Conclusion

I: Beneath the Masks One Must Be Something

In another BBC recording introducing a reading of poetry, Plath refers to her use of the "storehouse" of archetypes found in psychoanalysis; images that acted as "masks" but in fact belied what Plath herself called the "real" things (Strangeways 162). Plath's masks, the masks of psychoanalysis, (inherited from the modernist tradition), are designed to make less "terrible" the appearance of the pained psyche of the speaker ('Stings', CP 215). "Scar in the sky, red comet": pain accompanies the emergence of the female muse and her psyche. Like Woolf's 'Angel in the house', she has been stifled too long, and her emergence must, inevitably, include some form of distortion. In the case of Plath, this distortion is pain, a pain rooted in the contortion of the mid-twentieth century female self. If we return to the Plath juvenilia we find that the roles presented to a young woman of the post-war generation are not dissimilar from those presented to the previous generation. 'Cinderella' (CP 303-4), 'To Eva Descending the Stair' (CP 303), 'Sonnet to Eva' (CP 304-5), 'Aerialist' (CP 331-2), 'Female Author' (CP 301), 'Family Reunion' (CP 300-1), these poems reveal the young Plath shut up tight in forms of womanhood designed to preserve the type of femininity admired since Woolf's generation. Her predecessors from the previous generation, Teasdale, and Millay, echo through these early poems. In 'Female Author' we hear the voice of these predecessors creep through in lines designed to satirise:

she lies on cushions curled

And occasionally nibbles a bonbon of sin.
Prim, pink-breasted, feminine, she nurses
Chocolate fancies in rose-papered rooms
Where polished highboys whisper creaking nurses
And hothouse roses shed immortal blooms . . .

She muses on the odor, sweet and sick,
Of festering gardenias in a crypt (CP 301).

The "prim, pink-breasted, feminine" environment of the 'lady-author' is still the designation in Plath's young mind, of any would-be female writer. The fact that she later turns on this designation as something abhorrent - what she calls in a letter to her mother "the quailing and whining" of Teasdale's poetry and other female "scribblings") - does not rid her of its legacy (LH 277). As a female born in the 1930's, an adolescent in the 1940's and an emerging young woman of the 1950's, the setting of Plath's confinement is altered. She is no longer the reclining Edwardian lady "prim, pink-breasted, feminine" - the war has seen to that - but, as a woman, she is still kept by traditions of femininity that confine her to socially prescribed roles: the housewife, mother, wife before her personally chosen role of 'writer'. These traditions of femininity lead to, what Richard Ohmann has called, "the illness story" an "experience of personal crisis somewhere in the passage from youth to maturity" with Plath herself the mimesis of her protagonist, Esther Greenwood (Ohmann 83). The process of socialisation that involves the young woman in a series of social masks indirectly leads to a crisis of identity and existence. These social roles - wife, housewife, mother - are indivisible from the personal self. Through a
tug-o-war process with these roles the personal self begins to fracture and eventually shatters. As Ohmann states, the ideal selfhood "calls for a self that is complete, integral, unique, but in actual living one must be something, and somebody, and definitions of "somebody" already exist in a complete array provided by that very social and economic system that one has wished to transcend". Society threatens to pull apart the individual who fails to find an integral adult self, who fails to make the transition to one of its suitably deemed social roles (83). To a further degree, if an individual does not conform and chooses to opt out of the set of roles available to him or her, then society can label that individual as 'ill' or, at least, 'deviant', as we have seen in the case of Anne Parsons. Like Parsons, Esther's deviancy takes the form of breakdown, which, in the eyes of society, becomes synonymous with 'illness'. Esther becomes a true miscreant when, standing on the roof of the Amazon Hotel, she discards the uniforms of her prescribed social roles. Like Holden Caulfield of Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, she becomes a miscreant, literally, a disbeliever, and a heretic of the social formula.

In 'Totem', the speaker refers to the self as a series of "suitcases/ Out of which the same self unfolds like a suit" (CP 264). This self, she implies, is merely 'kept', as the lady-author of 'Female Author' is 'kept' in "rose-papered rooms". The self of 'Totem' is a social functionary who appears and disappears according to the occasion. For this self, "there is no terminus", only the endless repetition of unfolding and refolding, an endless process of social vesting and unvesting. The self then, as defined by society is a series of "suits", and this series of suits forms an integral part of the authentic self that must live alongside its societal self. By moving toward breakdown, Esther is opting out of the social roles prepared for her, stepping out from the series of outfits that have been tailored to fit. She is, in fact, opting out of society altogether. Marriage, one of the
"suits" designed to fit is something she now believes will "brainwash" her, make her "numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state" (BJ 81). Marriage is an assault on the self, and so through breakdown she shuns the society that has made claims on her. In a similar vein, Salinger's fifties heroine, Franny Glass, finds an alternative to the stifling conformity of her class through religion and its channels of purification. The Fat Lady is a fitting idol; as a social misfit herself, she is an apt object of worship for Franny - in search of an alternative to social prescriptions. If we remember Franny is in search of an alternative to social prescriptions. The Fat Lady is, herself, one of the misfits of society, and therefore, an apt object of worship. The 'Jesus Prayer' becomes her mantra as a means of access to that alternative. Salinger's novel presents another version of the "illness story" and like Plath's version of this story, the heroine comes round in the end, back to society where she slips into the role prepared for her - ironically, as an actress (Ohmann 85). The attempt to find a personal alternative for the self, then, ends in failure. The move towards breakdown is futile: both Esther and Franny are confronted with the singularity of their choice, bringing them full-circle back to the social fold with nothing gained except a great deal of personal sorrow. The "illness story" is the story of social ills (what Ohmann calls "social contradictions") transmitted to the personal level with the individual struggling to undo these ills within him/her self. The attempt is reminiscent of a teenage tantrum, a battle of wills against paternal authority, and indeed, in the eyes of a patriarchal society, this is the verdict.

The personal voice, obliterated by social consensus, goes underground. Driven by need, the literature of the personal continues its twentieth century unveiling. In the tradition of Whitman - "Who touches this touches a man . . . . From behind the screen where I hid I advance
personally solely to you" (Whitman 391) and Carlos Williams - "I am lonely, lonely. / I was born to be lonely, / I am best so!" (Williams 148) - emerges the voice of the 'confessional' poets. As Diane Wakoski has written, "it is not autobiography [these poets] are writing, but [their] life [they] are using in order to write about life as other people experience it too . . ." What Wakoski implies is that poets such as Plath must write in order that others may know they are not alone. She concludes: "The poet, then, is a person willing to see his life as more than itself and his autobiographical technique, ironically, should leave autobiography behind" (Wakoski 3-5).

Wakoski's thesis presumes that the tradition of public poetry continues with the personal genre - only in a less rarefied form. A sense of a wider audience than the self is still present, but the forum is more intimate.

The poet's agenda, however, is altered. Wagner-Martin traces the emergence of the personal voice to the turn of the twentieth century when poets such as Frost began writing about the colloquial minutiae of life, "farmer's mending a wall instead of international relations", or a poet such as Vincent Millay began to voice personal feelings on public events (Wagner-Martin 108). This turn toward the internal world began with erosion of the sense of an absolute external self, a self attached to the events of the outside world. In its place a new sense of self began to emerge, following the patterns of colloquial speech, the voice of the "I". Writers such as Joyce through the characters of Molly and Harold Bloom entered the intensely private, often crude world of the individual. In America, the liberation of the "I" voice also took the form of the colloquial with Whitman's easy, rolling colloquial style, the essence of which reflected the expansive, unbounded nature of the American landscape. Whitman's familiar, panegyric style captured the essence of American democratic principles of which self-expression and freedom is
the core. From a more private place, the poetry of Emily Dickinson gave voice to the particular restraints of the female ontology. Her language is the language of the private self, an idiosyncratic language that exposes an existence entirely separate from the social self: a self hitherto hidden from the public eye. Yet, Dickinson's voice is addressed to that same public world; it is projected for the attention of the public world outwards as an attempt to bridge the gap between the private and the public. She writes: "This is my letter to the World/ That never wrote to Me" (Dickinson 211). Society, the public sphere, does not acknowledge the personal life, for which many women like Dickinson, without much engagement or purpose in the public sphere, was life. Dickinson herself is aware of the ontological gap between her own existence and the existence of the world beyond, and her poetry is a public declaration of the private world that contains her. In effect, her poetry is a request for the world to acknowledge her peculiar existence.

