CHAPTER 3

A STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL IMAGES

Images are formed in the unconscious. They are a means to convey the poetic truth which transcends the present to the eternal. These images immortalise the multiple psychological lives that a poet has to live, so as to impart the poems a beauty of their own. As Anne Sexton puts it: "Images are the heart of poetry... Images come from the unconscious. Imagination and unconscious are one and the same. You're not a poet without imagery." It is the process of the expansion of image, not the motivation or ultimate objective, which enables one to discover the stimulating image. A poem must create a distinct image in reader's mind. It must manifest a picture that lay hidden in the unconscious. In fact, the psychological framework of once fulfilled ecstasy creates a heightened sense of the existing sensibilities but, when with the passage of time, distances are created; those memories that were at the centre of the canvas are forced towards margins. In this case, the nostalgic pains create fatal humiliations which give birth to various images.

For creating images, the quality of the unconscious varies with the individual, and depends upon the stored experiences of the individual. Psychological Images are drawn from the deeper portions of the mind which are the sources of wisdom. According to this view, images not only reveal the poet's deeper character, but also draw such truth from these deeper sources which is not ascertainable by conscious expressions and which touches the life of the spirit and immortality. The desires of the poets are transcended in
to psychological images by the poetry. These desires are not meaningless, but ordered and significant. The poet prefigures the world to come in his imagistic patterns and points the path to be followed later. Because the desires expressed in a poem are general, the reader can secure his own personal gratification through them and because the images that a poet uses are psychological; psychoanalysis interprets them in vast patterns of hermeneutics. Psychoanalysis explains the psychic economy of the artistic conception and relates it to psychic mechanisms and impulses that are common to mankind. They are interpreted in psychological terms and their meaning is explained to the individual artist. In fact, as Kuttner puts it, “The artist comes into being when he has a concept to express in artistic terms. At this point, psychologist could be of use to the literary critic by helping him understand the artistic images in a literary work.”

The reader-critic identifies himself with the poet through images that a poet represents. The poet provides him with the needed outlet for his pent emotions. For him, too, the poem expresses what would otherwise remain inexpressible. The artist, according to Alfred Booth Kuttner has been endowed with the “gift of technique” which is a general biological endowment that enables the artist to mould materials into pleasing forms. He quotes Freud to the effect that the artist “finds his way back from the world of phantasy to reality by shaping his phantasies into a new form of reality... Thus, he becomes the hero, King, creator, lover, that he aspired to be without making the tremendous detour of really changing the outer world.”
Claudia C. Morrison, in her *Freud and the Critic - The Early Use of Depth Psychology in Literary Criticism* compares the mind to an island; if the waters are removed, the foundations of the individual merge with other land bodies. Similarly, the images emerged either from recent or from older events, are utilized in poetry. These images work as a substitute or screen for an earlier experience which was highly charged "complex" or desire from childhood. This unconscious wish which was forbidden to enter consciousness by the censor; produces substitute images which are more acceptable to consciousness without any apparent motivation and bring with them feelings unrelated to the images themselves. Byron's well-known statement that poetry was the lava of the imagination, whose eruption prevents an earthquake, is the basic of Prescott's and Freud's theories of poetry. According to them, poetry served as a catharsis for the audience as well as for the poet, and they clarified catharsis employing Freudian notions of repression and displacement.

The process of repression itself is something one is not aware of. It is impossible to repress something out of one's head deliberately. This makes the identification of the roots of a person's problems extremely difficult. As a human being, we constantly repress many wishes, which we find, are morally reprehensible. Wishes get repressed because they contravene social norms and values that the individual has been forced to accept. This repression occurs as a result of the clash between the individual's wishes and his social conscience. In this process, the latter wins and the former is pushed out of the consciousness. Through displacement, the idea concerning one person
is displayed on another. In Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton’s case, their repression of wishes brought about the production of various psychological images in their poetry. Through the process of displacement, Sylvia Plath displaced her ideas concerning her father towards Ted Hughes. Poetic imagination accomplishes a fusion of images and ideas from without, and images and feelings, already stored in the mind, do it from within.

When the neurotic influence adulterate with the images, they tend to become neurotic psychic images. In order to reveal the inner layers of the consciousness of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton in their images, the artifact of reminiscences has been employed. Because the recapitulation of the relation between one’s psychological past and present is unavoidable, the confessional poetry is full of the agonizing emotions. There is a decentring, an ambivalence in the choice of poet, and the absence of the central element, the “logocentrism,” brings neurotic disasters. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were diagnosed as typical hysterics [Hysteria will be discussed in the next chapter] suffering from dissociation because of two repressed “complexes” which are also known as psychological images: their narcissism, and their father-complex which is better known as Electra complex.

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton’s poetry is a true presentation of the conflicts of the dissociated personalities as it presents the emotional experience of the neurotic and carries them with its waves. In every epoch, the soul of the artist is sick with the problems of his inner circle as well as the outer circle of the generation. He cures himself by expressing his traumas. By producing a catharsis in the spectator through the enjoyment of his art, he
also heals his fellow beings. As Floyd Dell puts it, "The artist is the psychoanalyst of human society. [It is] his task to liberate the very impulses which society so much fears from their age-old repressions...."

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton's use of their own life in their poetry is an effort to bring together the divergent aspects of their experiences. For them, confession takes the form of a unifying principle that carries a personal validity. The psychological images of Sylvia Plath's *The Colossus* have the reverberations of the unifying principle. These images assume a clearer shape in *Ariel*. Anne Sexton's *To Bedlam And Part Way Back* and *Transformations* are replete with such Psychological images. William Dickey, in his review of *The Colossus* speaks of Plath's insistent desire to define the inter-relation of things and the unity underlying them:

The thread that runs through all her work is the wish to know what an object or an emotion is like. What image can compare it exactly, what compares with it, what separates it from other things and defines its identity? And her most serious question: how are the object and the emotion interpenetrated, what effect has each on the other.6

Broken families, loss of the dearest ones and dissatisfaction with the present makes a person psychically crippled which leads towards the ambivalency. This ambivalency, further becomes the cause of the loneliness and disaster. The only possible task is to drag the person among the reverberations of the dead past and this done, the loneliness becomes more intense. Among the system of beliefs, a person is forced to choose out his
moral standards. The ambivalent search for an authentic existence leads towards the imprisonment in the cage of nostalgic pains. The poems of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton are filled with the exposure of their nostalgia, ambivalency and psychic pains through the various psychological images they employed in their poetry.

