from your great lips.
> It's worse than a barnyard.
>
> Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,
> Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.
> Thirty years now I have labored
> To dredge the silt from your throat.
> I am none the wiser.
>
> Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails of Lysol
> I crawl like an ant in mourning
> Over the weedy acres of your brow
> To mend the immense skull-plates and clear
> The bald, white tumuli of your eyes.
>
> A blue sky out of the Oresteia
> Arches above us.

This poem tells the story of the speaker's Electra complex. She regards her father as the hero of the Oresteia. The law of the father dominates the daughter: "The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue". Like the speaker in the poem, "Electra on the Azalea Path," the speaker's psyche is made by a patriarchal culture. She devotes herself to the patriarch. For her, the father is "pithy and historical as the Roman Forum."

On the last stanza, Shelley Orgel suggests:

> She [the speaker] saves herself at the end. She says she is "married to a shadow"; she will no longer wait for "the scrape of a keel/ On the blank stones of the landing." Condensed in this

[54] Hanna Segal, "A Psycho-Analytical Approach to Aesthetics," p. 197.

is the wish to renounce a life of waiting faithfully and endlessly for her father to return from the dead.[55]

Does the speaker really save herself at the end? I think instead that what the speaker says ("My hours are married to shadow") suggests the Persephone story because the realm of "shadow" belongs to the underworld where Hades lives, that is, she knows she is destined to marry her lost father. I think that it is not a salvation as Orgel suggests. The speaker appears to choose death at the end. Her initial aggressive attitude disappears. She is obsessed with the death world where her father belongs.

The image of the "colossus" in the sea is first seen in Sylvia Plath's early poem called "Letter to a Purist" (*CP*, pp. 36-37).[56] The "grandiose colossus" "Stood astride/ The envious assaults of sea." In this poem as well, the speaker who mocks her father has an ambivalent feeling towards him. A figure in "Man in Black" (*CP*, pp. 119-120) is also related to death and the sea. In this poem, an enigmatic death-figure walks towards the end of land.[57] This man is shown as a "vortex." This means that he sucks in surrounding things. He draws everything towards him, including the speaker. She cannot turn away from him.[58] In her journals, Plath writes: "'Man In Black,' the only 'love' poem in my book" (*J*, p. 300).

The image of the father as a "colossus" recurs in other works. In one of Plath's short stories, "Among the Bumblebees," Alice Denway's father has been "a giant of a man"(*JP*, p. 259); "a king, high on a throne" (*JP*, p. 261): "When he laughed, it sounded as if all the waves of the ocean were breaking and roaring up the beach together. Alice worshipped her father because he was so powerful, and everybody did what he commanded because he knew best and never gave mistaken judgment" (*JP*, p. 259). He is "proud and arrogant among the bumblebees" (*JP*, p. 266). In "Sunday at the Mintons," Elizabeth Minton's brother is "a colossus astride the roaring sea" (*JP*, p. 158). In both stories, colossus-like fathers are also related to the sea.

"Little Fugue" (*CP*, pp. 187-189), one of Sylvia Plath's later elegies, is a poem about guilt and memory, which abandons the image of the heroic mythic father. It denies that the daughter should feel guilty: The guilt centers on the father. The daughter can say: "I am guilty of nothing."

Since the speaker is in a state of "manic reparation," she does not feel the mourning experience. Her attempt for restoration goes unrewarded. This poem represents the speaker's disintegrated inner world with her image which reduces to signs and fragments.

The word "Fugue" is a musical term: "a musical composition in which one or two themes are repeated or imitated by successively entering voices and contrapuntally developed in a continuous interweaving of the voice parts."[59] Another meaning of "fugue" is a form of temporary amnesia, "a disturbed state of consciousness in which the one affected seems to perform acts in full awareness but upon recovery cannot recollect the deeds."[60] Lynda K. Bundtzen articulates: "The two meanings of fugue come

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[55] Shelley Orgel, "Sylvia Plath: Fusion with the Victim and Suicide," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 43 (1974), p. 278.

[56] This poem suggests Sylvia Plath's own father with the line, "With one foot" – her father's leg was amputated during his illness.

[57] The father figure walks towards the sea in the first section of "Berck-Plage" (*CP*, pp. 196-201):

> The lines of the eye, scalded by these bald surfaces,
>
> Boomerang like anchored elastics, hurting the owner.
> Is it any wonder he puts on dark glasses?
>
> It is any wonder he affects a black cassock?
> Here he comes now, among the mackerel gatherers.