**Plath's Expressionism**

The so-called 'confessional' style of poetry that emerged from the post-war climate marks an acceleration of the personal voice toward a greater degree of candour. For some critics, including M.L. Rosenthal whose term 'confessional' reeks of censorship, this newly found candour was too much, constituting an affront to the restraint of the modernist tradition. For Plath, the "very personal emotional experiences" of the poet were not permitted to bubble messily over and drown the whole poem in an excess of emotion. Rather, as a poet she specified "control" of such intense emotion, suggesting that the true skill of the poet lay in his/her manipulation of those experiences (Plath, 1975). The intense experiences shed by her life fed her
art; an instinct for the manipulation of those experiences provided the form of her art, channelling the anarchy of her emotion into the technical structures of her poetry. Diane Wakoski would view Plath's choice of form as an extension of the content of her poems. Writing in Sparrow 3, December 1972, Wakoski celebrates the indivisibility of form from content with the exploratory piece, "Form is an Extension Of Content". She poses the question:

Do we choose the symbols of our lives
and then write the poems?

Or do the poems write our lives
in ink that stains more than the fingers? (3)

Form begets content, and vice-versa, but in the case of Sylvia Plath naked self-exposure does not mean a naivety of style; rather, self-exposure allows for experimentation. The colloquial voice rips through into a realm from which it had previously been barred. In Plath's later poems a colloquial style fuses with the potent imagery of her psyche. The Ariel poems are the end of what her mother describes in Letters Home as a series of personalities "she encountered and tried on, later to discard" (LH 184). By the time she was writing Ariel, Plath had fused all these personalities together to suit the purpose of her poetry. What we hear in Ariel is a culmination of these multiple personalities, a one-woman show of several voices. The "very personal emotional experiences" of Plath, moulded around the poetry of Lowell and Sexton, are part of the development of the "I" voice in twentieth century literature. Plath declares her poems to emerge "out of the sensuous and emotional experiences [she has]" (Plath, 1975). Yet, even the personal can become another mask, an artifice, and a convention. In the case of Plath, it is a role-play, the
acting out of a series of psychic characters. The Plathean opus is both a literary body - a body of words, the text - and a psychic body - a panoply of other 'selves' that is also theatre. This theatre of the mind enables Plath the woman and Plath the writer to wrest herself from the dualities of her acculturated self. Ironically, the textual "I" offers the means of transcending the "I" of the symbolic/social order - of which language itself is the cornerstone. Thus, through language, by means of the signifying textual "I", Plath imposes upon her texts an imprint of self that is beyond cultural dictates, cultural duplicities.

'Daddy' is the final insurrection of the textual self in which the final lines of the poem declare the speaker's disassociation from the symbolic: "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (CP 224). The trope of communication, "the black telephone's off at the root/ the voices just can't worm through", conflated, metonymically, with the speaker's identity or 'roots', is now violently 'uprooted'. The persona of 'Daddy' is reduced, textually, to the second person pronoun - a deliberate act of deflation. This act of textual disempowerment is all part of the speaker's process of self-disentanglement from her symbiotic relationship with the 'Other'. As Steven Gould Axelrod has noted, Plath's technique is one of "figuring, disfiguring, and refiguring", the male 'other' that defines her, and so the final tropes of 'Daddy' involve a violent disfiguring of the tropes of power. The "bag full of God" that was the male 'other' "can lie back now"; 'Daddy', the figurative altar-piece ("marble-heavy") is now disembodied, disfigured in a ritual of linguistic, tropetic assault. The ritualistic, sadistic 'killing' of the male 'Other' is an essential part of the process of refiguring and reconfiguring of the female self. The male figure, the male culture responsible for her configuration has been destroyed, and the process of reconfiguration begins again.
III: A Duplicitive Form of Womanhood

We confront again and again, in the body of Plath's writing, a form of womanhood that typifies an era, a formula that breeds the stereotypical characters of her prose and the conflicting personae of her poetry. Characters such as Ellen in her story, 'Day of Success', represent an entire brand of women familiar to Plath's generation, who, while "waiting for the water to boil", ponder the small thrill of making household sacrifices and exchanging "budget recipes" with other wives whose husbands were "unsalaried idealists" (JP 83). Ellen is the frustrated wife, is jealous of her husband's success, and suffers from a lack of creative and personal fulfilment. Plath's stories are filled with such women, all suffering with the same malaise. There is Sadie of 'The Fifty-Ninth Bear' with "her simple pagan enthusiasms, her inability to argue in terms of anything but her immediate emotions . . . ". As her husband Norton observes, these traits in a woman are "too flimsy, too gossamer a stuff to survive" the legacy of the male, to emerge "from under the wings of his guardianship" (JP 111). The male guardian (in the case of Sadie, her husband Norton) is responsible for his female charge, without which, this "gossamer" form of woman would disintegrate. The contingent position of the woman emerges again and again in Plath's body of writing, with her sense of self always defined in relation to the male. The formula of the jealous wife, eclipsed by the creative or visionary power of her husband, is the prescient type of her prose. Agnes Higgins of 'The Wishing Box' (JP 213-220) is jealous of her husband's sophisticated, Blakean dreams. Through his dreams, Harold acts out a grandiose wish-fulfilment of the creative genius: "I was just beginning to play the Emperor Concerto," he tells his wife.
Harold, unlike his wife, achieves his private fantasy of the genius through dreams that resemble "meticulous works of art" (JP: 214). Agnes, on the other hand, suffers from a depleted and infertile dream world: "At what age had those benevolent painted dream worlds [of her childhood] ousted her?" (JP 215).

In her poetry, this theme continues. In poems such as 'The Jailer' (CP 226) and 'Stopped Dead' (CP 230), the female speaker vents her virulence against the male presence that defines her:

My night sweats grease his breakfast plate.

The same placard of blue fog is wheeled into position

With all the same trees and headstones.

Is that all he can come up with,

The rattler of keys? (CP 226)

The women of these poems, like the prose, are raging against their existence:

Its violent. We're here on a visit,

With a goddam baby screaming off somewhere.

There's always a bloody baby in the air.

I'd call it a sunset, but

Whoever heard a sunset yowl like that? (CP 230)
The relations between the male progenitor and the frustrated, captured female, are at boiling point. The situation turns toward the tragic with the female speaker toying with the idea of herself as a vengeful Hamlet. The male then, becomes the focus for the speaker's frustration, literally, 'the jailer' of her fully realised self that has 'stopped dead'. The model of womanhood swallowed by Plath's female voices is a dupe, leading only to a dead-end. The years of preparation under the tutelage of women like her mother whose Disney-dream of femininity - "the flowers and bluebirds that never were/ Never, never, found anywhere" translates in real terms to the existence of the housewife, mother and wife, the frustrated heroine of unfulfilled, private fantasies. Plath presents women strangled by their culture, reduced to the two-dimensional cutouts of their familial roles. The post-war boom of abundance and good living at home has not yielded its promises. These women are themselves perpetuating the propaganda of the 1950's for whom the liberation of the 1960's has not yet arrived.

As a reversal of the form of womanhood reflected in her prose, poems such as 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus' can be seen as revenge poems that undo the power of the social, male order. The voice of the suffering female, martyr to the memory of the idolised male, her father, turns her grief into vengeful anger. The pain of the female voice merges with a chorus of provocateurs, a taunting, tormenting crowd who now makes a spectacle of the memory of the father:

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 (CP 224).
The hate and accusation of the female toward the male idol resembles the ritual of the matriarchal goddess whose love for her consort is equal to her disgust, and in a bout of fury chooses to destroy him. Thus, the form of womanhood that defined women such as Ellen and Nancy, and by which Plath was also defined, is shattered in a ritual of orgiastic rage. The assertion of female power of 'Lady Lazarus' is the final triumphant flourish: "Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air" (CP 247). The feeble protestations of the unhappy wife "I'm homespun, obsolete as last year's hemline" (JP 86), are drowned in the lurid rage of the 'Lady Lazarus' persona.

