CHAPTER-III

SYLVIA PLATH AND

THE PHENOMENON

OF ANGST
Angst is a German word. The word ‘anxiety’ in English is an insufficient translation of it. So is ‘anguish’. Angst emerges out of indecipherable depths of one’s personality. When once it takes its grip on a person, he experiences typical uncontainable revulsions. Mere outward restlessness is not an indication of it. It shakes the total personality as in dread, fear, nausea and the like. The causative facts of angst always remain hidden for any kind of insight or perception. When once the cause is known it dwindles into a mere anxiety. Angst cannot be chased out. It has to be suffered. It is just like life itself in its uncontainable dimensions. Precisely it is a startling surprise that all are susceptible to it in varying degrees. In a mystic it hastens for a confession. In a creative artist it gives strange unfounded visions and voices. It is interesting to note that such visions and forces are there also in a neurotic or a schizophrenic. It happens to her unconsciously or unknowingly. But an artist or a mystic are conscious agents well aware of its intensity and feel.

‘Angst’ arises from internal contradictions, unassimilated desires, an attitude of rejection of the daily occurrences, long standing deep desires embedded in the psyche. The phenomenon of angst takes shape differently in different people. In the Bible, ‘the psalmist’ gives shape to his angst in the form of psalms.

Out of the depths I cry to you O lord”
Lord hear my voice”1

Prophet Isaiah expresses his anguish of abandonment, loneliness and despair in his prayers and prophesies.

Sylvia Plath converts her angst into consistent poetry. Her anguish,
deep seated suffering, loneliness, unassimilated desires are characterized in artistic verses.

Several poems of Sylvia Plath, particularly those of “Ariel”, are a painful expression of her unfulfilled desires, obsessive fears, heart rending anxieties. Poems of “Ariel” in particular are a tragic drive towards death as a final solution to her anxieties that arose from a deep frustration from unwithstandability as being-in-the world.

Fear without a deducable cause is a state of Angst or Anxiety. Marjorie Perloff says,

> In the poetry of process, Catharsis is replaced by ecstasis: The poet is the medium of the oracle as in a trance like state; autonomous voices seem to speak through him, and as he is concerned to utter rather than to address, he is turned away from his listener, so to speak, in a state of rapt self-communion.

Here, you do not find an observation of the world as seen by the poet, rather you find a direct identification in which the poet himself is involved. For example in “Ancient Mariner”, the poet becomes the stricken deer.

It can be observed in “Morning Song” of Ariel.

Love set you going like a fat gold watch
The midwife slapped your foot soles, and your bald cry
Ticked its place among the elements.
Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival, New Statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety, We stand round blankly as walls

(Ariel, p.11).

In the “Morning Song” above the whole process of birth is mechanized and people in it are made as cog wheels in the machinery. Love is not a sacred emotion in a relationship. It is more like winding a watch for movement to produce an effect i.e. children. The whole conjugal intimacy is described mechanically and the children born become museum show pieces. The angst of the poet is described in becoming a self identified part of the observed.

The address is directly to the morning sun rise. The ‘bald cry’ of the sun taking ‘its place among the elements’ suggests at the manner in which the sun equals himself in might, a new born as he is. The ‘bald cry’ signifying his heroic arrival is counterprinted by ‘our voices echo’. The result is the most satisfying arrival in a ‘New Statue’. There is a sudden metamorphosis in the poetic mood into an antithetical one. There is nothing to hide in ‘your nakedness’. Our safety is in secrecy (shadow) as our sins have to be kept undisclosed. Hence, we cannot take pride of place ‘among the elements’. Elements threaten our (sinful) being. So in their abundance of mystery of the elemental world ‘we stand round blankly as walls,’ as though the walls could really save or protect us. Walls are barriers. It was Robert Frost who said that “there is something in me that hates the walls”. Plath follows the clue.

Here the pure divine love of the sun is contrasted with the sinister love of the humans while the sun moves ‘like a fat (unfearing) gold watch’. Our movements are required to be shadowed for ‘our safety’. The irony is the same pure sun, as the observer of everything has to grant us that safety,
by way of relegating us to a 'drafty museum' creating shadows behind our
'round blank' wallness. It is all an 'angst' filled revulsion against her own
self in the human set.

D. H. Lawrence responds as a poet of Angst in *City Life*: observing
the daily work of his fellowmen, he comes to the conclusion that modern
life is a paralysis and without a goal. The poet sees iron hooks growing out
of every face he meets and he senses that 'invisible wires of steel' pull the
city dwellers back and forth to work. Dehumanized, they become corpse
like fishes hooked and being played by some malignant fisherman on an
unseen shore.

