INTRODUCTION

“I write only because
There is a voice within me
That will not be still”
Sylvia Plath: “Why do I write Poems”

Sylvia Plath (October 27, 1932 – February 11, 1963) was an American poet, novelist and short story writer. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, she studied at Smith College and Newnham College, Cambridge before receiving acclaim as a professional poet and writer. She married fellow poet Ted Hughes in 1956 and they lived together first in the United States and then England, having their two children Frieda and Nicholas. Plath suffered from depression for much of her adult life, and in 1963 she committed suicide. Controversy continues to surround the events of her life and death as well as her writing and legacy.

Plath is credited with advancing the genre of confessional poetry and is best known for her two published collections: The Colossus and Other Poems and Ariel. In 1982, she won a Pulitzer Prize posthumously for The Collected Poems. She also wrote The Bell Jar, a semi-autobiographical novel published shortly before her death. Plath was born on October 27, 1932, in the Massachusetts Memorial Hospital, in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. Her mother, Aurelia Schober Plath (1906–1994), was a first-generation American of Austrian descent, and her father, Otto Plath (1885–1940), was from Grabow, Germany. Plath's father
an entomologist and professor of biology and German at Boston University had also authored a book about bumblebees. Plath's mother was approximately twenty-one years younger than her husband. They met while she was earning her master's degree in teaching and taking one of his courses. Otto had become alienated from his family after choosing not to become a Lutheran minister, as his grandparents had intended him to be. On April 27, 1935, Plath's brother Warren was born and in 1936 the family moved from 24 Prince Street in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts to 92 Johnson Avenue, Winthrop, Massachusetts. Plath's mother, Aurelia, had grown up in Winthrop, and her maternal grandparents, the Schobers, had lived in a section of the town called Point Shirley, a location mentioned in Plath's poetry. While living in Winthrop, eight-year-old Plath published her first poem in the *Boston Herald*'s children's section. In addition to writing, she showed early promise as an artist, winning an award for her paintings from The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards in 1947.

Otto Plath died on November 5, 1940, a week and a half after Plath's eighth birthday, of complications following the amputation of a foot due to untreated diabetes. He had become ill shortly after a close friend died of lung cancer. Comparing the similarities between his friend's symptoms and his own, Otto became convinced that he, too, had lung cancer and did not seek treatment until his diabetes had progressed too far. Raised as a Unitarian Christian Plath experienced
a loss of faith after her father's death, and remained ambivalent about religion throughout her life. He was buried in Winthrop Cemetery; visiting her father's grave prompted Plath to write the poem *Electra on Azalea Path*. After his death, Aurelia Plath moved her children and her parents to 26 Elmwood Road, Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1942. In one of her last prose pieces, Plath commented that her first nine years "sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle—beautiful inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth". Plath attended Bradford Senior High School in Wellesley, graduating in 1950.

In 1950, Plath attended Smith College and excelled academically. She wrote to her mother, "The world is splitting open at my feet like a ripe, juicy watermelon." She edited *The Smith Review* and during the summer after her third year of college Plath was awarded a coveted position as guest editor at *Mademoiselle* Magazine, during which she spent a month in New York City. The experience was not what she had hoped it would be, and it began a downward spiral. She was furious at not being at a meeting the editor had arranged with Welsh poet Dylan Thomas—a writer whom she loved, as said by one of her boyfriends, "more than life itself". She hung around the White Horse bar and the Chelsea Hotel for two days hoping to meet Thomas, but he was already on his way home. A few weeks later she was to slash her legs to see if she had enough courage to commit suicide. Many of the events that took place during that summer were
later used as inspiration for her novel *The Bell Jar*. During this time she was refused admission to the Harvard writing seminar. Following electroconvulsive therapy for depression, Plath made her first medically documented suicide attempt in late August 1953 by crawling under her house and taking her mother's sleeping pills. She survived this first suicide attempt after lying unfound in a crawl space for three days, later writing that she "blissfully succumbed to the whirling blackness that I honestly believed was eternal oblivion." She spent the next six months in psychiatric care, receiving more electric and insulin shock treatment under the care of Dr. Ruth Beuscher. Her stay at McLean Hospital and her Smith scholarship were paid for by Olive Higgins Prouty, who had successfully recovered from a mental breakdown herself. Plath seemed to make a good recovery and returned to college. In January 1955, she submitted her thesis “The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoyevsky's Novels” and in June, graduated from Smith with highest honors.

She obtained a Fulbright scholarship to Newnham College, Cambridge where she continued actively writing poetry and publishing her work in the student newspaper *Varsity*. At Newnham, she studied with Dorothea Krook, whom she held in high regard. She spent her first year winter and spring holidays travelling around the continent. Plath's stay at McLean Hospital inspired her novel *The Bell Jar*. In a 1961 BBC interview (now held by the British Library Sound Archive),
Plath describes how she met Ted Hughes:

I happened to be at Cambridge. I was sent there by the [US] government on a government grant. And I'd read some of Ted's poems in this magazine and I was very impressed and I wanted to meet him. I went to this little celebration and that's actually where we met... Then we saw a great deal of each other. Ted came back to Cambridge and suddenly we found ourselves getting married a few months later... We kept writing poems to each other. Then it just grew out of that, I guess, a feeling that we both were writing so much and having such a fine time doing it, we decided that this should keep on.

Plath described Hughes as "a singer, story-teller, lion and world-wanderer" with "a voice like the thunder of God".

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia
Of your left ear, out of the wind,
Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.
My hours are married to shadow.
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.

The couple married on June 16, 1956, at St George the Martyr Holborn in the London Borough of Camden with Plath's mother in attendance, and spent their honeymoon in Benidorm. Plath returned to Newnham in October to begin her second year. During this time, they both became deeply interested in astrology and
the supernatural, using Ouija boards. In early 1957, Plath and Hughes moved to the United States and from September 1957 Plath taught at Smith College, her alma mater. She found it difficult to both teach and have enough time and energy to write and in the middle of 1958, the couple moved to Boston. Plath took a job as a receptionist in the psychiatric unit of Massachusetts General Hospital and in the evening took creative writing seminars given by poet Robert Lowell (also attended by the writers Anne Sexton and George Starbuck). Both Lowell and Sexton encouraged Plath to write from her experience and she did so. She openly discussed her depression with Lowell and her suicide attempts with Sexton, who led her to write from a more female perspective. Plath began to conceive of herself as a more serious, focused poet and short-story writer. At this time Plath and Hughes first met the poet W. S. Merwin, who admired their work and was to remain a lifelong friend. Plath resumed psychoanalytic treatment in December, working with Ruth Beuscher.