The Necessity of Speech

The virulence of 'Lady Lazarus' is a direct response to the position of the acculturated female who finds herself without speech, and therefore, without power. Speech and the lack thereof is a persistent theme in the Plathian corpus. Underlying the anxiety of a wordless or speechless ontology is the knowledge that lyrics, metaphor, the poetic word itself are the designated property of the male 'Other' (Axelrod 13). The speaker of 'Daddy' confesses that she "could hardly speak" (CP 223), and that her relationship with the male other operates upon a syllogism of speechlessness. While the male may speak, the female is mute; furthermore, her attempts at speech are impaired by a lack of space or appropriate forum for which to air her voice. For the female to have an audience, some public space must be designated. The speaker of 'Daddy' informs us that her words are "stuck in a barb wire snare": confined, to non-public space, the female cannot win for herself an audience for her words. In 'Munich Mannequins' (CP 263)
the anxiety of "voicelessness" closes the poem. The speechless snow is the metaphor for the anxiety of the female speaker, whose 'voiceless' condition is congenital to her domestic locus. Images of absence and silence engulf the speaker, and a sense of the dangerous void of the domestic space, sinister in its intentions toward the female self. The greatest danger is the threat of extinction, of self-erasure that comes with the domestic space. It is a space surrounded by a dangerous silence. As in 'Daddy' the trope of communication - the sinister "black phones on hooks" - is conflated with non-communication and non-being. The identity of the speaker, by definition, depends on communication - speech. An image of the German enemy indicates, metonymically, the presence of the 'other', which, unlike the speaker, has access to communication and speech. Ironically, those who can speak are "slumbering in their bottomless Stolz". The silence of the male 'other' eats away, metaphorically, at the vocal space of the female. The silence of the "black phones" belies the threat of that consumption; indeed, the act of consumption itself is surrounded by silence; only the 'voiceless' presence of the snow is 'heard', "glittering and digesting" the silent space of the silenced speaker. 'Munich Mannequins' prefigures the erasure of the female voice within the domestic locus. Within this locus, the "blood flood" that is "poetry" ('Kindness', CP 270) cannot be heard. An alternative space for the female voice must be found.

"I" must have Space

That much needed space becomes the space of the text, in the words of Michel Foucault "the space in which it is dispersed [the text] and the time in which it unfolds" ("What is an Author", Rabinow 104). Space is provided for the female voice within the time-space dimensions
of the text itself. The "voicelessness" of the female speaker can be overcome upon the sounding 
board of the text; within what Foucault calls "the gaps and breaches" of the text itself - those 
"openings" suggesting an absence of authorial presence - can offer themselves as a place/space 
for the female voice to be heard (104). Within the text, the voice of Foucault's "silent 
determinations" - hinted at in the image of "glittering and digesting" phones, ('Munich 
Mannequins', CP 263) in the "indefatigable hoof-taps" of the words themselves upon the page 
('Words' CP 270) - those quashed, subterranean sounds and images of the female imagination - 
will rise to the surface of the text. The "I" of the female speaker, unlike the authorial "I" does not 
have a name - a cultural identity - and therefore, her "speech" is "immediately consumable" 
(107). The "I" of 'Munich Mannequins' is not necessarily the "I" of Sylvia Plath, the poet; but she 
is a voice, with a speech, and that speech is 'heard' by dint of her association with the authorial 
"I". The cultural "status" that Foucault argues is attached to the "name" of the author, is not 
attached to the anonymous female voice; but because the author herself has some status, then the 
female voice must also. Following Foucault's argument, this voice, by dint of its status is a 
"speech" given by the "I" of the author, "that must be received in a certain mode" - that is to say, 
a cultural mode (as the author, by dint of her authorial status, has also, a cultural status (107)). 
The female voice, the female speaker of Plath's oeuvre must be granted some place within her 
culture where she can be heard. That place, is the body of the text - whether it be in the Journals, 
Letters, poetry or prose of the Plathean corpus. The "indefatigable hoof-taps", that is the speech 
of the female voice is contained within the temporal dimensions of the text.

The fear of "voicelessness" however, drives Sylvia Plath, the author, and the woman, 
toward the cultural status of the author-persona. This persona is designed to enhance the
marketability of herself as "author", and her "works" as commodities to be sold. In her Journals Plath writes repeatedly of her sense of failure, both as a writer and as a woman: "Incompetence sickens me to scorn, disgusts me, and I am a bungler, who has taken a bad turn in fortune - rejected by an adult world, part of nothing - of neither an external career of Ted's . . . nor a career of my own . . . nor part of motherhood . . . (J 251). The fear of being marginalized drives Plath, as a female author, toward the market of what she calls "the slicks", the populist market of female writers embodied by Esther's benefactor, Philomena Guinea. These female writers perpetuate the myth of the female as a simple, naive creature whose only real need in life is romance and babies, both of which can be satisfied by the possession of a male. Whilst aware of the horrors of what she calls "the American dream of a home and children" with its air of pressure: expectancy of conformity", Plath, like most women of her generation, is terrified of being left out in the cold. In terms of a writer, she courts the attention of the populist literary establishment; as a woman, she is anxious to gain a husband, home and children to ensure her social status. In both cases she is, as she describes to her mother, "at war with her unconscious" (J 222).

Plath's best-selling novel, The Bell Jar is the story of a young woman's coming of age within the context of duplicitous and contradictory social regulations. Jacqueline Rose has seen The Bell Jar as "the coming-into-being of a writer across the fragments of contemporary cultural life" in which the figure of the populist female writer appears as the source of the young woman's 'oppression' and 'generation' (Rose 186). Women, then, as ambassadors of the male majority, are responsible for reinforcing the unhealthy and unattainable cultural ideals that lead to Esther's breakdown. As Esther prepares to re-emerge into the social foray from the twilight zone of the
sanatorium, she observes the "myopic, spinsterish, effaced" of the hospital librarian, "an alumna of the asylum herself" and concludes that such a specimen of womanhood was unlikely to be "whole and well". "Whole and well" herself, according to the judgement of the hospital authorities, the hallmark of Esther's health is her re-adoption of social regulations, including a model of womanhood in which marriage is the cornerstone. Marriage, then, must be something Esther actively seeks in order to maintain her 'health', her social membership. 'The Bell Jar' with its "stifling distortions" is a personal crisis of cultural dislocation, a state of reaction and rejection of societal norms, and a psychic retreat from those norms into the realm of breakdown.

Plath's prose unhinges the bulwark of American absolutism through the unravelling mind of a young woman for whom the American dream is a huge dupe. Concurrent with Esther knowing "there is something wrong" with her state of mind is the realisation that there is "something wrong" with the whole American formula of supremacy and infallibility, a sense of the entire culture "moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo"(3). The Bell Jar unravels what Janet Malcolm has termed the 'cultural duplicity' of the America of the 1950's through the failing struggle of a young woman's process of acculturation. As a novel, it contradicts the formula of Plath's other prose, waiving the style of the "slicks" she was so anxious to replicate. In this sense, it is a more honest account of the impossible cultural standards of the day. What surfaces from Esther's breakdown is an entire culture of fear strung together like a trail of littered symbols: the Rosenberg execution, the image of a cadaver in a hospital, Buddy Willard, dead foetuses, the cruelty and indifference of the cat-like girl in the editorial office. These images float like scum to the surface of Esther's mind as sordid remnants of a self-righteous culture whose principal tenets are prejudice, cruelty and greed. Esther experiences the
heinous unaccountability of the American conscience whose strength is the consequence of mass ignorance. The culture of "the fearful, double-faced fifties", in the words of Janet Malcolm, generates a culture of blind ignorance and mass conformity as a means of protection from the more sordid reality of American power. Malcolm writes: "we lied to our parents and we lied to each other and we lied to ourselves, so addicted to deception we had become. We were an uneasy, shifty-eyed generation" (Malcolm 16). In *Letters Home*, within her stories and, at times, within the safety of her *Journals*, Plath allows herself to be a willing agent of this culture. The cultural deception of the apple-pie happy young woman, after all, is easier to maintain than its darker double.

"I Am, I Am, I Am: The Process of Self-Fashioning"

In the light of her husband's comment that "Sylvia Plath was a person of many masks, both in her personal life and in her writings", we are led to conclude that the whole body of Plath's writing, including the final *Ariel* poems, are all part of the poet's process of self-fashioning. The body of her work writhes with these varying and conflicting personae, the result of both the cultural forms of her time and personal psychic tropes. The *Journals*, prose and poetry are configured toward the search for a self within the maze of cultural and personal myths they embody. Her *Letters Home*, however, represent a version of the cultural myths of her time, a carefully edited account of her true thoughts and feelings reserved for her *Journals*. Her mother, the principal recipient of her letters, embodies the pervading cultural values of the era, or so Plath, in her earnest attempts to satisfy those values, believes. Like a good pupil, Plath endorses the values of her institution in her letters. Her prose further reflects her desire for allegiance to
popular culture, requiring conformity to the style of popular women's magazines. As she wrote to her mother, "I'll never get anywhere if I just write one or two stories and never streamline them for a particular market. I want to hit the *The New Yorker* in poetry and the *Ladies Home Journal* in stories, and so I must study the magazines the way I did *Seventeen* (LH 107). Her stories are a further example of her complicity with this culture.