Plath is interested in the treatment of theories as useful tools in relation to her poetry. Al Strangeways analyzed in his *The Shaping of Shadows* that most psychoanalytic approaches to Plath’s poetry either use Object-relation theory or Lacanian theory. The relation between the mother and infant in the first year of life is studied in the Object-relations theory. Melanie Klein’s theory diverts the Freudian account of Oedipus complex towards the mother than from the father. Lynda Bundtzen studies the unmanageable influence of Plath’s mother than her father on her poetry. But because Plath had keen interest in her literary past and her poetic desire to situate herself in literary tradition; her argument is considered dubious.

The recurrence of psychoanalytic terminology and symbolism in Plath and Sexton’s poetry and their thematic interest is reflected in their dealing with the various workings of what Freud termed the “family romance.” In their poems, Plath and Sexton figure their family romance of poetic influences in the traditional patriarchal terms. But their muses are female and they have ambivalent feelings of desire and fear regarding their power and coldness. Plath’s heavy markings of Ernest Jones’s book *Hamlet and Oedipus* reflect her conscious interest in the traditional aspect of the “family romance” as it
concentrates on the literary and mythic history of expression of the Oedipal rivalry with the father.

For Anne Sexton and Plath, life is a series of changes. The difficulties that a person encounters are necessary for strengthening the individual on his or her way through it. Their conviction is that a strong, vital and creative nature is an outcome of struggle, conflict and hardship. Plath and Sexton, like Nietzsche, privilege the "pain and hurt" of the struggles of life. Such situations abound in their poetry, not merely because of some psychological imbalance, or because they have a morbid or neurotic desire to experience pain; this attitude consciously formulates Sexton and Plath's personal philosophy. In Sylvia Plath's and Anne Sexton's poetry, history and myth combine in such a way that the mythic and psychoanalytic aspects of it become more immediate than the real history of it. As Al Strangeways avers:

The twentieth century has seen, in the advent of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, a blurring of boundaries between the myth and the personal. Freud's use of myths such as those of Electra and Oedipus to explain his theories of personality development and Jung's exploration of archetypes have both been culturally powerful. Plath was poetically and personally interested in Jung and Freud's theories, and her poetry effects a comparable blurring of boundaries between myth and personality as that practiced by these figures.  

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton have personalized the myths in their poetry by imparting them a value of being psychological images. Probing into
an in-depth analysis of their neurosis, it can be said that all must possess the right mental balance to safeguard their psychic stability or the right knowledge of the mortality of human race. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton have mythologized the psychic images or so to say, imagified the myths. The myth of Electra's love for her father, the myth of the vastness of the Colossus statue, the myth of the Narcissus' self-love and the rebirth of Lazarus, have been used as images in their poetry.

Sylvia Plath has made conscious use of the mythic aspects. In her poem, "Electra on Azalea Plath," Plath quotes the classical myth of the sacrifice of Electra's sister, Iphigenia, by their father, Agamemnon, and his subsequent murder by his wife, Clytemnestra, which leads to Electra's revenge and Freud's appropriation of the myth for his theorizing of the infant girl's feeling of hate towards the mother. These poetic and personal uses of myth emphasize the immediate importance it held for her: she needs to explore the relationship between myth and personal, because [as Ted Hughes notes] she feels these mythic personalities to be deeply involved in her affairs. Plath's project of presenting the myth effectively is meant to highlight the mythic constructedness of such pasts, intending to confront the reader with their implication in the viewing and metaphoricalization of other's lives and sufferings, and aimed at foregrounding the complexity of the boundaries between myth and reality which form the root of the problematic placement.
In her poetry, Plath appropriates myth for idiosyncratic and personal ends by connecting it with psychoanalytic themes. When she introduced her reading of “Daddy” for BBC radio in 1962, for instance, she describes the speaker in conventional psychoanalytic terms as a girl with an Electra Complex. The theme is psychoanalytically resonated in “Daddy,” the poem coming to terms with the powerful absence of a dead father while it was addressed in the poem “Electra on Azalea Plath,” written three years before “Daddy.”

Plath’s “Daddy” positions the eponymous speaker in a mythic-psychoanalytic framework. Seamus Heaney writes of Plath’s “Daddy” that it “rampages... permissively in the history of other people’s sorrows.”

“Daddy” not only reflects the Electra myth in the psychological Image of Electra Complex but in the oppressive and patriarchal, Jewish and Fascist image of her father, the Colossus myth is also highlighted. In fact, “Fever 103°,” “Lady Lazarus,” and “Daddy,” the most famous of Plath’s late poems, combine history and myth in an uneasy partnership. “Fever 103°,” shows this uneasy combination of history and myth. In this poem, the speaker’s journey towards some sort of cathartic transformation works through mythic references to Cerberus. She writes, “Pure? What does it mean / The tongues of hell / Are dull, dull as the triple / Tongues of dull, fat Cerberus / Who wheezes at the gate.” (A 52). The myth-making account of the death of Isadora Duncan (a figure both mythic and political) transforms to a historical-political image of the effects of atomic-destruction and Hiroshima:

Love, love, the low smokes roll
From me like Isadora's scarves, I am in a fright
One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel.
Such yellow sullen smokes
Make their own element.... (A 52)

Images of “smokes” are used to describe both Isadora’s fatal scarves and the nuclear holocaust which act as the transition between the mythic and the historical imagery. This transitional imagery of fire and smoke is strongly reminiscent of the central motif of the more successful “Mary’s Song,” written one month later, where again fire is transformed into “thick palls” of smoke which connect Christian myth and twentieth century cruelty.

Judith Kroll, in her work Chapters in a Mythology argues that Plath’s poetry “is not primarily literal or confessional. It is, rather, the articulation of a mythic system which integrates all aspects of her work, and into which autobiographical or confessional details are shaped and absorbed.” The great artist is one who is able to experience the primordial images of the unconscious to shape them into a form fitted to the needs of his time, so that the images could stir man afresh. In the discussion of the myths that Plath employed in her poetry as psychological images, the Colossus myth is the first one. Plath creates the Colossus image for her father in her poems like “The Colossus,” “On the Decline of Oracles,” “Daddy,” “Full Fathom Five,” “The Beekeeper’s Daughter,” “Lament,” and “The Man in Black.”