Plath and Hughes traveled across Canada and the United States, staying at the Yaddo artist colony in New York State in late 1959. Plath says that it was here that she learned "to be true to my own weirdnesses", but she remained anxious about writing confessionally, from deeply personal and private material. The couple moved back to the United Kingdom in December 1959 and lived in London at 3 Chalcot Square, near the Primrose Hill area of Regent's Park, where an English
Heritage plaque records Plath's residence. Their daughter Frieda was born on 1 April 1960 and in October Plath published her first collection of poetry, *The Colossus*. In February 1961, Plath's second pregnancy ended in miscarriage; several of her poems, including “Parliament Hill Fields”, address this event. In August she finished her semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* and immediately after this, the family moved to Court Green in the small market town of North Tawton in Devon. Nicholas was born in January 1962. In mid-1962, Hughes began to keep bees, which would be the subject of many Plath poems.

In 1961, the couple rented their flat at Chalcot Square to Assia and David Wevill. Hughes was immediately struck with the beautiful Assia, as she was with him. He would later write in *Dreamers* (*Birthday Letters*, 1998, 31)

> The dreamer in her
> Had fallen in love with me and she did not know it.
> That moment the dreamer in me
> Fell in love with her and I knew it.

In June, Plath had had a car accident which she described as one of many suicide attempts. In July 1962 Plath discovered Hughes had been having an affair with Assia Gutman and in September the couple separated. Beginning in October 1962, Plath experienced a great burst of creativity and wrote most of the poems on which her reputation now rests, writing at least 26 of the poems of her posthumous collection *Ariel* during the final months of her life. In December 1962, she returned
alone to London with her children, and rented, on a five year lease, a flat at 23 Fitzroy Road—only a few streets from the Chalcot Square flat. William Butler Yeats once had lived in the house which bears an English Heritage blue plaque for the Irish poet. Plath was pleased by this fact and considered it a good omen.

The northern winter of 1962-63 was one of the coldest in 100 years; the pipes froze, the children—now two years old and nine months—were often sick, and the house had no telephone. Her depression returned but she completed the rest of her poetry collection be published posthumously in and 1965 in the UK 1966 in the US. Her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, came out in January 1963, published under the pen name Victoria Lucas, and was met with critical indifference.

Dr. John Horder, a close friend who lived near Plath, prescribed her antidepressants a few days before her death. Knowing she was at risk alone with two young children, he says he visited her daily and made strenuous efforts to have her admitted to a hospital and when that failed, he arranged for a live-in nurse. Some commentators have argued that because anti-depressants may take up to three weeks to take effect, her prescription from Horder would not necessarily have helped. Others say that Plath's American doctor had warned her never again to take the anti-depressant drug which she found worsened her depression but Horder had prescribed it under a proprietary name which she did not recognize.

The nurse was due to arrive at nine o'clock in the morning of 11 February
1963 to help Plath with the care of her children. Upon arrival, she could not get into the flat, but eventually gained access with the help of a workman, Charles Langridge. They found Plath dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in the kitchen, with her head in the oven, having sealed the rooms between herself and her sleeping children with wet towels and cloths. At approximately 4:30 a.m., Plath had placed her head in the oven, with the gas turned on.

It has been suggested that Plath had not intended to kill herself. That morning she asked her downstairs neighbor, one Mr. Thomas, what time he would be leaving. She also left a note reading "Call Dr. Horder", including the doctor's phone number. Therefore, it is argued Plath turned on the gas at a time when Mr. Thomas would have been able to see the note. However, in her biography Giving Up: The Last Days of Sylvia Plath, Plath's best friend, Jillian Becker (1987, 24) wrote, "According to Mr. Goodchild, a police officer attached to the coroner's office ... [Plath] had thrust her head far into the gas oven... [and] had really meant to die. Dr. Horder also believed that her intention was clear. He stated that "No-one who saw the care with which the kitchen was prepared could have interpreted her action as anything but an irrational compulsion."(Ibidem,26) Plath had described the quality of her despair as "owl's talons clenching my heart." In his 1971 book on suicide, friend and critic A Alvarez claimed that Plath's suicide was an unanswered cry for help.
An inquiry on the day following Plath's death gave a ruling of suicide. Hughes was devastated; they had been separated five months before. In a letter to an old friend of Plath's from Smith College, he wrote, "That's the end of my life. The rest is posthumous. Plath's gravestone, in Heptonstall's parish churchyard of St Thomas the Apostle, bears the inscription that Hughes chose for her. "Even amidst fierce flames the golden lotus can be planted." Biographers variously attribute the source of the quote to the 16th century Buddhist novel *Journey to the West* written by Wu Cheng'en or to the Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita.

The gravestone has been repeatedly vandalized by those aggrieved that Hughes had written on the stone; they have attempted to chisel it off, leaving only the name "Sylvia Plath." When Hughes' partner Assia Wevill killed herself and their four-year-old daughter Shura in 1969, this practice intensified after each defacement, Hughes had the damaged stone removed, sometimes leaving the site unmarked during repair. Outraged mourners accused Hughes in the media of dishonoring her name by removing the stone. Wevill's death led to claims that Hughes had been abusive to both Plath and Wevill. In 1970, radical feminist poet Robin Morgan published the poem "Arraignment", in which she openly accused Hughes of the battery and murder of Plath; other feminists threatened to kill him in Plath's name.

In 1989, with Hughes under public attack, a battle raged in the letters pages
of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. In *The Guardian* on April 20, 1989 Hughes wrote the article "The Place Where Sylvia Plath Should Rest in Peace" (65):

> In the years soon after [Plath's] death, when scholars approached me, I tried to take their apparently serious concern for the truth about Sylvia Plath seriously. But I learned my lesson early. [...] If I tried too hard to tell them exactly how something happened, in the hope of correcting some fantasy, I was quite likely to be accused of trying to suppress Free Speech. In general, my refusal to have anything to do with the Plath Fantasia have been regarded as an attempt to suppress Free Speech [...] The Fantasia about Sylvia Plath is more needed than the facts. Where that leaves respect for the truth of her life (and of mine), or for her memory, or for the literary tradition, I do not know.