These personal and cultural myths are the contingent forces in her writing, the springboard toward the pursuit of an original female voice. The search for self as 'author' involves an interplay of fictive personalities; something Plath revels in. This is all part of the theatre of language - what Bakhtin has recognised as the "many social voices" that "construct both selves and characters-as-selves" - whose "interplay" is a manifestation of the historical and cultural fashioning of the self (Bauer 709). Plath's textual voices engage in a fluid dialogue between themselves, opening up the boundaries of the text to both alternative discourses and alternative versions of themselves. These alternatives, as Dale Bauer notes, "violate" the prescribed code of the dominant language of the text, a language that reflects the dominance of the social and patriarchal code itself (Bauer 710); thus, Plath's "dialogism" or polyphony is a form of discourse aimed at fashioning an alternative vision of the self. Within the junctures of the text, within the space between dialogue, a new self may be fashioned.

The hugely charismatic poetic personae of *Ariel* rub shoulders with the characters of her prose, who themselves enjoy an interplay of textual and personal identities. As Steven Axelrod has noted, Esther Greenwood is a kaleidoscopic character whose deflections combine both authorial and fictive sources (Axelrod 10-11). Esther is a myriad form of the "I" of the author,
and the "I" of the protagonist speaker. In the light of this, her self-affirmative "I am, I am, I am" at the close of the novel, becomes a statement of allegiance to the "I" of her acculturated female prototype. Esther's ontology is fictitious and duplicitous, and in this sense, she mirrors her cultural prototype. Thus, the protagonist's "I" becomes a means by which the authorial "I" can re-enact the forms of her acculturated self. Through her fictitious persona, "she" the acculturated female, is able to remove herself from the contingencies that arrest her to this role. As a woman, her acculturated self has failed to provide her with the security she desires. As she writes in her Journals, the culture of 'happy homemaker' does not satisfy her creative and intellectual libido, and while she is happy to act out that role and comply with the cultural norm, there is a more urgent need for a larger sense of self. For Plath, that meant joining the ranks of the contemporary canon of poets whose most recognised members were men. Her role models were those few women who had succeeded in penetrating the sacred inner sanctum of 'read' and 'recognised' poets, of whom Virginia Woolf was the most potent example. Plath's strong assertion of the "I" voice belies a struggle to imprint her texts with an authorial authority and autonomy - something her acculturated self was incapable of. In this sense, the written word is an act of self-determination and self-formation, what Foucault has called "the privileged moment of individualization" (Rabinow 101). Her poetry maps the journey of her growth toward that larger self and the legacy of her forerunners.

Plath's textual "I" is in search of the immanence that her empirical or social "I" is denied. Many of her mature poems present tropes of immanence that involve a transubstantiation of the empirical, socialised, feminine self. This self is constructed, self-fashioned, a guise, and hence, a commodity, an object with market value. The writing "I" can exist only by dint of the empirical,
feminine "I"; indeed, within the patriarchal order (of which femininity is a product), the feminine "I" validates the authorial "I" by means of its marketability, its utility in the male order. Thus the feminine "I" is a necessary pre-requisite of the authorial female "I". In poems such as 'Face Lift' (CP 155-6) this means that the demise of the feminine self - the well-constructed feminine exterior - precipitates the demise of the authorial self. Plath's conflation of the authorial and the feminine self is represented in the "dewlapped lady" who is "done for" (CP 156). The process of disintegration is marked by physical decline: no longer a "lady" in the sense of a disintegrating femininity, this female self is marked out for abuse:

Old sock face, sagged on a darning egg.
Let her die there, or wither incessantly for the next fifty years,
Nodding and rocking and fingering her thin hair.

The ideal "I" or the specular "I" no longer exists in the empirical sense. The coalescence of the feminine and authorial "I" once reflected in the speaker's "mirror" is no longer possible. The two have diverged, divided, fractured - and with it, all sense of the speaker as writer. The process of physical disintegration marked by the peeling of the speaker's skin is an echo of the same shedding process of the 'Lady Lazarus persona, a dramatic gesture more imperative than chosen. In order to retain her validity on the male market the female subject must 'shed' her skin, recreate and revitalise her feminine self; effectively, the female dreams of a self-fashioning, self-birthing process that will enable her to do this. In this sense, 'Lady Lazarus' is a projection of female fantasy, of the authorial self willing her own longevity against the odds of her doomed femininity.
III: In the Shadow of the Dream

The darker reality of the 1950's was the psychic inheritance of the horrors of World War II: the Nazi death camps and the atomic bomb. The legacy of these horrors seeped through the events of the decade: the Rosenberg trial, the House un-American Activities Committee and the whole culture of fear and suspicion that surrounded these events. In her Ariel poems, Plath steps out from the behind the pretence of the decade, and reveals, albeit in the form of a personal drama, the fearful, nightmarish psyche of a nation. 'Daddy' (CP222), 'Lady Lazarus' (CP 244), 'Mary's Song' (CP 257), 'Getting There' (CP247) expose the disturbing legacy of the holocaust and the burden of American guilt in this appalling violation of human rights. This nation, as Plath describes it in her Journals, conceals its fear of humanity in the safe process of conformity: "processed in uniform, cellophane-wrapped blocks, like synthetic orange cheese", America buries itself from the dark side of her moon (Kukil 343). The enthralling state of her booming markets, her campaign of a domestic utopia, drives her further away from the memory of the recent war. Furthermore, the emergence of communist power in the USSR allows her to generate the idea of an 'enemy', a threat to her supremacy and integrity, her moral superiority on the world stage.

The communist power acts as a Grendel figure in the American psyche, a potential source of destruction of all her greatness and with it the security of western civilisation. The capitalistic boom of the post-war years can be seen as a retort to the perceived communist threat. Mass spending was a tonic to the fears of communism and atomic destruction that circulated through
the American bloodstream. The logic was that by surrounding yourself with the latest gadgetry from the American markets you could convince yourself of the invincibility of the American lifestyle with its unending stream of bigger and better technology. Bombarded by the popular media's scare mongering of the USSR's atomic threat, America became a nation of voracious consumers. The nuclear family living "in the nuclear age" was, in the words of Elaine Tyler May, "cushioned by abundance, protected against impending doom by the wonders of modern technology" (Tyler May 3). The myth of the 'good life' was a deliberate counteractive agent to the pessimism of the age, a lifestyle generated by the machinery of the consumer markets to convince America of its own peace and prosperity.

The images of the holocaust we confront in Plath's later poems shatter the prevalent image of the pacific, easy fifties. Written in the opening years of the 1960's, they are a defiant blow to the false confidence of the fifties and the policy of 'containment' of the past. In this sense, Plath is similar to the voice of the Beats, whose colloquial style and subversive subject matter, strove to undo the code of propriety that surrounded the decade. In poems such as 'Daddy' and 'Getting There' we are confronted with the relationship of oppressor to his victim, the Nazi to the Jew: poems that deliberately unsettle and provoke, that flaunt, even, the sadism of the holocaust. Indeed, sadism is something Plath seems to delight in, approaching it as she does, from the perspective of her relationship to her father in infamous lines such as: "Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute/ Brute heart of a brute like you" (CP 223). The poet-speaker aligns herself with the image of the Jewish victim, contemplating her assimilation to that historical image, and the image of her father to "every German":
An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew (CP 223).

The simple, nursery-rhyme language intensifies the shock-effect of Plath's association, revelling as she does with a childlike petulance, in the charade of avenging Jew: "You do not do, you do not do/ Any more black shoe", "Daddy, I have had to kill you" and, "I have always been scared of you/ With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo" (CP 222-3). In 'Getting There' (CP 247), Plath re-enacts the drama of a Jewish prisoner en route to a death camp whose journey ends with the epiphany of her father:

And I, stepping from this skin
Of old bandages, boredoms, old face

Step to you from the black car of Lethe,
Pure as a baby (CP 249).

The speaker's journey is a journey towards the father figure. The backdrop of the holocaust is merely the speaker's device, a metaphorical landscape for the re-enactment of a psychic union with the father. The march is a march through the landscape of the psyche, an inert and sluggish reality:
It is Russia I have to get across, it is some war or other.

I am dragging my body
Quietly through the straw of the boxcars . . . .

Here there is such mud . . . .

There is mud on my feet,
Thick, red and slipping (CP 248).