“The Colossus” deals with an imagistic play on the hardness of stone and lost love. Plath imagines that the Colossus, which once dominated the harbour at Rhodes, is her father’s dead body, now lying broken in pieces on a hillside. The time has destroyed the father’s “ancient” power and size. This
image embodies poet's fear of the stone-like, resistant force of the patriarch as well as her admiration for the Colossal power that her father once possessed. While she gives her father a giant image, she reduces herself into the image of an ant:

Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails
of Lysol
I crawl like an ant in mourning
Over the weedy acres of your brow
To mend the immense skull plates and clear
The bald, white tumuli of your eyes. (CO 20)

This poem, which is considered as a prototype of "Daddy" brings about the absurdity of the ant's labour to put a broken statue together and weave it into the theme: "Thirty years now I have labored / To dredge the silt from your throat / I am none the wiser."(20). The poet is trying to put into shape her own fragmented personal past through the image in ruins. She is unable to relate herself to her father. She is unable to grasp or express the dimensions of this anarchic presence which her father excites in her. "The Colossus" is a poem where the reality of the inner world becomes schizoid in its implications. Overwhelming images are employed to analyze the father's death and its impact on daughter's identity. The huge image of Colossus is very much like the image of Oracle which Plath has described in "On the Decline of Oracles," a poem written during her Cambridge period. In this poem Plath says: "Inside a ruined temple the broken statue of God speaks a mysterious language."11 The Oracle is considered as another version of the Colossus by Jon Rosenblatt as it declined just as the giant statue of Colossus and for "The Colossus": "It would take more than a lightning-stroke / To create such a
ruin." (CO 21). Being unable to grasp or express the dimensions of the anarchic presence which her father excites in her, she struggles with the problem of relating herself to her father:

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. (21)

The creation of the image of Oracle admits her own inability to cast herself in any other role. Impressed and well-versed in the myths of Frazer as she was, Plath mourns not her father's death through the deteriorating images of Oracle and Colossus, but her inability to get rid of the psychological involvement with his death: "I shall never get you put together entirely, / Pieced, glued, and properly jointed." and "A blue sky out of the Oresteia /Arches above us. O father, all by yourself / You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum." (21).

Sylvia's feeling of guilt is the basis of the myth of Colossus in which Plath revelled. This myth along with the Electra complex, which will be discussed in next chapter, is associated with her father. The immense sizes of Oracle and Colossus symbolize her incestual awe and their ruined fragments project her ambivalent feelings. The Colossus image continues to occur in other poems. In the poem, "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.," the surgeon sees the body of the patient he is operating on as a veritable garden. Further, for the surgeon, the body is a piece of architecture, a Roman thing which reminds of the Colossus as a Roman Forum. Hence, garden imagery
associates the existential view of the human body. In "The Beekeeper's Daughter," the garden becomes a female landscape through which the father moves: "You move among the many-breasted hives." (CO 73). She submits her femininity to her father which results in petrification: "My heart under your foot, sister of a stone." (73). Al Strangeways marked that to be a female poet means not only moving away from the sphere of influence which bestows love and praise, but actively threatening it. As Leighton asserts, "To be a woman and a poet is to threaten the father's power." In the presence of her tyrannical father, who is the "maestro of the bees" (73), the poet withdraws into herself. To establish a meaningful relation, she sticks to her feminine self. These lines intensify the sexual overtones of the imagery: "Trumpet-throats open to the beaks of birds. / The Golden Rain Tree drips its powders down." (73).

Her next poem "Daddy" opens with an image of mutilation. Her father is the "black shoe" in which she has been living for thirty years, "poor and white," "Barely daring to breathe or Achoo." (A 48). Plath's father had to be amputated for gangrene in the leg before he died of diabetes. Thus, the black shoe suggests the memory of father's disfigured body which, in turn becomes an emblem of the poet's mutilated self. For Plath, who wants to define her identity in absolute terms, black is an absolute colour. In a later poem "Little Fugue," she calls her father a "dark funnel" and sees his voice as "black and leafy"(A 66). The inhabiting influence of her father robbed her of any substantial sense of being. To live on, she had to kill his memory: "Daddy I have had to kill you / you died before I had time." (A 48).
Though Plath efforts to destroy the memory of her father, it persists. It was her attachment to her father that precipitated her mental conflicts. Her psychotic disturbances were an outcome of her incestual complexes. Her Electra infatuation finds expression in the image of her father as a statue:

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

Here she again gets into the Colossus image which reinforces the theme of incestual awe. The statue is "marble-heavy" as well as "ghastly." It evokes both love and revulsion. When Plath herself comments on the poem, she reflects her incestual awareness by terming it "Electra Complex." Freud envisages Electra complex as a biological phenomenon which inhibits normal mental development in a female. Plath reduces it to the level of a metaphor through her conscious self-analysis. It is a psychological image because it depends on forces beyond one's control. "The awful little allegory" she speaks of, is that of being victimized by a dead father. This father-daughter relationship is characterized by both submission and guilt. Her mind vacillates between a defiant denial: "you do not do, you do not do" and a deep attachment for her father: "I used to pray to recover you."

To elaborate her relationship with her father, Plath alludes to her father's German background. She creates an image of foot. Her father comes from a town "scraped flat by the roller of wars." She could never find out where her father put his "foot,root." Earlier she had created this foot image
for herself as living in the “black shoe” of her father’s foot or root. In fact, she searches her own roots in the history of her father. Her father’s language was German so she “could never talk” to him. She says,

   The tongue stuck in my jaw.
   It stuck in a barb wire snare.
   Ich, ich, ich, ich,
   I could hardly speak.
   I thought every German was you.
   And the language obscene.
   An engine, An engine
   Chuffing me off like a Jew. (A 48-49)

Beginning with a search for ancestry, Plath reaches to comment on her inability to speak her father’s native language. She identifies herself with the Jews because of the Austrian background of her mother. German is a personal image that binds the father and the daughter. The German language as well as her Austrian descent remind her of her victimized state and confirm her in the role of a Jew. Then she transforms her father into a fascist, the ultimate metaphor of authority:

   I have always been scared of you,
   With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
   And your neat moustache
   And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
   Panzer- man, panzer-man, O you
   Not God but a swastika
   So black no sky could squeak through. (A 49)
Earlier she had created the image of ghastly statue as "a bag of God." Now she rejects it in favour of a black "swastika" that envelops the whole sky. Later on, she inextricably mixes the paradox of love and death in her relation with her father as between a Jew and a Fascist. She identifies passion with destiny when she admits her fatal fascination for the persecutor: “Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you.” (49). The controversial lines that begin “Every woman adores a Fascist” have both Jewish and Fascist image relating to the Colossal image of the Fascist that makes a psychological and gendered point. Throughout the poem, the speaker and the Daddy who are respectively masochistic and sadistic figures appear dependent upon each other. Both figures; Jew [Speaker or Plath] and Fascist [Daddy] have dependence on each other.