On March 16, 2009, Nicholas Hughes, the son of Plath and Hughes, hanged himself at his home in Alaska, following a history of depression. Plath wrote poetry from the age of eight, a poem that appeared in the *Boston Traveller*. By the time she arrived at Smith College she had written over fifty short stories published in a raft of magazines. At Smith she majored in English and won all the major prizes in writing and scholarship. She edited the college magazine *Mademoiselle* and after her graduation in 1955, she won the Glascock Prize for *Two Lovers and a Beachcomber by the Real Sea*. Later at Newnham, Cambridge, she wrote for the *Varsity* magazine. By the time Heinmann published her first collection, *The Colossus and other poems* in the UK in late 1960, Plath had been short-listed
several times in the Yale Younger Poets book competition and had her work printed in *Harper's*, *The Spectator* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. All the poems in *The Colossus* had already been printed in major US and British journals and she had a contract with *The New Yorker* for its publication. It was however her 1965 collection of poems *Ariel*, published posthumously, on which Plath's reputation essentially rests.

In 1971, the volumes of *Winter Trees* and *Crossing the Water* were published in the UK, including nine previously unseen poems from the original manuscript of *Ariel*. Writing in *New Statesman*, fellow poet Peter Porter wrote:

>Crossing the Water is full of perfectly realised works. Its most striking impression is of a front-rank artist in the process of discovering her true power. Such is Plath's control that the book possesses a singularity and certainty which should make it as celebrated as *The Colossus* or *Ariel*.

The *Collected Poems*, edited, introduced and published in 1981 by Ted Hughes contain poetry written from 1956 until her death. Plath was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, the first poet to win the prize posthumously. In 2006 Anna Journey, then a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University, discovered a previously unpublished sonnet written by Plath entitled “*Ennui*”. The poem, composed during Plath's early years at Smith College, was published in *Blackbird* (36), the online journal.
And I
Am the arrow,
The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red Eye, the cauldron of morning.

According to Hughes, Plath left behind some 130 typed pages of another novel, provisionally titled *Double Exposure*. That manuscript disappeared somewhere around 1970. *The Colossus* received largely positive reviews in the UK highlighting her voice as new and strong, individual and American in tone. Peter Dickinson at *Punch* called the collection a real find and exhilarating to read, full of clean, easy verse. Bernard Bergonzi at the *Manchester Guardian* said the book was an outstanding technical accomplishment with a virtuoso' quality. From the point of publication she became a presence on the poetry scene. The book went on to be published in America in 1962 to less glowing reviews. Whilst her craft was generally praised, her writing was viewed as more derivative of other poets. Some later critics have described the first book as somewhat young, staid or conventional in comparison to the more free-flowing imagery and intensity of her later work.

It was Hughes' publication of *Ariel* in 1965 that precipitated Plath's rise to fame. As soon as it was published critics began to see the collection as the charting of Plath's increasing desperation or death wish. Her dramatic death became her most famous aspect and remains so. *Time* and *Life* both reviewed the slim volume of *Ariel* in the wake of her death. The critic in the *Time* (36) said:
Within a week of her death, intellectual London was hunched over copies of a strange and terrible poem she had written during her last sick slide toward suicide. 'Daddy' was its title; its subject was her morbid love-hatred of her father; its style was as brutal as a truncheon. What is more, 'Daddy' was merely the first jet of flame from a literary dragon who in the last months of her life breathed a burning river of bile across the literary landscape. [...] In her most ferocious poems, 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus,' fear, hate, love, death and the poet's own identity become fused at black heat with the figure of her father, and through him, with the guilt of the German exterminators and the suffering of their Jewish victims. They are poems, as Robert Lowell says in his preface to *Ariel*, that 'play Russian roulette with six cartridges in the cylinder.

Some in the feminist movement saw Plath as speaking for their experience, as a symbol of blighted female genius. Writer Honor Moore described in American Book Review (36) *Ariel* as marking the beginning of a movement, Plath suddenly visible as "a woman on paper", certain and audacious. Moore says:

> When Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* was published in the United States in 1966, American women noticed. Not only women who ordinarily read poems, but housewives and mothers whose ambitions had awakened [...] Here was a woman, superbly trained in her craft, whose final poems uncompromisingly charted female rage, ambivalence, and grief, in a voice with which many women identified.

The United States Postal Service has introduced a postage stamp featuring Sylvia Plath in 2012. Sylvia Plath's early poems exhibit what became her typical
imagery using personal and nature-based depictions featuring, for example, the moon, blood, hospitals, fetuses, and skulls. They were mostly imitation exercises of poets she admired such as Dylan Thomas, W. B. Yeats and Marianne Moore. Late in 1959, when she and Hughes were at the Yaddo writers' colony in New York State, she wrote the seven-part *Poem for a Birthday*, echoing Theodore Roethke's *Lost Son* sequence, though its theme is her own traumatic breakdown and suicide attempt at 21. After 1960 her work moved into a more surreal landscape darkened by a sense of imprisonment and looming death, overshadowed by her father. *The Colossus* is shot through with themes of death, redemption and resurrection. After Hughes left, Plath produced, in less than two months, the forty poems of rage, despair, love, and vengeance on which new her reputation mostly rests.

The poems in *Ariel* mark a departure from her earlier work into a more personal arena of poetry. Robert Lowell's poetry may have played a part in this shift as she cited Lowell's 1959 book *Life Studies* as a significant influence, in an interview just before her death. Posthumously published in 1966, the impact of *Ariel* was dramatic, with its dark and potentially autobiographical descriptions of mental illness in poems such as *Tulips, Daddy and Lady Lazarus*. Plath's work is often held within the genre of confessional poetry and the style of her work compared to other contemporaries, such as Robert Lowell and W.D. Snodgrass.
Plath's close friend A Alvarez, who has written about her extensively, said of her later work:

Plath's case is complicated by the fact that, in her mature work, she deliberately used the details of her everyday life as raw material for her art. A casual visitor or unexpected telephone call, a cut, a bruise, a kitchen bowl, a candlestick—everything became usable, charged with meaning, transformed. Her poems are full of references and images that seem impenetrable at this distance, but which could mostly be explained in footnotes by a scholar with full access to the details of her life.