The mud is the mud of guilt; the mud she attributes to her dead father for the "agony" of his death. The speaker 'folds' herself into the image of her dead father, as the German prisoners of war folded themselves into the trains that took them to their deaths; psychically, she places herself inside the procession toward death that is the image of the moving train:

It is so small
The place I am getting to, why are there these obstacles -
The body of this woman,
Charred skirts and deathmask . . .
The train is dragging itself, it is screaming -
An animal
Insane for the destination,
The bloodspot,
The face at the end of the flare (CP 249).
The speaker's self merges with the destiny of her co-passengers as they move toward death, "the bloodspot", where death shall merge into life, and a process of rebirth will begin: "The carriages rock, they are cradles". Through a union with death (and a reconciliation with her dead father), the speaker shall re-emerge with a new self resurrected, "pure as a baby". The journey toward the father is, as Jerome Mazzaro has diagnosed, a "dreaming back" to the purity of the "infantile" state, what Yeats deemed necessary for the rebirth of the spirit apart from the body (Mazzaro 236). What might be termed "dreaming back" in this poem becomes a deliberate child-like regression in 'Daddy' as a means to the father. The "ich, ich, ich" of 'Daddy' is a Plathean baby talk, a pre-language designed to arouse the memory of the father in the speaker's own psyche, a stab at re-enacting the childhood of her memory. The speaker perceives herself as a survivor, a survivor, that is, of memory. It is from this self-perception that she draws a figurative parallel between herself and the Jewish survivors. Attached to this perception is the formula of self as victim. As she writes in 'Little Fugue', "I survive the while, / Arranging my morning" (CP 189). Plath's use of the trope 'survivor-victim' relies upon the emotional reservoir of the holocaust, a source the more powerful for its incommensurability. It is the very incommensurability of emotion surrounding the event that grants Plath, if you like, access to the trope survivor-victim. Such a status is dependent on the assertion that the speaker is "lame in the memory" of her loss. In this sense, she is on an equal footing with all survivors of the holocaust, and as she declares, she is "guilty of nothing" in this respect ('Little Fugue', CP 188). She is fully entitled to her metaphor.
The father figure haunts these poems as the absolute raison d'etre of the speaker. The father is the child's universe; he is the ruling regime, the source of all government, including government of the self. With the death of the father the regime is thrown into chaos, and the speaker experiences not only the emotional loss, but also the political loss of a leader. Within the framework of the family, the rule of the father is over, and government of the family must fall upon the mother and the daughter herself. In terms of Laingian psychoanalysis, the exit of the father throws the nuclear family into a state of ontological insecurity. The family's social status is under threat, and so, in turn, the social identity of the daughter/speaker. The precarious nature of her social existence forces an existential crisis, a crisis acted out within the forum of the poem.

In the Plathean corpus, 'Daddy' is the embodiment of a tremendous grief for the loss of the 'ancien' regime of the father. Here, the potency of her father's death is wrapped up with the potency of the holocaust, an image close enough to Plath and her generation to leave in eradicable imprints. In 'Daddy', the loss of the father extends itself to the loss of moral direction, and the universe becomes one in which atrocity is commonplace, a universe in which the holocaust becomes possible. In a wider sense, 'Daddy' is a metaphor for the breakdown of political and social order, an order whose origin lies in the fifties ideal of American family life. Without the father, family order is destroyed, and moral and psychic chaos ensues. The holocaust is attached to the father figure as the objective correlative of the moral chaos that erupts with his loss.

Plath's story, "The Shadow" (JP 147-55), reminds us of the closeness of her generation to the "phenomenon of evil" that sanctioned the holocaust. The knowledge of death on such a vast scale assaulted the minds of Plath's generation "like some uncontrollable fungus", bringing into
question the validity of the "powers of good" that constituted America: one's "parents, the police, the FBI, the President, the American Armed Forces ... Not to mention God himself" (JP 153).

The reality of mass destruction of life hovered over the lives of the post-war generation like no generation before. The knowledge of the atom bomb exacerbated the sense of the ambivalence of life, as fear became a part of contemporary American life. Plath confesses to the "sidelong" effect of "the issues of our time" upon her poetry, what she calls "deflections" of current affairs ("Context", JP 65). As a poet, Plath internalises the "headlines of the day" for the sake of adding greater potency to her own mythopoetic world. The addition of such issues as "the genetic effects of fallout" and "Hiroshima", combine in an emotive cocktail to the process of this mythologizing.

Plath's psychic inheritance of her parents' Germanic roots is distilled for further effect. 'Mary's Song' brews together potent ingredients: Plath's own fantastical death wish: "Gray birds obsess my heart, / Mouth-ash, ash of eye" with the legacy of the Polish Jews - her father's homeland: "Their thick palls float/ Over the cicatrix of Poland, burnt-out Germany" (CP 257). Plath's "holocaust", however, is not historical; it is personal, a state of mind, a condition of the poet's psyche that brings forth this association:

It is a heart,
This holocaust I walk in,
O golden child the world will kill and eat (CP 257).

Plath's preoccupation with death is an extrapolation of the culture of fear arising from the "headlines of the day". It is a distillation of the paranoia of a nation whose present fears - communism and the atomic bomb - are deflections from the reservoir of fear generated by the
War. It is fear that propels Esther Greenwood from "the dark heart" of New York to "the motherly breath of the suburbs" (BJ 107; 109) where, even here, in the soft heart of the American domesticity, Esther confronts the "queer" feeling of fear (1). It is in the suburbs, at the heart of the American Dream, that Esther finds this fear, lurking in the form of a stifling homogenisation: "the white, shining, identical clapboard houses with their interstices of well-groomed green" impress themselves as a "large but escape-proof cage" upon Esther's psyche (110). Plath channels the general tenor of American fear through the experience of her protagonist. Esther is representative of the culture of uncertainty of what typified the America of the 1950's. On a grander scale, Esther's breakdown is symbolic of the loss of the American sense of self, of a sense of direction or national purpose; as she describes it, it was like "moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo" (3).

IV: Post-War America's Collective Unconscious

Within the framework of America of the fifties and early sixties, Plath's body of work can be regarded as rather subversive. In poems such as 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus', she personalises the horror of the holocaust with a flippancy that borders on disrespect. Furthermore, as a subject, it jarred with an era whose adolescent intent was to gloss over the nastiness of the recent past; Plath's brutal emotion was not in keeping with the saccharine culture of popular America. While she regarded herself as part of the tradition of female poets, Edna Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale and Phyllis McGinley (J 61; 211) among them, her poetry has little in common. Her own version of what she calls "light verse" of 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus', (a term borrowed from Auden's 1962 Introduction to The Oxford Book of Light Verse that declares "light verse can be serious . .
having been written for performance" and "having for its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being" [The Oxford Book of Light Verse: ix], her poetry is an entirely different tradition from that of her female forerunners. Plath's poetry throws open a window to the psyche to reveal tremendous private pain, or "the poet as an ordinary human being". In a sense, her poetry is a satire of the "light verse" of her forerunners, forcing, as she does, a re-definition of what constitutes 'female' and, in turn, 'female poetry'. She is able to assimilate the private pain of the individual psyche to the collective psyche of a nation that, thrown back upon "the headlines of the day", feeds upon a psychic reservoir of fear (JP 65).

Roethke, a definite influence upon Plath's poetry, declared his intention to write "a poem that is the shape of the psyche". The psyche, according to Roethke, was defined by the energy that "proceeds from the mind" (qtd. Blessing: 58). In the case of Plath, the energy of the mind, the individual psyche, is further defined by the state of the collective mind. In her story, 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' she embodies this collective unconsciousness in the dream life of a people: "Call it what you will, Lake Nightmare, Bog of Madness, it's here the sleeping people lie and toss together among the props of their worst dreams, one great brotherhood, though each of them, waking, thinks himself singular, utterly apart" (JP 158). This collective "Lake Nightmare" is "one borderless common reservoir" of fear, full of images of dead carcasses, "bodies puffed as blowfish, human embryos bobbing around in laboratory bottles". This image of swimming bodies evokes the holocaust and places it within the territory of unconsciousness of the American psyche. George Steiner, reviewing Ariel in his 1966 essay 'Dying is an Art', writes of the "classic act of generalization" that Plath achieves, the process of "translating a private,
obviously intolerable hurt into a code of plain statement, of instantaneously public images which concern us all" (Steiner 330). Those "instantaneously public images" Plath projects from her late poetry are images gathered from a collective psyche reaped from "the headlines of the day" into a series of deflections. These deflections, while translating into fantasy under the poetic process, have been, at some point, absorbed from a collective source.