The image of Fascist father takes on several overtones, the father merges into the husband and the image of a devil comes out of it. Father is the devil with “A cleft in your chin instead of your foot” and he is as much a devil as "the black man who / bit my pretty red heart in two”(49), which is an allusion to her husband. She wanted to get back to her father. Therefore, she had to marry such a man as resembles with her father. Plath’s conscious and disturbing assertion, that all women desire subjection to the physical and emotional violence of the Fascist, not only petrify these images but also connotes the escape from freedom through sadism:

the female figure’s adoration of the Fascist is an extreme result of a more characteristically feminine escape from the feelings of aloneness associated with freedom through masochistic
strivings. Freedom for the woman, in the context of 'Daddy' is freedom from the authoritarian father figure."

In the last part, she creates a psychological image of Patricide. She becomes a vampire-killer and kills her father and husband:

If I've Killed one man, I've Killed two-
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now. (A 50)

These lines are both psychological, and political. They are psychological, not because "Daddy" is about Plath's relationship with father, but in fact, the situation that Plath depicted in the poem, explores the dynamics of her attitude towards individualism. Her intellectual and moral approval of individualism is the basis of the ambivalency in her desire for freedom for which she turns toward her father in the last stanza: "They are dancing and stamping on you. / They always knew it was you. / Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through."(50).

The line "I'm through" is ambivalent which may mean either that the speaker is "through with Daddy" or free from him, or that she is through to him, having in short made a final and inescapable connection with him, having in short, given up her freedom. Robert Phillips considered "Daddy" as a poem of total rejection. He sees Plath's self-destructiveness as the source of her creative energy. He suggests: "The only way Plath was to achieve relief, to become an independent self, was to kill her father's memory, which in "Daddy" she does by a metaphorical murder of her father figure." This
image of Patricide is completed by the villagers dancing and stamping on the father. A. Alvarez finds a thickening of images in her poem which suggest the density of the poet's despair. The more desperate she is, the more image thickens into image, dividing and multiplying like fertilized cells. In psychological terms, Plath's untoward attachment for her father precipitated a conflict and ultimately psychotic disturbance.

The unnerving father-fixation as well as the twisting of various images in psychological mode continues in her poem "The Arrival of the Bee-Box" where the box becomes a central metaphor. This box-imagery suggests a familiar situation in Plath's poetry: "inner turmoil and outer form." The bee-box ordered by her, fascinates as well as terrifies her with the vibrant life inside. She is drawn to the box by its appalling noise. The bee, in this context, is a schizoid image pointing to Plath's divided mental world. The bees in the box are in a state of animation and they represent an inner disintegration that may overwhelm her. She is afraid to open the box:

How can I let them out?
It is the noise that appals me most of all,
The unintelligible syllables.
It is like a Roman mob,
Small, taken one by one, but my god, together! (A 58)

Here Plath intertwines the images. She is afraid of the swarm which assumes the shape of an ancient society, "the Roman mob." Earlier Plath had written that for the surgeon of "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.," the body is "a Roman thing." In Plath's mind, the swarm and the human body are associated with the Colossus image of her dead father. Like her father's inscrutable German, the
swarm speaks “furious Latin,” which she cannot understand: “I lay my ear to
furious Latin / I am not a Caesar / I have simply ordered a box of
maniacs.” (58). Plath again interweaves the images. Caesar, like Hitler, is a
figure which represents absolute autocratic power. Hitler is a Nazi and she
had referred to her father as a Nazist. The bee was part of Caesar’s royal
emblem. Similarly, her father was an entomologist. Her inability to
understand the language of the swarm or her father points to a breakdown in
communication. When she says that she is no Caesar, she confesses her
inability to cope with the situation once again. She assumes power by
changing her role into that of the owner of the bees: “They can be sent back.
They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.” (58).

Plath had already admitted her inability to control the swarm. But to be
an owner is to be able to control the swarm. She is unable to resolve the
problem of being a creator without destroying herself. The inter-relation
between violence and survival, life and death, becomes too complex for her
to solve. For Plath, the bee-keeper is a kind of poet who has to manipulate the
inner violence that threatens to break out. In her next poem “Stings,” she
describes the act of collecting honey which is a creative activity. The hive is
decorated and is a work of perfect craftsmanship. As a constructed piece,
the hive resembles the Colossus image of her father.

Having discussed the implementation of the Colossus and Electra!
myths as psychological images in some of Plath’s poems, now a discussion of
the use of Lazarus myth in her poems will take place. About Plath’s use of
myth in “Lady Lazarus,” Seamus Heaney has written: “the cultural resonance
of the original story is harnessed to a vehemently self-justifying purpose, so that the supra-personal dimensions of knowledge to which myth typically gives access- are slighted in favor of the intense personal need of the poet."

Sylvia Plath had written an essay during her Russian Literature Course at Smith. In it, she writes with sympathy of the late nineteenth century prose writer and dramatist, Leonid Andreyev's short story, "Lazarus," which deals with the tragedy of the biblical figure Lazarus after he came back from the dead but without any joyous tales of life after death. Andreyev's Lazarus has similarities with Lady Lazarus of Sylvia Plath. Both initially retain marks of the grave. More significantly, the apparently transformed woman at the end of Plath's poem also recalls Andreyev's figure. His gaze makes hope and life wither in the eyes of the onlooker, and Plath's witchlike Lady Lazarus is equally destructive, ascending in the climax of the poem, from ashes, to destroy her oppressors. Andreyev's Lazarus is a tormented figure and Plath's Lady Lazarus' triumphant breaking of the cycle of death and rebirth by a different type of rebirth, does not happen.

In a reading prepared for BBC regarding "Lady Lazarus," Plath's introduction proved this poem as the most dramatic articulation of the process of psychic death and rebirth: "The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the phoenix, the libertarian spirit." "Lady Lazarus" reflects Plath's recognition at the end of her life that the struggle between self and others and between death and birth must govern every aspect of the poetic structure. "Lady Lazarus" has such intensity in the depiction of the magical
and demonic aspects of the world. The lady of the poem is a quasi-mythological figure, a parodic version of the Biblical Lazarus whom Christ raised from the dead. The speaker undergoes a series of transformations that are violent, and registered through image sequences. To define the Lady's identity, Plath uses four basic sequences of images, as Jon Rosenblatt observes:

At the beginning of the poem, she is cloth or material: lampshade, linen, napkin; in the middle, she is only body: knees, skin and bone, hair; towards the end, she becomes a physical object: gold, ash, a cake of soap. Finally, she is resurrected as a red-haired demon.  