Many of Plath's later poems deal with what one critic calls the "domestic surreal" in which Plath takes every day elements of life and twists the images, giving them an almost nightmarish quality. Plath's fellow confessional poet and friend Anne Sexton commented in “Sylvia Plath and The New Decadence” (56):

Sylvia and I would talk at length about our first suicide, in detail and in depth—between the free potato chips. Suicide is, after all, the opposite of the poem. Sylvia and I often talked opposites. We talked death with burned-up intensity, both of us drawn to it like moths to an electric light bulb, sucking on it. She told the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail, and her description in *The Bell Jar* is just that same story.

The confessional interpretation of Plath's work has led to some dismissing certain aspects of her work as an exposition of sentimentalist melodrama; in 2010, for example, Theodore Dalrymple asserted that Plath had been the "patron saint of self-dramatization" and of self-pity. Revisionist critics such as Tracy Brain have, however, argued against a tightly autobiographical interpretation of Plath's
Plath's letters were published in 1975, edited and selected by her mother Aurelia Schober Plath. The collection, *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963*, came out partly in response to the strong public reaction to the publication of *The Bell Jar* in America. Plath had kept a diary from the age of 11 until her death, doing so until her suicide. Her adult diaries, starting from her first year at Smith College in 1950, were first published in 1982 as *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Frances McCullough, with Ted Hughes as consulting editor. In 1982, when Smith College acquired Plath's remaining journals, Hughes sealed two of them until February 11, 2013, the fiftieth anniversary of Plath's death.

During the last years of his life, Hughes began working on a fuller publication of Plath's journals. In 1998, shortly before his death, he unsealed the two journals, and passed the project onto his children by Plath, Frieda and Nicholas, who passed it on to Karen V. Kukil. Kukil finished her editing in December 1999, and in 2000 Anchor Books published *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. More than half of the new volume contained was newly released material. The American author Joyce Carol Oates hailed in *American Book Review* 6 (25) the publication as a genuine literary event decrying. Hughes for his role in handling the journals:

He claims to have destroyed Plath's last journal, which
contained entries from the winter of 1962 up to her death. In the foreword of the 1982 version, he writes, "I destroyed [the last of her journals] because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival).

**The Bell Jar:**

Plath's semi-autobiographical novel was published in 1963 and in the US in 1971, which her mother wished to block. Describing the compilation of the book to her mother, she wrote in Birthday Letters (1998, 26):

> What I've done is to throw together events from my own life, fictionalizing to add colour- it's a pot boiler really, but I think it will show how isolated a person feels when he is suffering a breakdown.... I've tried to picture my world and the people in it as seen through the distorting lens of a bell jar". She described her novel as "an autobiographical apprentice work which I had to write in order to free myself from the past.

She had dated a Yale senior named Dick Norton during her junior year. Norton, upon whom the character of Buddy in *The Bell Jar* is based, contracted tuberculosis and was treated at the Ray Brook Sanatorium near Saranac Lake. While visiting Norton, Plath broke her leg skiing, an incident that was fictionalized in the novel. Hughes controversy can be seen as:

> And here you come, with a cup of tea
> Wreathed in steam.
> The blood jet is poetry,
There is no stopping it.
You hand me two children, two roses.

Plath's marriage to British poet Ted Hughes was tumultuous and is a matter of persistent speculation. As Hughes and Plath were legally married at the time of her death Hughes inherited the Plath estate including all her written work. Hughes has been condemned from some quarters for burning Plath's last journal, saying he did not want her children to have to read it. He lost another journal and an unfinished novel and instructed that a collection of Plath's papers and journals should not be released until 2013. In the reams of literary criticism and biography published after their deaths, after the release of new material, biopic, or any old-new controversy, the debate over Plath's literary estate is very often reduced to black and white, that is, whose story the readers choose. Hughes has been accused of attempting to control the estate for his own ends, although royalties from Plath's poetry were placed into a trust account for their two children, Frieda and Nicholas.

Still the subject of speculation and opprobrium on, Hughes published Birthday Letters in 1998 and, his own collection of 88 poems is about his relationship with Plath. Hughes had published very little about his experience of the marriage and subsequent suicide and the book caused a sensation, being taken as his first explicit disclosure, topping best seller charts. It was not known at the volume's release that Hughes was suffering from terminal cancer and would die
later that year. It went on to win the Forward Poetry Prize, the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry and the Whitbread Poetry. The poems, written after her death, in some cases long after, are an account of a failure; they circle round a missing centre, trying to find a reason for why Plath took her own life.

Plath was portrayed by Gwyneth Paltrow in the 2003 film *Sylvia*. Frieda Hughes, now a poet and painter, who was two years old when her mother died, was angered by the making of entertainment featuring her parents' lives. She accused the "peanut crunching" public of wanting to be titillated by the family's tragedies. In 2003 she published the poem *My Mother* in *Tatler*:

Now they want to make a film
For anyone lacking the ability
To imagine the body, head in oven,
Orphaning children
[...] they think
I should give them my mother's words
To fill the mouth of their monster,
Their Sylvia Suicide Doll.

Sylvia Plath was persistently drawn back to her notions of fantasy, specifically her preoccupation with collective myths and scripts. Her late poetry, in particular, reflects her struggle to find fantasies that work, as well as her objective of defamiliarizing traditional fantasies, leaving the reader confronting a gaping hole. In her early poetry, the 'hole' is made whole.' Her early poetry fits in with New Critical ideals, well wrought urns, self-enclosed texts, written so as to announce their literariness. Her, at times, archaic literary language offers the reader
an array of stories, enchanted landscapes, romances, and other such pleasures. But in her late poetry, there is a relatively sudden shift as Plath denies the reader the pleasures of her enclosed lyrics: she refuses to fantasize a subjective plenitude. Wholeness is not a possibility. The hypnotic spell—and source of their pleasure—of her earlier fantasies appears defined, unnatural, disturbing. The elements of her earlier fantasies have become no more than props, almost entirely artificial. One of the most important effects of this shift is that Plath's work no longer looks for, or at least no longer finds, closure in the ego, the unconscious, the landscape, the story, poetical language but for openings onto the external world. She becomes less Literary and more concerned to carry on a dialogue with cultural fantasies, histories, scripts, signs, images, traditions, and institutions that weave the self together.