Plath's assimilation of the collective unconscious becomes, in Kristevan terms, a response to the domain of the "non-conscious". The Kristevan "non-conscious", a "domain not subject to repression but not within the reach of consciousness either" embodies the coeval forces of the dominant ideologies of an ear, including the prejudices, myths and assumptions of a society that serve the purpose of its governing body. In Kristevan terms, the "writing subject" is the recipient of these socio-cultural forces that are inevitably, to some extent, assimilated into the final body of writing (Roudiez 8). The influence of the "non-conscious" thus locates the "writing subject" within an historical moment, evident from the transference of cultural-historical motifs into the body of the work. The location of Plath's work within the historical context of the post-war years can be tracked by the motif of guilt running though her later poems and several pieces of her prose. The horror of the war continued to absorb the nation through the early 1960's, the period of Plath's Ariel poems and The Bell Jar, a novel framed within the context of the Rosenberg execution. 1960 also saw the capture of former Nazi officer, Adolf Eichmann whose trial preoccupied national headlines, while the following year saw the release of the motion picture, Judgement at Nuremberg (Mazzaro 219). Clearly, the aftermath of the war still occupied national consciousness, and preoccupied, undoubtedly, the collective unconsciousness of the
U.S. In an unpublished extract from her journals Plath presents the outline of her story "The Shadow", in which the relationship between Jew and German is explored:

My present theme seems to be the awareness of a complicated guilt system whereby Germans in a Jewish and Catholic community are made to feel, in a scapegoat fashion, the pain, psychically, the Jews are made to feel in Germany by the Germans without religion. The child can't understand the wider framework. How does her father come into this? How is she guilty for her father's deportation to a detention camp? . . . this is how I think the story will end (qtd. Rose: 238).

The issue here is the theme of transference of guilt, an echo of the Ariel poems 'Daddy' (CP 222), 'Getting There' (CP 247) 'Mary's Song ' (CP 257), 'Little Fugue' (CP 187), but heard also as early as 1957 in 'The Thin People' (CP 64-5). The burden of guilt, a huge psychic deposit, must be buried somewhere. Surrounding this burden of guilt is a code of silence that threatens to cripple the speaker: "I am lame in the memory" ('Little Fugue', CP 188). This code of silence is a consensus whose origin is social, an example of the Kristevan "non-conscious". This psychic deposit returns to the Kristevan "non-conscious", that is, into the surrounding culture where it is assimilated into an attitude, a mentality or stance. Memory itself becomes a deflection of this deposit and so, in the post-war years, the memory of the war is deflected into a consumer culture: part of the process of 'forgetting'. Hiroshima and Auschwitz then, are buried in the process of acquisition, reaching out - occluding images of mass destruction, transformed into mass consumption, reaching out - the 'outer-directedness' of David Riesman. Outer-directedness elides the inner, the psychic and the imagistic. America was in the process of convincing itself that it
had emerged from the war unscathed, a bastion of Western civilisation. All remnants of America's relationship to what Christine Britzolakis terms the 'exotic', the oppressed alien - the Jew, or the aggressor, the German Nazi, the Italian Fascist, the Japanese, were swept away in a frenzy of forgetting - a deliberate policy of cultural amnesia (Britzolakis 192).

A 1946 study of magazine fiction by Bernard Berelson and Patricia J Salters presents the permanence of the American shibboleth toward the 'exotic' or alien presence. This study of the eight most widely read magazines, of which The Saturday Evening Post and the Ladies Home Journal were most coveted by Plath for the publication of her stories, covered the war years, 1937 and 1943. The formula for the stories studied were "of the romantic love, boy-meets-girl type", or involved "family or domestic or marital problems", themes often chosen by Plath. The predominant tendencies in these stories show the Americans (the largest group of white Protestants) almost always in the role of hero/heroine, enjoying more social success as well as greater character credibility (Rosenberg & White 242-3). Plath's poetry and prose unearths these 'aliens' in a process of personal transference in which the alien Jew or Japanese serves as a trope for her own sense of cultural alienation. The buried 'alien' thus reappears as a symbol of the contemporary American female in a position of social and personal anomie. To apply Kristeva's term, "abjection" to the poet's struggle for identity, the poet is involved in a 'split', not from the maternal, but from her ordained social role. Unable to reconcile herself to this role, she is involved in a struggle for a new identity. For Plath, the poem constitutes the means to this identity: the creative or ontological space by which an identity is wrought.
V: The Authoritarian Mirror

The collective memory of the war, in collusion with the culture of American economic dominance, produced the 1950's domestic policy of containment. The corollary of this collusion is the repression of any sense of individual consciousness; all that exists is the collective. Plath's poem, 'Mirror' (CP 173-4), is the ironic voice of an obedient consciousness, subject to the dictates of a governing collective consciousness. This collective, and authoritarian consciousness demands an automatic response from its subject with no recall to analytical thinking. Hence, the response is rote-learned, originating from the speaker's surface consciousness:

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

I am not cruel, only truthful -

The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

It is pink with speckles.

I have looked at it so long

I think it is part of a heart. But it flickers.

Face and darkness separate us over and over (CP 173).
The speaker's language is that of an obedient member of a dictatorship, a self in the grips of a mesmerising dictator (the mirror). There are echoes of the Lacanian mirror-stage, only here, the self is synonymous with the mirror itself; indeed, has usurped the self. What is implied is that the boundary between self and other has so disintegrated that the self, as an individuated entity, has been erased. We are reminded of Esther's attempt to convince herself of the reality of her individuation: "I am, I am, I am", at the end of *The Bell Jar* (BJ 233). A more convincing interpretation would be that this cry of self-affirmation is nothing more than a restatement of the negative imago of the 'Other' - of which society is the 'real' embodiment.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* of the role of the mirror in relation to the woman's process of self-relating:

... all her life the woman is to find the magic of the mirror a tremendous help in her effort to project herself and then attain self-identification ... Man, feeling and wishing himself active, subject, does not see himself in his fixed image; it has little attraction for him, since the man's body does not seem to him an object of desire, while woman, knowing and making herself an object, believes she really sees herself in the glass (qtd. Chadwick: 3).

The "fixed image" in the mirror is, to the woman, her absolute self, her only self, that will serve her purpose in the social arena. Having identified herself as object, the woman transfers that perception to her society where she becomes, in her own mind and in turn, the eyes of her society, a useful commodity. Again, De Beauvoir's statement revolves around the Lacanian
theory of the "mirror-stage" in which the "misrecognition" of another in the mirror leads to the claiming of this image as a self or subject (Chadwick 8). 'Mirror' implies that there is no process of discernment, only complete consumption: "whatever I see I swallow immediately". Plath's poem explores the uncritical nature of American consumer culture in which immediate sensory gratification is elevated above self-reflection or analysis. The process of consumption itself involves Reisman's complete 'outer-directedness' with no heed to the inner. The ironic voice of the speaker re-enacts the voice of her social self from which the authentic self is split - the heart "on the opposite wall". 'Mirror' explores the painful alliance of the authentic and the social self and the cultural dictates that separates the two. This self-division leads to alienation or anomie whilst perpetuating and making permissible, the culture of 'outer-directedness'.

Psychic Residue

The abject woman, divorced from mainstream patriarchal-capitalistic culture, finds herself to be an object of that culture. Plath explores the nature of abject femininity as part of a fascist regime (Rose 157). This fascist regime draws parallels with the consumer culture of the fifties: "whatever I see I swallow immediately". Plath parallels the compulsive behaviour of consumerism, the automatic, programmed response, with the nature of a fascist regime, both equally authoritarian. In 'Daddy', the female speaker flirts with the idea that "every woman adores a fascist" (CP 223). The woman is both the subject and object of this regime; she is both consumer and consumed. In 'Fever 103" (CP 231-2) the speaker undergoes a process of detoxification from the unctuous consumer culture to become a fantasy of purity - "the pure acetylene virgin". This culture of consumerism is implicitly linked to what Plath describes as "
the terrifying, mad, omnipotent marriage of big business and the military in America" ('Context', JP 65). The speaker of "Fever 103" (CP 231-32) is part of the supply-chain of the "military-industrial complex" - of which the consumer culture is but a sub-stratum. Linked to this process of purification is the desire to eradicate the collective memory of the holocaust. Images of the holocaust are linked to the insidious military-industrial culture of the Eisenhower administration. The holocaust, like a virus of the memory, threatens the psychic health of the present generation, while the "marriage of the big business and the military" threatens to undermine the freedom of the individual. The speaker throws up noxious shards of memory: "Hiroshima ash ... The sin. The sin"; "Devilish leopard!/ Radiation turned it white/ And killed it in an hour"; "My head a moon/ Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin/ Infinitely delicate and expensive" (CP 231-32). By identifying with the alien "Japanese", the speaker, effectively, places herself on the margins of society in a place of cultural alienation. The unprocessed psychic deposit of the war years serves as a further barrier between the speaker and her culture, increasing her sense of cultural alienation.