[58] In "Man in Black," his "dead/ Black coat, black shoes" and black hair imply Sylvia Plath's father. Plath writes: "The 'dead black' in my poem may be a transference from the visit to my father's grave a month earlier" (*J*, p. 300).

[59] *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1831-), X (1993), p. 471.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 471.

naturally together in Plath's world to represent the master mindlessness, the numb and passive psychological state of Plath's victims."[61] The speaker's psychological void is represented by the colorless black-and-white design of the images: "Black yew, white cloud"; "I like black statements./ The featurelessness of that cloud, now!/ White as an eye all over!" There is an image in which a pianist plays the black and white keys on a piano in the middle of the poem.

In this poem, aural and visual communication does not work. There is a confusion of the senses: "I see your voice/ Black and leafy ..." In the speaker's mind, the father was "Lopping the sausages," which are "Red, mottled, like cut necks." "This butchery," Jahan Ramazani argues, "is linked to the mutilation not only of his body (leaving him "one leg") but also of her mind (making her "lame in the memory")."[62]

> I survive the while,
> Arranging my morning.
> These are my fingers, this my baby.
> The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor.

In addition to "arranging" her "morning," she arranges her "mourning." I think that the line, "The clouds are a marriage dress," represents another version of the Persephone story because the speaker puts on the marriage dress, the marriage shroud, to get married with her dead father who is in the world of the dead.

Furthermore, Sylvia Plath portrays the speaker's failure in the work of mourning in one of her last elegies, "Daddy" (*CP*, pp. 222-224). The speaker has a tendency to both affirm and deny her father as an "ego-ideal."[63] She regresses to the infantile "paranoid-schizoid" position, oscillating between "good" father and "bad" father and turning her love and hatred against her lost father.

In this poem, the speaker regresses to the preverbal infantile "paranoid-schizoid position." She moves backward in time and a child's conception of the world is depicted. A woman who is thirty years old reverts to infant-talk.[64] She uses the rhythm of nursery rhyme – it brings to mind "There was an Old Woman who lived in a Shoe." Her use of language for this poem is regressive and repetitive. Steven G. Axelrod's writes:

> Plath's assault on the language of "daddy-poetry" has turned inward, on the language of her own poem, which teeters precariously on the edge of a preverbal abyss – represented by the eerie, keening "oo" sound with which a majority of the verses end.[65]

A. Alvarez, who describes "Daddy" as a love poem, connects the "oo" sound with a "cooing tenderness."[66]

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[61] Lynda K. Bundtzen, *Plath's Incarnations: Woman and the Creative Process* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991, p. 191).

[62] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 275.

[63] In real life, throughout her life Sylvia Plath both adored and despised her father.

[64] Susan R. Van Dyne suggests that the child speaker dramatizes a woman writer's powerlessness: "it mirrors the cultural allegation that woman is child, and it gives form to her experience of being treated like one" (*Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems* [Chapel Hill/ London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 48]). According to Alicia Ostriker, infantile language signals sexual trauma, revealing the power of sexual pain to infantilize, to thwart growth (*Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* [London: The Women's Press, 1987, p. 237]. Ostriker picks up several poems whose languages are childish or infantile: T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and at the close of The Waste Land; Roethke's "Lost Son" poems; at the opening of Berryman's "Dream Songs"; and DuPlessis' "Medusa").

[65] Steven G. Axelrod, *Sylvia Plath*, p. 56.

[66] A. Alvarez, "Sylvia Plath" in Charles Newman ed., *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium* (London: Faber, 1970, p. 66).

In a reading prepared for BBC radio programme, Sylvia Plath explained "Daddy," revealing its mythical substructure and underlining that this poem is a fiction, not based on her life:

> Here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other – she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it. (*CP*, p. 293)

Plath explains that this is a story in which the speaker feels the dilemma of hatred for her mother, and love for her father. But the focus is only on the speaker's father, and the father substitute – a woman can overcome her penis envy through gaining a man according to Freud. The mother is absent in this story.