Plath sees death as “the big striptease” in this poem. She tells the “peanut crunching crowd”: “Gentlemen, ladies / These are my hands / My knees. / I may be skin and bone, / Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.” (A 9). This is the kind of public flogging which the modern audience revels in. First, she says that dying is an art which she does exceptionally well. She admits that she dislikes “the theatrical / Comeback in broad day. / To the same place, the same face,” and to “the same brute / Amused shout:” (A 9-10). Lady Lazarus could not understand why those around her consider the phenomenon of death and rebirth to be so unusual and miraculous. “Dying / is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well.” (A 8). The passage towards the end of the poem incorporates the transition from a sequence of physical images to a series of mental images as it shifts its address from the crowd to the Nazi Doktor:
And there is a charge, a very large charge
   For a word or a touch
   Or a bit of blood
   Or a piece of my hair or my clothes
   So, so Herr Doktor.
   So, Herr Enemy.
   I am your opus,
   I am your valuable,
   The pure gold baby
   That melts to a shriek. (A 10)

She adopts an ironic tone towards herself and her special gift. She is alienated from “the peanut crunching crowd.” In fact, she validates her own psychic deaths she has faced, and defends herself against those who do not accept her as she is. The poem is addressed specifically to the controlling male “Herr Doktor, Her Enemy” who finds her death-like stage ugly and contemptible. The male regards her as his possession, the “pure gold baby.” But she warns him in the end:

   Herr God, Herr Lucifer
   Beware
   Beware.
   Out of the ash
   I rise with my red hair
   And I eat men like air. (A 11)

In fact, in “Lady Lazarus,” the speaker’s apotheosis works not to rise above the victim-persecutor relationship of the patriarchal world, but merely transforms herself into an aggression, destroying men instead of becoming destroyed by those who bit her “pretty red heart into two.” Plath is ambivalent toward the whole notion of rebirth. If there is nothing after death,
to be reborn from death is a nightmare experience and transcendence that results from this "death-leap" denies the creativity of stoical struggle. This conflict is resolved in the final line: "And I eat men like air." The characteristic ambiguity of the line might connote the power and danger of the reborn witch-like figure, yet its very nihilism seems negative.

The next myth that is to be considered is that of Narcissus, the Greek youth who fell in love with his own reflection in the water. This myth became the basis of the Narcissism of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton which is treated in the next chapter as a complex. From her childhood, Sylvia Plath was a narcissist. She always loved herself, her flesh, and her achievements. Her ego-centrism is revealed in her remark: "I do not love anybody except myself. This is a rather shocking thing to admit. I am capable of affection for those who reflect my own world." (J 34-35). She always felt the existential brag at her heart, "I am, I am, I am." Gordon Lameyer, her close friend had observed that Sylvia's narcissism which originated with the demise of her father, prevented her from loving anyone else fully. He avers, "I think we must seek the roots of Sylvia's disturbance in another psychological area. Otto Rank says that when a narcissist experiences the loss of double, it sometimes demonstrates only his intense interest in himself."  

As a narcissistic cannot move out of the mirror image, Plath's poetry could not move out of the limited canvas of subjectivity. Her narcissistic fixation arises from her utter dependence on others for her survival. Her other complexes are a result of this narcissistic fixation. She had a paranoid personality which according to Freud suffers from a fixation in narcissism,
megalomania and sexual over-rating of oneself. Her narcissistic fixation was the cause that led her towards her father-fixation, the Electra complex in which she was fixated at the oral stage. In all the poems that have been discussed earlier, there is a reflection of her self-love, self-pits, self-hatred which establish narcissism as a psychological image.

(ii)

Now Anne Sexton's poetry will be discussed in context of these myths and psychological images. Anne Sexton considers images as probably the most important part of the poem as she herself puts it, "First of all, you want to tell a story, but images are what are going to share it up and get to the heart of the matter but I don't have to work too hard for the images- they have to come- if they're not coming, I'm not even writing a poem, it's pointless." In Anne Sexton's poetry, there is a deepening of the personal voice and a descent towards a subjective centre where the father-daughter relationship becomes a central concern. Anne Sexton told Barbara Kevles in an interview:

I understand something in a poem that I haven't integrated into my life. In fact, I may be concealing it from myself, while I was revealing it to the readers. The poetry is often more advanced, in terms of my unconscious than I am. Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious. The unconscious is there to feed it little images, little symbols, the answers, the insights I know not of. Robert Phillips has also discussed the psychic power of the images offered to us by Anne Sexton:
Mrs. Sexton retells the mythological stories, those master keys to human psyche, in images and metaphors of Hitler and Eichler, Linus and Orphan Annie, Isadora Duncan and Joe di Maggio, speed and electroshock, thorazine and thalidomide. By transforming the stories into the language and symbols of our own time, she has managed to offer us understandable images for the world around us. The tales focus on the psychological crises of living, from childhood dependence through adolescent trauma, adult frustrations through the deathbed.  

In fact, this predilection for psychologizing one’s experience is a peculiar twentieth century phenomenon. The grave illnesses, over which people have no control, are constrained by this way of sublimating desire to fulfill oneself through self-expression.

Anne Sexton organized the perceptual world through a series of polarities and focused upon a handful of significant images. This habit provided her the basis for later personal poetry in which there is a domination of a few personal images and a lot of psychic oppositions. The fear of physical harm and death, motherhood, and the poet’s sense of an emerging selfhood are the central concerns in her later poems. She used to internalize natural objects which permitted her to arrive at a thorough going symbolic representation of psychic process. From static imagery, her images move toward the dynamic imagery of the body and inner world.

In almost all of her collections, Anne Sexton has hinted the Electra! love, the Electra! myth. In To Bedlam and Part Way Back (1960), the poem
"The Moss of His Skin" expresses her love of Daddy in the burial with the dead. She even quotes from Harold Feldman's "Children of the Desert" that young girls in old Arabia were often buried alive next to their fathers. Though in Arabia, it was done apparently as a sacrifice to the goddesses of the tribes, Anne Sexton consider it important to smile and hold still:

   to lie down beside him
   and to rest awhile,
   to be folded up together
   as if we were silk,
   to sink from the eyes of mother
   and not to talk. (SP 22)

Wanting to conceal her Daddy-possession from her mother she held her breath in that black room which engulfed them like a cave or a mouth or an indoor belly:

   I held my breath
   and daddy was there
   his thumbs, his fat skull,
   his teeth, his hair growing
   like a field or a shawl.
   I lay by the moss
   Of his skin until
   it grew strange. (SP 22)

In her second volume All My Pretty Ones (1962), she expresses her sentimentality in the poem "All My Pretty Ones," again manifesting the Electra! image of herself. By turns her imagery is sentimental, sexual, violent, freakish, surreal, maternal, religious and scatological. Going through the album, she remembers how she expressed her sorrow at the idea of her father's second marriage:
This year, solvent, but sick, you meant
to marry that pretty widow in one-month rush.
But before you had that second chance, I cried
on your fat shoulder. Three days later you died. (SP 44)