In Plath's late work, for example, most obviously in “Burning the Letters” (13 Aug. 1962) “For a Fatherless Son” (26 Sept. 1962) and “Daddy” (12 Oct. 1962) --myths of traditional motherhood, femininity, marriage, and family have lost much of their power to sway the imagination. They are instead like so much defamiliarized material (signs, images, institutions, formulas, etc.) for manufacturing subjects. Nothing is normal. In such poems as “The Applicant” (11 Oct. 1962) and “The Munich Mannequins” (2-8 Jan. 1963) she satirically delivers her message by literally turning the female body into a commodity. What often
makes her work so disturbing is that the reader is made intensely aware that she is looking at human beings from the outside in, directing the reader from the culturally constructed surfaces to the human, so that one never forgets the artifice that produces subjectivity. Not surprisingly, much of Plath’s work takes as its subject how antagonisms, contra-interests, and disunity are collectively masked or suppressed. In other words she brings debate and dialogue to the supposedly harmonious unity of the family of Man. This is especially apparent in “Face Lift” (15 Feb. 1961) and “Tulips” (18 March 1961). In "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices (March 1962) where the personae are subject to the hospitals homogenizing environment. Within that unity Plath finds dissenting otherness everywhere. And yet, her work has been seen as traditional or, if political, only ambiguously so. There is a tendency to apologize for her, or to find her work complicit because it lacks a female voice. Critics often have difficulty reconciling Plath’s ambivalent attitude toward the patriarchal society in which she lived. Perhaps one problem is that her position is not simply one of clear-cut condemnation.

Steven Axelrod has captured some of this tension, arguing that Plath martyred herself to patriarchal tradition and rebelled against it; revered men's texts and defaced them........ In his essay on Sylvia Plath and Mademoiselle Magazine, Garry Leonard too reveals an ambivalent Plath, one who condemns the lessons of
the fifties culture, while at the same time buying into them:

She wishes to speak as a subject against the dehumanizing commodity culture, while at the same time preserving even improving her feminine failure as a valuable object within this same cultural.

Plath (as projected through the character of Esther in *The Bell Jar* (1963) is both attracted to and repelled by the media's images and symbols of patriarchal control, found in magazine articles and advertisements for clothing, cosmetics, and perfumes. Certainly, adopting the feminine mask gives the woman a measure of subjective satisfaction, the illusion of a 'feminine protection. As Simone de Beauvoir made it clear in the second sex (1975, XXVII):

To decline to be the other, to refuse to be a party to the deal---this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. “Garry Leonard” observation is that Plath’s heroine, Esther; desires to conform to a permanent standard of 'femininity’ even though she recognizes that to do so trivializes her status as a person.

But in essence, from my point of view, this trivializing of personhood is both the poison and the cure within Plath's work: for while the trivial" deflates the consistency, the unity of the self, it simultaneously unveils the structural materials (fantasy, signs, images, scripts, myths, institutions, social organization) that cement
the self (and social myths). Plath seizes upon these elements not only to deconstruct the self, but to bring us beyond fantasy to investigate the social machinery that manipulates personhood. In other words, she does not merely dress and undress, mask and unmask, sculpt and dissect, but rather Plath plays with the sources/elements/materials that could open and expand the dialogue with cultural power. Christopher Beach, in his ABC of *Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (1992) has placed Plath among those experimental writers who were opposed to the romantic tradition, or new critical ideals. As is the case, Plath’s late poetry is indeed a rejection of New Critical ideals of poetry, as well as the ego-centered romanticism as propagated by Harold Bloom that many feminist poets, critics, and revolutionaries ironically perpetuate. Toni Saldivar draws parallels between Harold Bloom’s theory of lignose and the form of women’s writing favoured by feminists Sâra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1989, 124):

This [feminist writing] is the creed of ego-centred romanticism that asserts its essential rightness by breaking old funs and making new ones as acts of self-generated identity.

In contrast, Plath does not invent a new utopian world vision for herself, or objectively describe, from a safe, controlling distance, the problem and explain where it is lacking. She does not organize the chaotic external world from the
interior of her mind. She does not reconcile opposites or dull conflict by celebrating ambiguity. Her aim is not to reconcile anything. On the contrary, like Christopher Beach's Poundian tradition, Plath shatters the closure of mind and literary text by taking into account the Other, ideology, language, script, role, history, myth, to create a dialogue/confrontation with those historical forces that construct the self and the text. Like the Poundians, part of Plath's poetics necessitates challenging official versions of literature, history, and nature. Part of Plath’s revolutionary style, recognized by Alicia Ostriker, Mary Lynn Bore and Susan Van Dyne, is her use of "parody and mockery, forms born out of the poet’s feelings of ear and rage" toward the dominating institutions. Susan Van Dyne points out in *Revising Life* (1993, 86) that for American feminist critics, rage in women's writing’s identified with a narrative need, a desire for a revisionary or oppositional story of female experience that counters the dominant cultural fictions.

Plath's is certainly a poetics of rage, but she does more than oppose the prevailing structure of power. More than a mirror reflection, she appropriates and foregrounds the traditional structures; in other words, her parodying has the added effect of insisting upon the artificiality of myths, fantasies, scripts that have been taken as natural. What is disturbing about Plath’s "parody and mockery is that there is no reassuring, shared 'real world against which the ridicule is cast? This is
made most explicitly clear in such poems as “The Detective” (1962), “The Courage of Shutting-up” (1962), and “The Jailer” (1962) where, as Van Dyne tells in Revising Life (89), Plath recasts marriage as a criminal act:

Imagery of domestic confinement and physical dismemberment characterize the institution that also robs the poet of her voice. But it must be added that Plath’s voice often turns this dismemberment against tradition. For her, all social elements are bits and pieces of material. For the most part, in her later work there is no transcendental standpoint (rationality, truth, nature, etc.) from which to dominate others. All that we have is a diversity of signs, images, privileged terms, some of which (‘male’, ’identity’, ’nature’, ’logic’) have gained hegemony over others (’female’, ’difference’, and ’art’, ’rhetoric’). My concern is with how Plath gets beyond the notion of true and false or even selves produced by the unconscious, through an intense engagement with the various, mainly artificial, materials that clothe the nothingness of the self.