The semiotic element of "Fever 103" emerges from the images of repressed memory that Plath releases from the psychic deposit. These images are prohibited, unspoken, pre-verbal and because of this, they present a danger to the psychic stability of the speaker. Their release provokes the kind of turmoil we confront in 'Daddy' (CP 222), 'Lady Lazarus' (CP 244) and 'Getting There'(CP 247). In 'Daddy', the daughter-speaker inherits the psychic burden of her father's unspoken psychic legacy. The unverbalised nature of this legacy threatens to obstruct the speaker's own psyche, and therefore, for her own sake, the daughter must kill the source of that legacy - the father himself. The second generation must eradicate the diseased memory of the
first. However, the inability to communicate the legacy of the war on the part of the first
generation leads to a tremendous repository of incommunicable grief. Years of silence have
made verbalisation impossible, and the daughter finds she is as mute as her father was. The
silencing of memory in the first generation leads to the psychic and verbal disabling of the
second:

I could never talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.
It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak (CP 223).

In this sense, Plath's "ich, ich, ich," becomes a mental and physical struggle to speak out,
on behalf of her own generation, from the silence of the previous generation. The play on the
guttural sound of the German language is an attempt to utter Kristeva's semiotic; that is, to speak
out, literally, that which is unspeakable, to make verbal the unverbalised, to bring into being
through utterance the inert mass of collective memory. Plath's onomatopoeia ("ich"/ sick) re-
enacts the sound of vomiting associated with a very young child, part of the process of
"dreaming-back" to the maternal, pre-Oedipal stage, before any association with the father (and
his psychic legacy) has been made. Communication with the father, and the collective memory
that he represents, has become impossible. The daughter is, literally, rendered speechless.
Language fails her, and coevally, her entire generation; words have become obsolete. Silence is
the only language possible in the face of the immense devastation of the war years.
The ubiquitous silence surrounding the war years is assimilated into the Kristevan "non-conscious". As George Steiner famously stated, after the holocaust there is no possibility of poetry, of the spoken, lyrical word (Steiner 1967). Silence leads to a dead-end in a culture; without language there is no possibility of culture. Language ignites culture. Nancy Steiner in A Closer Look at Ariel writes that Plath "could not guess that society would ever change; she seemed to see the taboos and tensions of her background as permanent conditions that could never be substantially altered" (Steiner, 1973: 78-9).

"Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" ends with the machine eradicating all communication, an echo of the annihilation of the holocaust. The electro-therapy treatment that greets the narrator is a palimpsest of the human experiments of the Nazis in their quest for Aryan purity: "the air crackles with his blue-tongued lightning-haloed angels" (JP 172). In the midst of the Great American Dream (from which Plath herself emerged as she declares in "America, America" (JP 54)), the spectre of death and annihilation looms. Plath's poem, 'The Thin People' (CP 64), depicts a ghostly twilight zone of negative memory, a shaft of crepuscular light deflected from the projector screen that is the nation's collective memory. The "thin people" are ubiquitous: "they are always with us", like a condition or a state of mind. Marginalised, they become the abject objects of a collective memory, sedimentary psychic deposits whose power lies only in their indelibility. As negative memory, 'The Thin People' are a threat to American triumphalism, and like the Jews to the Nazis, must be eradicated (Britzolakis 208-9). Plath's stories focus on the smallness of American domestic life in relation to the great "threat of war seeping everywhere". 'Superman and Paula Brown's Snowsuit' is full of the irony of the child-
narrator's viewpoint of the war: "I won the prize for drawing the best Civil Defence signs" she declares, while her mother, full of the doom of pending war repeats: "I'm only glad Otto didn't live to see this" (JP 283). The presence of the father, like the "thin people" is that of an aggravating revenant.

A 1960 collage in the Plath folders at Smith College sheds some light on Plath's sardonic view of American culture (described here by Rose):

At the centre, Eisenhower sits beaming at his desk. Into his hands, Plath has inserted a run of playing cards; on the desk lie digestive tablets ('Tums') and a camera on which is a cutout of a model in a swimsuit is posed. Attached to this model is the slogan 'Every Man Wants his Woman on a Pedestal'; a bomber is pointing at her abdomen; in the corner there is a small picture of Nixon making a speech. A couple sleeping with eye shields are accompanied by the caption: 'It's HIS AND HER time all over America'. In the top left-hand corner of the picture, this news item: 'America's most famous living preacher whose religious revival campaigns have reached tens of millions of people both in the U.S and abroad'.

There are moments of prophecy in this collage - Nixon and the religious revival of the new right. There are also clichés of sexual difference, together with a feminist association between male fantasy (woman on a pedestal') and war. The perfect body of the woman is a target of fantasy and aggression, perfect couples look as is they are blind, the perfect political body seems to be suffering from the
undigested surfeit of itself - another caption refers to consolidated aluminium
(starting salary, fringe benefits and pension rights) (Rose 9).

Plath's collage demonstrates the same cynicism we find in the biting satire of her most virulent poems. The 'perfect political body' of post-war America is clearly a fantasy of the ruling elite; perception and sight are clear metaphors of the self-delusion of this elite. Patriarchal rule designates to the female her role as cultural object, in the alluring guise of the romance myth. Reisman's 'outer-directed' man, driven to acquire, also desires a female object. There are echoes of the political extremism of 'Daddy', in the image of Nixon. The juxtaposition of the 'cut-out' model to the political father figure is a satirical role-play of the relationship of the female-speaker of 'Daddy' to her male 'Other'. This suggestion is that the image of the ruling male figure binds the female to a position of subordination and confinement (the pedestal); thus, Nixon's status as political leader is dependent upon the female occupying that position. Plath voices the social injustice of the male leader in his position of power: Eisenhower at his desk, figure of smug complacency, rules over a corrupt body. We are reminded of Plath's own fantasy of the powerful male [in reference to Hughes], what she calls in her Journals and Letters Home the "demigod" of her imagination, a "great hulking giant . . . the only one [over there] huge enough" (Kukil 211-12; LH 233). By the time 'Daddy' has been written, this male fantasy has become the fascist ruler "every woman adores" (CP 223).
VI: Multiple Narratives: One End

The collage resembles Plath's poetic technique: a multiplicity of images dispersed, coeval to one another, yet lacking a definite centre. The technique of collage offers itself a disruptive effect that is generative of more 'voices', more poetic energy. Plath is aware of the myriad nature of the 'I' narrative, and in a 1957 journal entry, reveals a keen sense of the marketability of this voice: "Then: the magazine story: written seriously, but easily, because it is easier to manipulate strictly limited characters, almost caricatures, some of them, than the diary "I" of the novel, who must also become, in her way limited, but only so she can grow to the vision I have now of life" (J 164). Plath makes clear that the function of the "I" persona is to "grow to the vision" that she, as author, holds. She is also aware of the limitations of the "I" voice to one particular technique or narrative mode. Frustrated by the limitations of a singular, unitary narrative, in Arial, she explores the possibility of multiple narratives, multiple voices. In other words, she begins to expand the boundaries of what Foucault has termed the "author-function". According to that function, the "author" is defined by his/her adherence to four basic principles: a "constant level of value"; a "field of conceptual or theoretical coherence"; stylistic unity; an historical framework in which he/she is regarded as an historical figure (Rabinow 110). Furthermore, Foucault declares the "author-function" to "arise from a certain social milieu or existence". In other words, Plath, the "author-function" peculiar to the author-persona, 'Sylvia Plath', is determined by the nature of her existence within society.

In her Journals, Plath describes the nature of her peculiar form of womanhood, a form that extends the definition to include "author". She writes, "it is like being crucified to give up my
dearest lares and penates, my 'household gods' (J 120). These 'household gods' are the traditional functions of womanhood that obstruct the transition to 'Sylvia Plath' the "author". The function of "author" allows the historical figure, 'Sylvia Plath' to move beyond the limited definition of 'woman' and 'womanhood' to embrace a purpose, which, according to Foucault, allows her to "introduce certain events" and then set about their "transformations, distortions and diverse modifications" (Rabinow 111). These "events" then, are the emanations of her narrative, which in Ariel reach a level of sophistication and multiplicity that propels her beyond the boundaries of her socio-historical self. In such a way, Plath frees herself from the noose of contemporary womanhood by 'travelling' through the space afforded to her by the text - the diverging, and multiple strands of her narrative and narrating personae. The "author-function" involves a complex interplay of fictitious speakers operating through the first person pronoun as a kind of foil or dupe, a mask or screen behind which glimpses of the authorial voice may be heard. The "indefatigable hoof taps" ('Words' CP 270 ) of the first person voice afford tiny perforations in the narrative screen that offers a glimpse of 'Sylvia Plath', the author. Thus, as Foucault expounds, the "author-function" permits a plurality of selves in which the 'real' author exists in a separate space-time from the speaker of the "I" pronoun (Rabinow 112).