Though she prevented her father's second marriage, she had to part with him. Closing down the album of memories, she declares: "my drunkard, my navigator, / my first lost Keeper, to love or look at later." (SP 45). Now she moves toward the five-year diary, which her mother had kept for three years, intimating into it the alcoholic tendency of her father. Now she keeps this diary of his hurly-burly years:

The diary of your hurly-burly years
  goes to my shelf to wait for my age to pass.
  Only in this hoarded span will love persevere.
  Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,
  bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you. (SP 45)

While Sylvia Plath crawls like an ant in mourning in the memories of her father and could not forgive her, Anne Sexton forgives her father and keeps the diary preserved to love and look at later. In another poem "Young" of the same volume, Anne Sexton expresses her loneliness as a child and her looking at her parents' windows:

  when I was a lonely Kid
  in a big house with four
  garages and it was summer
  as long as I could remember,
  I lay on the lawn at night,
  clover wrinkling under me,
  the wise stars bedding over me,
  my mother's window a funnel
of yellow heat running out,
my father's window, half shut,
an eye where sleepers pass.

I, in my brand new body,
which was not a woman's yet,
told the stars my questions
and thought God could really see
the heat and the painted light,
elbows, knees, dreams, goodnight. (SP 46)

Anne Sexton gives the impression of selecting from a great flood of
dreamlike or nightmarish images precisely those which communicate most
directly to the reader and to the poet herself. In fact, this succumbing to the
Oedipal image was proofed in Anne Sexton's epigraph in her first collection,
To Bedlam and Part Way Back, which she had taken from a letter of
Schopenhauer to Goethe echoing Hester Prynne's reproof that most of us
carry in our heart the Jocasta who begs Oedipus for God's sake not to inquire
further. The poem "In the Beach House" from her third collection Live or Die
(1966), expresses her Electra complex through the psychological image of
Royal Strapping: "Inside my prison of pine and bedspring, / Over my window
sill, under my knob. / It is plain they are at / The royal strapping." (SP
108) Anne Sexton's analyst analyzed that image by relating it to a childhood
incident of her. He asked if she was ever beaten as a child. She told that once
she was beaten by her father in his bedroom when she was about nine years
old. She had torn up a five dollar bill which her father had given to her sister.
He laid her on his bed, pulled off her pants and beat her with a riding crop.
Her analyst revealed her through her own image, the intensity of that moment
and the sexuality of that beating. Psychoanalytically, the masochistic seizure of that beating is transference of poet's own sexuality into the copulating image of her parents and she furthers:

My loves are oiling their bones
and then delivering them with unspeakable sounds
that carry them this way and that
while summer is hurrying its way in and out,
over and over,
in their room.(SP 108)

Hence, this image provides a therapeutic effect by manipulating the father complex of this Electra into "royal image" of strapping. Hence, the poetry and therapy have an intimate relation. In fact, in the artist's mind, there are two general tendencies- one directs the attention outward to the world of forms, and the other directs the attention inward to the world of subjective images, the "fresh elemental imagery" of the unconscious. To achieve the perfection in art, equilibrium of both the tendencies is needed. When the artist succeeds in finding this equilibrium and making his fantasies communicable and socially valuable, he can save himself from neurosis finding his way back to reality.

In another poem of this volume, "Cripples and Other Stories," she writes a love song for her doctor and pleads her father's love, which gives her a kind of pyrrhic gratification, a release:

God damn it, father-doctor,
I'm really thirty six,
I see dead rats in the toilet.
I'm one of the lunatics.

.................
you rock me in your arms
and whisper my nickname.
Or else you hold my hand
and teach me love too late.(SP 109)

Introduced to the love by her father-doctor she petrifies the love again: “You
hold me in your arms / How strange that you’re so tender! / Child-woman that
I am, / You think that you can mend her.”(SP 110). Again she expresses her
father-love with the experience of her rebirth: “Father, I’m thirty six, / Yet I lie
here in your crib. / I’m getting born again, Adam, / As you prod me with your
rib.” (SP 111). Anne Sexton knows that her father is only part of the story, a
dubious source of her misery and even she is confused about him like many
other things. Earnestly groping for an image of consistency where there is
always essential contradiction; she is mystified by tenderness, by apparently
genuine displays of affection and whispers of love.

The poems of Live or Die are a carryover of the sections of her play
Mercy Street which imparted the character of psychodrama to it. The
expansive forms and intense imagery of these poems, the voice that speaks
them, grows more various in its effects. It matches a strident aggression or
hovering tenderness with the mood and matter evoked. By the time of her
fourth collection, Love Poems, Anne Sexton had mastered the art of creating
images in domestic detail. In Love Poems Sexton has forsaken the indignities
of the body for the more uniquely human dignities of the heart. These poems
express a search for lover to serve her therapeutically, but her drug
addiction and attempted suicide helped her much in this matter, because it
led her to an extramarital affair which left her in despondency. These failures
in love led her towards an incompatibility with the modern world and towards
dissatisfaction with her own self. But in this process she finds inherent "a
rebirth of a sense of self, each time stripping away a dead self."\textsuperscript{24} Anne
Sexton had implored many images to depict the pain as well as absence of
love. To communicate transcendental truths, she employs the most homely
and blatant commercial images. At one place, she creates the psychological
image of scissors. Scissors are always related to the sexual relationships.
She comments on her lover, "We are a pair of scissors / who come together
to cut." With the mutilating scissors figure, she reveals how basically images
of juncture turn out to be destructive rather than constructive. Her book
\textbf{Transformations} [1971] is an exaggeration and distortion of the fairy tales. All
the seventeen poems of it, resound the voice of her own heart and the
psychic images formed in her own mind. Giving a Freudian flavour to her
stories, she has created psychological images out of them. As Jane McCabe
writes: "The power of fairy tales has always resided in their 'changed' dream
landscapes, and Freud discussed them as 'screen memories', survivals of
persistent human conflicts and desires, narrative whose characters and
situations are symbolic of the unconscious dramas in any individual's
psyche."\textsuperscript{25} Psychoanalytically, the word "Transformations" itself refers both
to the variations of the same thematic material represented in a patient's
dreams of experience and to the process by which unconscious material is
brought to consciousness.