In his book For They Know Not What They Do (1991), Slavoj Zizek reinterprets the story of The Emperor's New Catharses as:

The Emperor's New Catharses than praising the child for stating the obvious, criticizes and warns against the child's gesture as psychologically risky. The usual reading emphasizes that by stating openly that the Emperor has no clothes, we intend only to get rid of the necessary hypocrisy and pretence.
Zizek does not deny this, but rather gives us an unsettling supplement: "After the deed, when it is already too late, we suddenly notice that we got more than we bargained for." (Ibidem) For Zizek, such a liberating gesture turns out to have a catastrophic effect on the social order. The foolish innocent destroys the consistency of the "inter subjective network", what Henrik Ibsen called Vital lies, or what Wallace called. Further discussion on the critical debate over Plath’s "true' and false" selves will be taken up in chapter one. Goldman on Vital lies, in Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-exception (1983) quotes Henrik Ibsen's phrase: "The vital lie continues unrevealed, sheltered by the family’s silence, alibis, stark denial" (16-17). Wallace Stevens called supreme fictions (The Necessary, Angel, 31). Suddenly, a involved are rudely shocked into acknowledging fantasy as fantasy, fantasy as groundless.

Sylvia Plath, in her late poetry, is a bit like this story’s child in whom we find some important differences. She has a vested interest in 'the game. and in her relentless undermining of cultural fantasies (the child's role ends shortly after its comment, before it goes back to its toys; after all, what does it really care?) she keeps the revolutionary moment, the essential lack of essentialism in the social order of things, right before our eyes. Ian Hamilton comes close to this understanding of Plath when he writes in a review of “The Colossus”: “It is the impossibility of seeing things as they are, and the blank horror this provokes that
preoccupies her in these poems. There is a kind of nightmarish panic beneath their tough, enigmatic surfaces; the concrete world fragments into emblems of menace that are denoted in a tone of flat surrender”.

What Hamilton describes here as the blank horror and the impossibility of 'seeing things as they are' as exhibited in Plath’s poetry is similar to the experiences of the townspeople after they are told that the Emperor has no clothes. In creating just such a catastrophic climate, Plath reveals the negativity that is the self: that structured nothingness. Or, conversely, she shows how everything is clothing, artifice; we are mere masks. Her psychic world is harsh and ugly. Instead of making the ugly (a sign of death and fragmentation of wholeness) or the banal appear beautiful and complete (i.e., fantasy, that illusion which, as would say, supports all of our discourses, giving them consistency), or the beautiful a beautiful whole, Plath reveals the supposedly beautiful in all its ugliness as disturbingly fractured. In direct opposition to the creed of much Romantic poetry is as if she heeds Nietzsche’s words: "To experience a thing as beautiful means to experience it necessarily wrongly". Specifically, rather than showing female beauty as natural and harmonious, she exposes the 'beauty of women as something constructed, artificial, contrived, even grotesque and painfully deformed. In fact, even to suggest that, Say, Woman with a capital W, as an eternal verity, is 'constructed, a piece of clothing, must appear as an ugly as:
Much of Romantic poetry records a quest for the lost wholeness and transcendence of the imaginary, an attempt to find in nature a mirror which will reflect an image of the subject at one with itself and its context, a unity which precedes differences affront, a stain, to adherents of the 1950s' fantasy. Simone de Beauvoir argued that the males could not enjoy this privilege fully unless they believed it to be founded on the absolute and the eternal. (Ibidem, 63)

Plath in her late poetry continually rejects the notion of Woman as natural, absolute and eternal by foregrounding her as constructed fantasy. Images of fragmentation and disunity dominate Plath's portrayal of women in her late poetry. She gathers up the clothing, the elements of her construction--and reflects it back to the world as a violent negativity. Which is to Say, this construction is an *unworkable* fantasy--i.e., she is not comforted by the fantasy; the clothes fail to fit her. Its particular form depends on victimizing those who must assume their identities under its sign-the supposedly exalted figure, Woman.

Sylvia Plath’s goal is not as simplistic or reactionary as the discarding of her clothing, her objectification. Instead, she will wear it with a vengeance excessively, grotesquely-as if to undress the dress itself, make it naked, the decent appearing indecent! This means she will not allow the fantasy (Woman) to appear in its smooth aspect. The *Stafford Wives*, adapted from the best-selling novel by Ira
Levin, *is* a 1975 science-fiction movie directed by Bryan Forbes documenting the perfect' white, upper-middle class, American town (Stafford, Connecticut) where families from the outside strive to make their homes one day. Here, the women have been transformed (captured and made into machines) by the men who desire them to be traditional, dutiful, subservient, complacent wives and mothers.

Consistency, but rather she will Wear it so that its contractedness sticks out freakishly, the very image of obscenity. Plath’s situation is complex. As has been suggested, she does not go along with the idea--a guiding idea in the satire of *The Stafford Wives*--that women are pure objectification and that there is an ideal subjectivity somewhere. Despite the fact that patriarchal culture actively objectifies women, it simultaneously masks this objectification by transforming Woman into the very mitigation of care (the nurturer, the mother, the lover, the nurse--an object or commodity who is also a desiring subject whose desire is constricted to fill the lack in the male subject). Plath tells us in her late poems that Woman is more than an object that she is in the peculiar position of an object that wants and desires. Specifically, she desires to be desired which inevitably leads to the patriarchal response and her imprisonment in the opposite sexes script: 'she wants it. Consequently, the (obscene) masks Plath adopts are the ones that the culture looks upon approvingly, reassuringly and reassured. We notice her acute awareness of this situation as early as 1952 when she was just 20 years old: "Masks are the order
of the day and the least I can do is cultivating the illusion that is gay, serene, and not hollow afraid.” (204-05) The mask promises plenitude for the male, a solution to his needs, care for him and his children, But because Plath’s masks are obscene (masks appearing as masks instead of real: this is the dysfunctional fantasy), we acutely feel, instead of care/Care, her discomfort, her antagonism.- Plath flaunts her obscene masks and uses them as a weapon, an imploding bomb. The intrusion of such violence into this idyllic scene threatens the culture's illusion of naturalness; she is unnatural, and because the male looks to her for a solution for his own lack, the image he now gets back exposes just how much masculinity depends on her image.