The watershed in the narrative process is marked by Plath's 'Ariel' poem (CP 239-40). This poem corresponds to Foucault's narrative 'event [s]' in which the "transformation [s]" of the narrative replicates a 'transformation' in the author-persona. 'Ariel' is a poetic 'event' in which the speaker (a part refraction of the 'author') declares her release from her socio-historical self. The speaker arranges this through metaphors of change, mutation, and climax:
White
Godiva, I unpeel -
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.
And I am the arrow,
The dew that flies (CP 240)

The speaker is involved in a metamorphic process in which she sheds her former self ("I unpeel/Dead hands, dead stringencies"), which has, until now, attached her to an historical narrative of contemporary womanhood. The metonymic "White Godiva" is the historical self whose uncomfortable locus is contemporaneity itself; thus the speaker disengages from contemporary history by removing herself from the cycle of events that make up that history. First, she returns to the formative stage of the 'child' where she can rebegin the process of personal history and construction. This is an indication of psychological transformation, a process enabled by the poetic device of metaphor. Secondly, she identifies herself, linguistically, with the signifying "arrow", literally, a mark both of signification and direction. The "arrow" is the Lacanian "initial signifier" that constitutes the "lack-in-being" of the female sex (Lacan 710). The "arrow" is the self as the "initial signifier", the self as phallus - directive in language and constituting sexual difference, and hence, power. Thus, the speaker directs herself, metaphorically, by means of
poetic device, and linguistically, by means of signification, toward the final image of transformation - the alchemical "cauldron of morning" (CP 240). Her 'aim', metaphorically, and linguistically, is a process of self-determination in which she, the female speaker, will realise the role of director or 'author' of the poem. Ironically, her signifying 'aim' redirects her toward an image of domesticity that threatens to reconstruct the female self within a traditional, contemporary definition. As Judith Butler has noted, the process of self-construction is ultimately limited to permeations of the prevailing social model of the self. The subject may mimic, parody, subvert the dominant model, but can never completely re-invent the self. By definition, self and subject are allusions to the prevailing discourse of the 'Other' (Butler 1990).

An Ahistorical Creature: The Liberation of the Cyborg

Ultimately, Plath's search for an 'authentic' personal voice takes her beyond the constructs of history itself. If we mean by 'authentic' as that rooted in an historical time and place, then her search is not toward the 'authentic' at all, but rather, to a place/pace that is synchronic, rather than diachronic, from which all reference to contemporaneity is absent. Ironically, the final image of 'Ariel' combines the anachronistic image of the 'cauldron' with the tension of a libidinal "drive" toward that point. It is the "morning" that the speaker seeks, a temporal reference that relocates her within the quotients of time-space again. Plath's "drive" toward "the cauldron of morning" is latent with a sense of futility and doom. The very "drive" that would have her shed her "White Godiva" self now 'directs' her ("the arrow") toward an image of domesticity (albeit anachronistically) - "the cauldron of morning". The speaker's attempt to locate herself outside of history is doomed to failure. History itself is a male construct, inscribed by the male within the
public domain. The private realm of the female is mediated only through the public realm of the male, but does not exist independently (Smith 6). A non-historical, non-contemporary construct of the female self is only permissible if the female can first write her own version of history - her-history. The female cannot write a history of herself until she is able to experience selfhood as an 'I' independent of the male 'Other'; in other words, an image of self that is not a deflection of her 'lack-of-being'. This would be to end the duality of western, male rationality and shift the paradigm of self-representation and identity toward something independent of boundaries and difference (Waugh 468). The speaker of 'Ariel' expresses a desire to be "at one with the drive" (CP 240). This "drive" is the impulse of history; the force of a specific temporality that Kristeva identifies as "a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival. This linear time is coeval with language (the symbolic order opposed to the semiotic), "the enunciation of sentences (noun+verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending (Kristeva 863). Kristeva identifies female subjectivity as operating within two types of temporality: cyclical and monumental (862). These peculiar forms of female subjectivity are at odds with the traditional "drive" of history: male and linear.

Plath's 1962 essay, 'A Comparison', juxtaposes the temporal locus of the female novelist against that of the female poet. According to Plath, the novelist operates within an eternal, almost mythical schema; "Her business is Time, the way it shoots forward, shunts back, blooms, decays and double-exposes itself. Her business is people in Time. And she, it seems to me, has all the time in the world. She can take a century if she likes, a generation, a whole summer" (JP 62). Plath's thesis situates the female novelist within a rather nostalgic, anachronistic temporality, that of the 19th century lady of the house (or perhaps, 'angel of the house'). Plath's female novelist
does not experience the tension of temporality; she merely "blooms" and "shunts" backwards and forwards through the corridors of mythical time. The female poet, on the other hand, is located within the passing minute ". . . a door opens, a door shuts. In between you have had a glimpse; a garden, a person, a rainstorm, a dragonfly, a heart, a city" (J 62). Plath's antecedent for the female poet's extreme temporality is that of the modernist male poet:

When we came back from late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not speak, and my eyes failed,
I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence (Eliot 52).

The poem emerges from the space of a "minute", from the snapping open and close of "suitcases", from the momentary, the ineluctable transience of time itself. Plath's poetess does not enjoy the lady-like leisure of the novelist, that self still moulded by a 19th century femininity, "pruning a rose bush . . . shuffling about among teacups, humming" (J 62). Plath's disparagement of the novelist's antecedents is based largely on a valorisation of the 'moment' of poetic conception. She implies that the novelist's expansive sense of time is rooted in a romantic conception of time as an eternal commodity. This eternal view of times is further exacerbated in the female novelist by her lack of socio-cultural status or identity. The female poet, however, (an identity here valorised by Plath), emerges from the modernist vision of the early part of the 20th century. As a predominantly male vision (with the exception, perhaps, of Gertrude Stein), this modernist antecedent is thoroughly legitimate, providing a cultural foundation for the emergence
of the poet that is 'female'. The female poet, then, legitimised by her male antecedents, has a
locus for herself within the annals of literary history. Functioning as a female subject within the
social structure, she is still labelled 'Woman'; accordingly, her 'story' is that of 'his story' -
essentially male. However, the female subject can learn to use this social self to her advantage.
In the words of Rosi Braidotti this self presents itself as "a set of available poses, a set of
costumes" that will provide her with more "history and social power" (Braidotii 16). The female
subject then has access to the historical and the social only by dint of her submission to those
power structures - those same power structures that label and costume her as 'woman'.

Thus, the speaker of 'Ariel' attempts to insert her self into the "drive" of history, but
because she is excluded from the symbolic order that governs history, she is unable to make her
mark (semantically). The experience of subjectivity that she desires is ahistorical and non-linear;
it is the experience identified by Donna Haraway as the "cyborg creature", "an ahistorical figure .
. . a liberatory metaphor" and "a description of lived reality" (Kirkup 7). The "liberatory
metaphor" of the cyborg is the dissolution of boundaries between self and other, physical and
non-physical through a process of absorption of the material "into the flow of semiosis (sign
production)" that presents an ever-changing flux of meaning (Lykke 85). The metaphor of the
cyborg is of a transcendent female self removed from the constraints of temporal history and the
divisions of sexual difference. The flux of meaning attributed to the reality of the cyborg licences
a fluctuating identity. Identity thus becomes shifting, adaptive, polyvalent; a release from the
static homogeneity of culturally determined roles and inscriptions. Thus, the speaker of 'Ariel'
removes herself from her contemporary locus toward a process of re-assimilation of the self:
beyond the constructs of history, society, even temporality itself.
Self-Expression v. Ironic Self-Presentation: The Post-Modern Self

Plath’s poetry treads a fine balance between the serious need for self-expression and the desire to jest with that need. In this sense, she plays the role both of self and ‘other’: the self that must speak, and the self that pokes fun at this need. Indeed, the sensibility of Plath’s Ariel poems is that of the post-modern self in search of an expanded sense of what a self might be; a self beyond the rhetorical guise of the mask and the persona. This new self is myriad, fluctuating, synchronic and yet dissolute, multiple, fluid, and chameleon; a sensibility that oscillates between a ferocious drive for self-expression, and a more detached, ironic self-commentary. This is the woman “perfected”, a new authorial self whose body (the corpus of her writing) “wears the smile of accomplishment” (‘Edge’, CP 272). This ‘perfected’ woman is also the historical, acculturated female of her era, whose self, subject to cultural codes and definitions “wears the smile” (de Kooning’s ubiquitous American smile) of her socialised self. This mask, or social persona is of itself, an “accomplishment”, a “necessity”, albeit an “illusion” (CP 272). The smile, an expression of self and feeling, is also a contrivance, an act. It is the ironic smile of the authorial, writing self, sister to the acculturated self, the smile of the sister who stays “within the house”. A “duet of shade and light” plays between these two forms of self: the self that would speak and the self whose silence speaks volumes (‘Two Sisters of Persephone’, CP 31-2).