Through this book, Sexton has whispered her often terrifying visions
into familiar and commonplace sounds. She has taken a long step toward
solving a problem that has recurred in her earlier work. By using the artificial as the raw material of Transformations and working her way backward to the immediacy of her personal vision, she draws her readers towards herself more willingly, and thereby makes them more vulnerable to her sudden plunges into personal nightmare. In the poem “The Frog Prince,” she expresses her father-obsession and her wish to chop up the frog which she has imaged as her father’s genitals: “My guilts are what / we catalogue. / I’ll take a knife / and chop up the frog.” and “Frog has no nerves. / Frog is as old as a cockroach. / Frog is my father’s genitals.” (SP 164) which gives her electric shock: “At the feel of frog / the touch-me-nots explode / like electric slugs.” (164). Electrified by her Electra! love, she moves on to the next poem, “Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)” where again her father-obsession is hinted at:

a girl who keeps slipping off,
arms limp as old carrots,
into the hypnotist's trance,
into a spirit world
speaking with the gift of tongues.
She is stuck in the time machine,
suddenly two years old sucking her thumb,
as inward as a snail,
learning to talk again,
She's on a voyage.

..............
Little doll child,
come here to Papa.
Sit on my knee.
I have kisses for the back of your neck.(SP 169)
More or less conventionally this fable of the princess who sleeps off a
hundred year curse unfolds until the prince:

    kissed Briar Rose
    and she woke crying.
Daddy! Daddy!
Presto! She's out of prison!
She married the prince
and all went well
except for the fear-
the fear of sleep.(SP 171)

The concluding stanzas move back to the tortured world of her earlier poetry:

    Each night I am nailed into place
    and I forget who I am.
Daddy?
That's another kind of prison.
It's not the prince at all,
but my father,
drunkenly bent over my bed,
circling the abyss like a shark,
my father thick upon me
like some sleeping jellyfish.
What voyage this, little girl?
This coming out of prison?
God help-
this life after death? (SP 173)

In the next volume, The Book of Folly (1972), the poems again trace her
childhood. The first poem of the section “The Death of Fathers” expresses
memories of her childhood mixed with sexual fantasies. It recalls Freud's
sense of the origin of childhood memories:
Quite like conscious memories from the time of maturity, they are not fixed at the moment of being experienced and afterwards repeated, but are only elicited at a later age when childhood is already past; in the process they are altered and falsified, and are put into the service of later trends, so that generally speaking they cannot be sharply distinguished from phantasies.  

"Oysters" is at once a fantasy of self-begetting and a memory of desire that, once conscious, defeats innocence. She is Daddy's girl having lunch with her father at a restaurant, and she is afraid to eat the Oysters, "this father food," his semen: "It was a soft medicine / that came from the sea into my mouth, / moist and plump. / I swallowed.(SP 182). She describes, "It went down like a large pudding / Then I ate one o'clock and two o'clock. / Then I laughed and then we laughed." (182). This laugh echoes through the death of childhood. Freud writes that the "screen memories" that are made of childhood traumas relate to impressions of a sexual and aggressive nature, and no doubt also to early injuries to the ego[narcissistic mortifications]. In this connection, it should be remarked that such young children make no sharp distinction between sexual and aggressive acts, as they do later.  

As Anne Sexton puts it. "There was a death, / the death of childhood / there at the Union Oyster House" and the victory of womanhood: "for I was fifteen / and eating oysters / and the child was defeated. / The woman won." (SP 182)
The second poem, "How We Danced" continues the fantasy in an Oedipal round. She remembers her dance with her father like two birds on fire:

we danced, Father, we orbited.
We moved like angels washing themselves.
we moved like two birds on fire.

............................

we were dear,
very dear.
Now that you are laid out,
useless as a blind dog,
now that you no longer lurk,
the song rings in my head. (SP 182-83)

Then she imagines physical intimacy with her father while dancing and drinking with him:

Pure oxygen was the champagne we drank
and clicked our glasses one to one.
The champagne breathed like a skin diver
and the glasses were crystal and the bride
and groom gripped each other in sleep
like nineteen-thirty marathon dancers. (183)

She was envious of her mother yet happy that father was with her:

Mother was a belle and danced with twenty men.
You danced with me never saying a word.
Instead the serpent spoke as you held me close.
The serpent, that mocker, woke up and pressed against me
like a great god and we bent together
like two lonely swans.(183)
In a memory of violence, both sexual and aggressive, her memories get resolved in the third poem "The Boat." There is even a prediction of the destruction of memories:

Now the waves are higher
they are round buildings,
We start to go through them
and the boat shudders.
Father is going faster.
I am wet.
I am tumbling on my seat
like a loose kumquat.
Suddenly
a wave that we go under,
We are daring the sea.
we have parted it.
we are scissors.
Here in the green room
The dead are very close.(SP184)

Sometimes it is impossible and even useless beyond a certain point to distinguish between the really “happened” events and the “imagined” desires. Anne Sexton here goes to the extent of saying, “Father is going faster. / I am wet.”(184).

In the next poem "Santa," she kills the child's mythic sense of her father: “Father, / the Santa Claus Suit / you bought from Wolff Fording theatrical Supplies, / back before I was born, / is dead.” (SP185). After describing how her father dressed up her childhood, she refers to her jealousy: "Mother would kiss you / for she was that tall. / Mother could hug you / for she was not afraid."(185). Then she comes to reveal her contempt
for his liquoring tendency: "The year I ceased to believe in you / is the year you were drunk." (185). Later, her Electra! impulse is fulfilled. Now her father dresses up for her children. She replaces the emptiness of her mother: "We were conspirators, / secret actors / and I kissed you / because I was tall enough. / But that is over." (SP 186).

The creation of Double or the Mirror Image in the poetry of Anne Sexton gives it a distinguished place in the genre of confessional poetry. The 'double' or the self-image in the mirror is a projection outward, onto a related figure, of aspects of one's own mental conflict. Such duplication according to Otto Rank, "brings about an inner liberation, an unburdening" a release, through repetition of one's guilt or anxiety. A feared self, within the psyche, may sometimes appear to obstruct erotic attachments. Its externalization, as other, gives at least a temporary appearance of relief from disunity. According to Rank, the soul of dead is said to reside in mirrors. There is a custom of veiling mirrors [in European Countries] in the house of the deceased so that the soul may not remain there. The mirror image acts as a safeguard against division and loss. Ruth Parkin, in Literature and Psychoanalysis, writes that

The double as shadow or image is also a threat, a prediction of death. To gaze at your reflection / soul for long is to lose it, as the Narcissus myth shows. . . doubling in the Lacanian schema originates in the mirror stage, when the 'misrecognition' of oneself as whole takes on a variety of guises which return throughout life: fragmentation, splitting and substitution.
Mladen Dolar observes that double is always the figure of jouissance. According to Jacques Lacan, during the mirror stage, the infant experiences the full impact of the ambivalence of identification; jubilation at the recognition of its own whole image, marred by a sense of alienation at the fictionality or fraudulence of this wholeness. In an attempt to escape the necessary breaking of the dyadic relation with the mother, the subject "fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself." He views that when a child is able to perceive and accept his mirror image as his own, he falls in love with it. This narcissistic love-stage is defined as the mirror image in a child's life. Anne Sexton has made exquisite use of the mirror-stage in her poems. She has created mirror-images of herself in the persons she love as well as hate. This imagistic love, when related to the mother is fraught with danger. As Kristeva puts it,