Uncomfortably, Plath allows subjectivity and objectification to cohabit within the same skin, without rationalization; in this she stages a àrama between two terms of a dialectic which she shows literally in “In Plaster” (18 March 1961). In essence, this splitting reveals both the failure of the old fantasies (masculine/feminine, subject/object) as well as setting the scene for a more workable fantasy, as we will see in such later poems as “Lady Lazarus” (23-29 Oct. 1962) --although, I do not think she moves into the promised land of a new, workable fantasy. This is a genuinely revolutionary moment in Plath’s corpus, and Pamela Annas even goes so far as to note in her essay The Self in the World: The Social Context of Sylvia Plath's Late Poems (1980 P.33) that the position of the
speaker in some of Plath’s poems and fiction is close to that of the Marxist conception of the proletariat as discussed first by Georg Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness* (1922) and later by Fredric Jameson in *Marxism –and Form* (1971). Annas explains: "Sylvia Plath has this dialectical awareness of self as both subject and object in particular relation to the society in which she lived" (35). For Lukacs, this moment of recognition equaled a philosophical Nyman in which the subject finally coincided with the object, a Western dream since Platols dialectics. For Lukacs, this coincidence would fuel the revolution; it was to be a moment of empowerment. But while agreeing that the dialectical moment exists in Plath's work, what is perhaps most significant about her is that she constantly distances herself from any utopian vision. She refuses to patch' things up (in this case, Lukacs's vision of a whole, communist society, a radical fantasy of social unity-a fantasy which Lukacs himself later abandoned and criticized). She is more negative than Lukacs in that she maintains the fact of artificiality. Plath documents the failure of the fantasy and leaves us with no resolution: an impossible position, but one that takes us to the inevitable 'social contractedness of the self. Her concern is with the outside world, how it shapes the self. It is from this historicized self that a new step can be taken.

In a more positive sense, Plath does seek out knowledge. Her notion of the subject allows for’ an embracement of the female body, its objectification, and a
study of the way it has been made or written in order to learn, read and *mite room* it. This learning enacts an archaeology of the body, as she recognizes her' body as object and then gains knowledge by retracing the seams. It is as if Plath puts up for scrutiny the stitches that pierced the woman's body, the linguistic-ideological threads that bind her, the castration of the female tongue, and the constricting insertion of the female body within the family.

The result is a poetry that is sometimes 'campy'. Plath flaunts her objectification, takes it as her own and reversely exaggerates it in a way that, at the very least, borders on camp. This is again another way of making us aware of the external self, and the self as constructed artifice, mere clothing. According to Susan Sontag in *Against Interpretation* (1961), “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. Somehow, attractive and offensive, Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism… That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization"(Ibidem, 279). Camp "takes on overtones of the acute, the esoteric and the perverse” (Ibidem, 281). Finally to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-Role. Role-playing, exaggeration, artifice, perversion: these, too, characterize such conspicuous Plath subjects as Lady Lazarus, for example. Lady Lazarus flagrant, ostentatious, campy exhibition foregrounds her objectified condition, while it simultaneously exposes a powerful, emerging subjectivity
(which is, in part, the subject of chapter four) of this thesis. The problem is that this favouring of the camp in her poetry is to express personal persecution as well as vengeance that have caused some Plath readers to question her legitimacy as a significant poet, especially when humour is not even acknowledged by these critics as part of her poetic style. (She significantly called the bitterest of her poems a distinguishing aspect of camp). Plath has been accused of emotionalism, of drawing inappropriate parallels (specifically between herself and the persecuted Jew during the Holocaust-a symbol of the ultimate victim), and of being solipsistic with solipsists’ implications of madness in a more general sense. The passionate excess which underscores her poetry has provoked much of the hostile criticism she has received. The problem is that excess, by definition, goes beyond unity, order and wholeness; and the ideal of unity, order and wholeness is considered a necessary element of a Jacqueline Rose, in her book The Haunting of Sylvia Plath (1992), cites a category of Plath critics who read her work as pathology: at best "something we should both admire and avoid. Some of the most prominent members of this camp include Edward Butscher, Irving Howe, Stephen Spender, Anne Stevenson, Hugh Kenner, Denis Donoghue, avid Holbrook, Joyce Carol Oates and Harold Bloom. Rose argues that Plath’s criticism is divided between this group and an opposing feminist camp which sees Plath’s inner nature as representative. It is apt to situate Lynda Bundtzen, Judith Kroll, Susan Van Dyne,
Lynda Wagner, Alicia Ostriker, Pamela Armas, Mary Lynn Broe, Marjorie Perloff, Sandra Gilbert, Suzanne Juhasz, Rochelle Ratner and, for all intents and purposes, Jacqueline Rose herself as part of this latter group. Good poem (all of which will be discussed more fully in this chapter). Overstatement is an essential part of Plath's technique. By taking Woman to an extreme she displays a personality structure that demonstrates the inadequacy of the form. Her presentation of the “feminine fails smoothly and becomes obscene, surreal and freakish”. Moreover, as Susan Sontag argued, “camp is at its best when dead serious, unconscious, and unintentional” (282). However Plath does not necessarily intend to be campy as such. Rather she is supersensitive to, or conscious of, the constructedness and incompleteness of people, specifically women. Her attempt at playing out the feminine script does not crone naturally; she imitates symbols that lack meaning for her. She fails to experience herself as unified and, instead, realizes for us herself as scripted, a prepackaged discourse. It is for this reason that Plath’s poetry is mutinous. Her subjects may not be obviously revolutionary; nonetheless, Plath is revolutionary in demonstrating the obsolescence of the feminine image. In this sense, she may be aligned with the second wave of feminism stemming from Simone de Beauvoir who, as announced in The Second Sex: “is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267). Plath discloses a personality in her book Contemporary Feminist Thought (1983), Hester Eisenstein outlines the history of contemporary feminism from the
1970s through to the early 1980s. The first structure which demonstrates the inadequacy of the form we have come to know as Woman wave of feminism sought to emancipate women legally, whereas the second wave of feminism interrogated women’s psychological subordination. As documented in *Rate Millet's book Sexual Politics (1970)*, first wave feminism began with the campaign for women’s rights that arose out of the abolition of slavery and extended to the women’s suffrage movement in the United States in 1920. According to Eisenstein, Simone de Beauvoir laid the foundation for the powerful second phase of the debate which advocated that the socially constructed differences between the sexes were judged to be the chief source of female oppression. In Beauvoir’s words humanity is male and man.-defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. As a solution to women’s secondary status, Kate Millet, Shulmith Firestone and others advocated the replacement of gender polarization with some form of rouging. But the implications were disturbing for many. Joan Didion, commented:

All one's actual apprehension of what it is like to be a woman, the irreconcilable difference of it-- that sense of living one's deepest life udometer, that dark involvement with blood and birth and death--could now be declared invalid, unnecessary, one never fell at all. Perhaps in consequence, about the middle of the 1970s there was a shift in the terms of the debate set by Beauvoir and extended by the early writers of
the second wave. Feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow rejected androgyny in favour of a woman-centred perspective: Instead of seeking to minimize the polarization between masculine and feminine it sought to isolate and to define those aspects of female experience that were potential sources of strength and power for women… (Xiii)

Rather than being seen as a hindrance, female difference was celebrated as a source of women's liberation. But in some versions of this new perspective held by Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin, biological determinism uncomfortably replaced the social construction of gender: men by definition were considered corrupt, while women were seen as intrinsically morally superior.

It is arguable that Plath’s late poems break from her earlier conformist style which seems to support cultural format. She moves from a preoccupation with the self to a larger formative symbolic system that situates that self in the social context.

Nevertheless, critics fail to take seriously Plath’s collective significance and social critique. Rather, they tend to limit their readings to individual psychological critiques. Critics desiring normalcy' situate the poem's chaos in the individual rather than in the world where it would be regarded as a collective problem. The intended motive herein is to shift the focus from recovering individualism or self-actualization to critiquing the formative fields of the social which rules subjectivity. To resituate the private and the individual subject within the public
world will be the objective. Plath's poems insist on returning us to the external world. It’s just this refusal to find refuge in traditional categories of individualism that differentiates Plath from so many of her contemporaries. Whereas the Confessional and lyrical poets look at how the psyche shapes the external world, Plath works to the reverse, exposing how the outside world shapes the self. In chapter second the focus will be on Plath's poems as instances of a dialogic process--not as dialogue between nature and culture, but between the subjects as a culturally created artifact and collective fantasies. Her poem Plaster shows various sources of dialogue that crone to determine the self. It exposes’ in particular the self's repression and the fellow self's right to speak its difference; in other words it dramatizes how social myths form emotional and moral responses.

Plath turns the singularity of the -whitewalls and the singularity of the fly fellow’s If into collectivities which emphasize the larger social context In, “Three Women”, the monotonous, white, Law hospital, inhabited by working, homogenous figures (nurses, doctors) is pitted against the protruding bodies of three pregnant women. The result is a menagerie of voices. The women at times are defined by their great shape; while at other times they are flattened into distinction. But despite their desire to conform, they are always porous bodies signifying shifting identities threatening the surrounding illusions of self-containment. This instability of body is mirrored in the narrative of A Birthday Present (30 Sept. 1962) where the poem’s continual questions and lack of solid ego identifications create disorienting effect. The incomprehensibility of “A Birthday Present”, like of Ezra Pound's poetry, highlights the signified over the
signifier. It points up the poems external make-up, its constructedness and artificiality. It is this general focuses on the external which makes Plath more experimental as compared to her (confessional) contemporaries.

Plath’s controversial method of turning the private and the individual into public, collective, and historical spectacles in poems such as “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus”. Plath gives us an extreme attempt at self-possession by a woman who has lost her body to a non-communal, rationalized society. In the Bee poems “The Bee Meeting” (3 Oct. 1962), “The Arrival of the Bee Box” (4 Oct. 1962), “Sting” (6 Oct. 1962), “The Swarm” (7 Oct. 1962), “Wintering” (Oct. 1962) and in “The Rabbit Catcher” (21 May 1962), Plath shows the invisibility of social forces and the crushing effects of that invisibility, especially on women who have been locked, like the-bees and the rabbits, in the privacy of the home/hive/trap. In these poems, Plath shows culture and nature not in opposition, but as sliding into each other. The woman, like a queen bee, desires freedom and independence from the society/hive, yet is lost, if not dead, without it.

What have to be known by Plath critics as the Bee poems are about Sylvia Plath's beekeeping experiences at her cottage in Devon where she lived with Ted Hughes (Van Dyne, More Terrible 154). Critics do not include “The Bee keepers Daughter” (1959) among the bee poems since it was written three years earlier.

Plath’s poetry does not demonstrate so much the crushing of the authentic or "real self by the patriarchal, as it shows the role of (social) fantasy in the construction of the subject”. Plath abandons the lyric's feel good conclusion, and explores the terms male and female without having to find a fantasy that masks the antagonism. Even though Plath’s lyrical style, whether in her earlier or later poetry,
is most often refined and polished, the late poems effect a sense of ugliness--fragmentation, disorder, and pain. Liz Yorke in her book Impertinent Voices (1991, 90) rightly maintains:

Sylvia Plath did not find any material or symbolic...restitution to counter the situation she found herself in. Neither did she, finally, find a sufficient mythic mode of displacing the feminine model, that is, the male projections, the patriarchal scene of representation.

The confessional, occasional, short, lyrical poem has been, in retrospect, particularly singled out for its preoccupation with the void and the need to fill it. On the one hand, this poetry is intensely aware of the hole, of the subject as lack. As Mark Bracher writes in his brilliant rewriting of Lacan in The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A study of Themes (1989, 68):

Lyric poetry often presents a persona in the position of the divided subject; but too often this hole is patched up at an absurd, aesthetic level, 'providing master signifiers that promise to close up the division.

If truth is beauty, ugliness is the big bad other: bits and pieces, fragmentation, discord- and dismemberment, everything that threatens the self's sense of unity. Furthermore, even if Plath does not provide a solution or a resolution, she sets the scene for it by presenting the female subject as fragmented, as porous, and as collective; she offers dimension and difference to counter the monotony and monologic of the world she inhabits. Ultimately, Plath demonstrates in her writing that she cannot be contained (as a Woman). She directs the inner, and the familial outward, turning the personal into a cultural confession.
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