The description of a fallen Colossus toppled over shows how great her father was:

> Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
> Ghastly statue with one gray toe[67]
> Big as a Frisco seal
>
> And a head in the freakish Atlantic
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

Though firstly Daddy appears as the God-like statue with his toe in the Pacific and his head in the Atlantic – he is bigger than the continent – but then he reappears as a devil, and finally a brutal Nazi hated by the daughter. The father which was to be restored changes into the persecutor. Melanie Klein remarks on the case in which hatred appears in the mourner:

> When hatred of the lost loved object in its various manifestations gets the upper hand in the mourner, this not only turns the loved lost person into a persecutor, but shakes the mourner's belief in his good inner objects as well. The shaken belief in the good objects disturbs most painfully the process of idealization, which is an essential intermediate step in mental development. (*Love*, p. 354)

The speaker's regressive self is intensely emotional, oscillating between love and hatred towards her father. She cannot let him go because she is helpless, but at the same time she cannot hold on to him because she believes that he persecutes her. The "manic defence" is based on this kind of "splitting" process. The "good" and "bad" aspects of the father are thus not integrated. That is why it is difficult for the speaker to promote separation and self-integration. Plath's explanation of "Electra complex" at the BBC programme obscures the speaker's divided emotions into love and hatred. Although the speaker has a will to accomplish her mourning, hatred cannot achieve "reparation." According to Melanie Klein, "[f]eeling incapable of saving and securely reinstating their loved objects inside themselves, they must turn away from them more than hitherto and therefore deny their love for them" (*Love*, p. 368). "Daddy" reveals an attack on the speaker's own internalized "bad" father, and subsequently a suicidal attack on her self.

Unable to complete the work of mourning for her father and to rebuild her lost father in her inner world successfully, the speaker makes and gets married with a father-substitute (husband) and attempts to regain her lost father.

> I made a model of you,
> A man in black with the Meinkampf look

[67] "One gray toe" is supposed to be related to Sylvia Plath's obsession with the fact that her father's leg was amputated during his illness. See also "Letter to a Purist" which suggests her father with the line, "With one foot."

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

"I do, I do" are the words as the marriage oath. The words, "I'm finally through," imply several meanings: What seems to be applicable here is that the speaker believes that she can forget her father by getting a father-substitute. "The black telephone's off at the root,/ The voices just can't worm through": tearing out the telephone line, the speaker destroys the voice of the father to get rid of the internalized father.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two –
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

However, later the speaker says she has also killed her father's substitute. The words, "I'm through" seem to mean that she believes she is finally released from both her father and her father-substitute, and is independent. The attitude of the speaker's contempt over them produces a "phantasy" that creates an illusion of triumph over them. According to Melanie Klein, "one of the ways in which hatred expresses itself in the situation of mourning is in feelings of triumph over the dead person" (*Love*, p. 354). She also explains that feelings of triumph have the effect of retarding the work of mourning. In the case of the speaker as well, it is not a successful reinstatement of her lost father. Actually she has not finished the work of mourning yet even though she declares "I'm through."

Jahan Ramazani comments on the role of the villagers:

> The end of "Daddy" resumes but revises another traditional elegiac device – the troop or chorus of mourners. Milton and Shelley had amplified their laments by representing them as group acts; Plath unites with a vengeance: the villagers "are dancing and stamping on you". Milton and Shelley had paralleled their laments with mourning rites for such fertility gods as Adonis and Orpheus; Plath also alludes to primitive ritual, but her tribe enacts death without hoping for resurrection.[68]

Similarly, the speaker in "Gulliver" (*CP*, p. 251) who is in the position of the Lilliputians "hate[s]" colossal Gulliver who "step[s] off seven leagues".

The speakers in Plath's early elegies attempt to perpetuate the name of the fathers in idealizing their dead fathers as potent heroic figures, mythic beings or gods with allusions to Greek tragedy (the father as an "ego-ideal"), and actively attempt to totalize or internalize their fathers and reinstate their distrusted inner worlds at the same time, turning rage inward. On the other hand, in Plath's later

[68] Johan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 279.

elegies the speakers are not positively engaged in reinstating their fathers, but in directly attacking their fathers. Their process of reparation is so slow in the early elegies, and is so destructive in the later ones that in either case they cannot complete the work of mourning. Connecting Plath's later elegies with Plath herself, Susan Kavaler-Adler assumes that Plath's mourning of her father is pathological because of her "manic defence" against him.[69] According to Melanie Klein, however, "manic defence" is not necessarily pathological.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CP – Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Ted Hughes (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).
Envy – Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Virago, 1988).
J – Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, ed. by Karen V. Kukil (New York: Random House, 2000).
JP – Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams and Other Prose Writings* (London: Faber, 1977; revised edition, 1979).
LH – Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*, ed. by Aurelia Schober Plath (London: Faber, 1976).
Love – Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (London: Virago, 1988).

[69] See Susan Kavaler-Adler, *The Compulsion to Create*, p. 97.