The daughter... is rewarded by the symbolic order when she identifies with the father...(but she) has nothing to laugh about when the symbolic order collapses. She can take pleasure in it, by identifying with the mother, the vaginal body, she imagines she is the sublime repressed forces which return through the fissures of the order. But she can just as easily die from this upheaval, as a victim or militant, if she has been deprived of a successful maternal identification and has found in the symbolic paternal order her one superficial, belated and easily severed link with life.
Anne Sexton refers to her mother as "the large one" and seems to fear that growing up might mean becoming her mother. In a poem "Housewife" she insists: A woman is her mother. / That's the main thing."(SP 64). This semblance of image, this mirror reflection, she considered as a trap. But later, she celebrates liberation from 'the large one'- the sense that she is not doomed to become her mother, that she can be both a woman and a mother on her own terms. All the seven sections of her poem "The Double Image," are skillfully bound by recurring double images; she painfully refers to the estranged daughter, to the mother dying of cancer and her two suicide attempts in these sections. She searches her own identity through the identities of her daughter and her mother whom she creates as her mirror images or rather it would be alright to say that she made herself the mirror image of her mother and daughter. Her portrait faces the portrait of her mother and she finds her mother: "My mocking mirror, my overthrown / Love, my first image. She eyes me from that face, / That stony head of death / I had outgrown."(SP 33). Again, when she looks at her child, she also sees herself: "A cave of a mirror / Placed on the south wall; / Matching smile, matching contour."(SP 31) and she resembled her: "And you resembled me; unacquainted / With my face, you wore it. But you were mine / After all."(31).

Anne Sexton finds herself unable to escape the inevitability of generation. The time cannot be unpetrified; it cannot be stopped from repeating itself. Her mother has not forgiven her suicide attempt: "I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said. / And she never could. She had my portrait / Done instead." (SP 29). Now when her child is in question, how will
she be able to forgive Sexton's suicide. When she faces her mother and her daughter, she faces herself and this means trusting what it means to be a woman. She acknowledges her connections, the reflections of herself that she sees in her mother and her child, but she refuses to be entirely bound by them.

Through mirroring herself in her mother and daughter, she needs to find herself in her own present as well as in the past and future versions of herself. The reflection, after all, is bound to distort. The poem "The Double Image" becomes an artful therapy. In explaining her absence to her child, she is also explaining it to herself, working her way slowly part way back from Bedlam. In the final section of the poem, the child identifies her mother, names her *mother*, and claims her in simple need: "You scrape your knee. You learn my name, / . . . . . . . / You call me *mother* and I remember my mother again, / Somewhere in greater Boston, dying." (SP 34).

The poet reclaims her living child in the face of the death of her mother and in doing so, affirms her own life. When this double image is focused in to a single one, the connections and resemblances become valuable. In fact, she has been assigned with the disabused confession of searching her own identity through the identity of her daughter. The search for an authentic self ends in the image of her child: "I, who was never quite sure / about being a girl, needed another / life, another image to remind me." and this was her worst guilt: "you could not cure / nor soothe it. I made you to find me. (SP34). As Jane McCabe puts it,
Sexton’s use of images is primarily psychotropic, used less for literary effect than as a means to pry deeper into her psychic history, to float the findings and model her experience. As she said, “the poetry is often more advanced, in terms of my unconscious, than I am. Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious.”

Like “The Double Image,” her poem “Pain for a Daughter,” also confronts the vital connections between women—mothers and daughters when they are alone in themselves. This poem is about her daughter. In it, she describes the injured child, who is suddenly not a child in her pain and cries,

Oh my God, help me!
Where a child would have cried Mama!
Where a child would have believed Mama!
she bit the towel and called on God
and I saw her life stretch out...
I saw her torn in childbirth,
and I saw her, at that moment,
in her own death and I knew that she knew. (SP 113)

Creating an image of a child which mirrors her own self, the poem in a way turns out to be narcissistic as she reflects her own self in her daughter’s self. In fact, mirror image is itself a part of the narcissistic obsession which means loving one’s own self. Moreover, in the poem "The Division of Parts,” she wrestles with her mother in an outraged voice for she gave Anne Sexton the
identity she herself possessed: "You come, a brave ghost, to fix / in my mind without praise / or paradise / to make me your inheritor." (SP 39).

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton have appropriated myth in their poetry for more idiosyncratic and personal ends by connecting it with psychoanalytic themes. Both of them were schizophrenics, schizoids and paranoids all rolled in one. They suffered ambivalence throughout their life. A perceptive reading of their works make us aware of the elements of self-pits self self-hatred and self-criticism that led them to suicide. David Holbrook had studied Sylvia Plath's schizoid personality and he attributed her extremist art to the presence of schizophrenia taking instances from her work to show the nature of her schizoid personality, which is a narcissistic attribute. The narcissistic fixation since their childhood became the root cause of the various compulsive acts of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton as grown-up ladies. Their art is largely an expression of their obsessions. This narrowed down their creative range. In case of Sylvia Plath, her dominating father believed in the strict upbringing of his family and his masochism and autocratic behaviour is inherited by Plath. This inheritance explains the love-hate relationship between the father and the daughter.

Through their images, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton fulfill the task of relating the outer world of nature to the inner world of mind, the past of their childhood with the reality of dream-like experiences and the 'neutrality' of everyday life with the freedom of creative imagination. In fact, whether it is Colossus or Lazarus myth, Narcissus or Electral myth or the mirror imaging,
they have endeavoured to represent the psychological experience of which the self is an integral part. The confessional poetry always explores this relationship and produces a human world changed with meaning. Hence, the physical details are chosen in such a way that the truth of the psychological experience is made intelligible.
REFERENCES

1- "Craft Interview with Anne Sexton" William Packard in Anne Sexton : The Artist and Her Critics.47.


10- Ibid.2.


Further references to this book are incorporated into the text of the thesis under the abbreviation CP.


Subsequently cited as The Art of Sylvia Plath.

14- The Art of Sylvia Plath. 6.

15- The Confessional Poets. 148.

16- Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. 148.


18- The Confessional Poets. 294.

19- The Poetry of Initiation. 38.


25- Ibid. 277.

26- Ibid. 282.


31- Quoted in *Anne Sexton: The Artist and Her Critics*. 270.