Sylvia Plath's angst or floating fear is expressed in her dehumaniza-
tion of herself and her fellowmen; persons including oneself are objects,
things associated with a nameless fear. But the human qualities lacking in
persons are found everywhere in outer world: the poet's "I" can thus be-
come 'a blue mole', 'an elm tree,' 'a cut thumb,' 'a race horse.'

In the poem "Elm", one finds Sylvia Plath expressing her angst in
her identification with the taproot of the Elm, the roaring sea, a galloping
horse-

I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap
root:

It is what you fear.

I do not fear it: I hear in me,

Its dissatisfactions?

Or the voice of nothing, that was your madness

Love is a shadow
How you lie and cry after it

Listen: these are its hooves; it has gone off, like a horse.

(Ariel p. 25)

In the above lines Plath becomes the tap root of Elm tree and thus expresses her dissatisfactions, unimportance of her existence. Speaking about love, she says that it is like a temporary shadow. Plath becomes temporary and unimportant in the form of disappearing hooves of a horse suggesting how life's immensity runs far away after throwing her into loneliness. She knows 'the bottom' with her insight ('any great tap root'). My knowledge becomes a point of fear for you. Eve ate the fruit of knowledge before Adam; and this nature of her knowledge scares him and makes him seek distances. 'You live and cry after it', as you could not fulfill the mission. It is her promised pleasure that ran off' these are its hooves; it has gone off, like a horse'.

Sylvia Plath's poems mostly centre on the "self" without any objectivity because she is unable to detach her self sufficiently to describe the things outside herself. She can give voice only to her own emotional responses.

When Sylvia Plath was a little girl, she loved the suppers her grandmother prepared. She recalled in B.B.C. broadcast made shortly before her death in 1963

I never could watch my grandmother drop the dark green lobsters with their waving, wood-jammed claws into the boiling pot from which they would be in a minute, drawn red, dead, and edible. I felt the awful scald of the water too...
The little girl who could suffer so profoundly for a lobster was, however, the same child who felt a “polar chill immobilize” her bones when she found out that she would no longer be the only child in the family; her baby brother was born. “I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth,” she remembers feeling. “I felt the wall of my skin; I am I. That stone is stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of the world was over.”

Analyzing Sylvia Plath’s vision of reality, Marjorie Perloff says, that her poetry has two poles: (1) Human beings are in themselves, simply things, objects, machines—Museum Mammoths, but (2) such thingness can be transcended either in the joy or in the suffering that results when man identifies imaginatively with the life of animals, of plants, or of inanimate objects. The central paradox at the heart of Sylvia Plath’s poetry is thus human beings are dead, inanimate, frozen, unreal, while everything that is non-human is intensely alive, vital, potent.

Identifying herself with an Elm tree, Sylvia Plath speaks in the poem "Elm":

I have suffered atrocity of sunsets
Scorched to the root
My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires

(Ariel p.11).

According to some psychologists, identifying herself with the tap root of "Elm", she gives vent to her sorrows and anxieties as expressed in the above lines. It is a rare devise to employ in converting one’s angst into such poetic forms.
Anxiety in psycho-neurotic disorders is a danger signal felt and perceived by the conscious portion of the personality. “It is produced by a threat from within the personality (e.g. supercharged, repressed emotions, including such aggressive impulses as hostility and resentment) with or without stimulation from such external situations as loss of love, loss of prestige, threat of injury”, says Coleman.

Sylvia Plath’s ‘angst’ that is so strikingly evident in her later poetry can be understood in the analysis of Neurosis and Anxiety what I called as Anxiety Syndrome. James C. Coleman describes the causes and symptoms of neurotic anxiety:

Neurotic behaviour is a circular process in which an individual (1) has basic feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which lead to the evolution of everyday problems as threatening and to the resultant arousal of anxiety; (2) tends to avoid stress situations through various defensive maneuvers, rather than attempting to cope with them directly; (3) manifests a lack of insight into his self defeating behaviour together with rigidity, in the sense of failing to perceive or act upon alternative courses of action; (4) manifests egocentricity and therefore has trouble establishing and maintaining satisfying interpersonal relations; and (5) has feelings of guilt to cope directly with his problems, together with general feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness with his way of life.

For example her mental attitude is clearly exposed in the poem “Blue Moles”. Her ‘angst’ at vainsless efforts and fruitless labour can be clearly understood. She identifies herself with the blue moles in the poem, sees
the futility of her journey. It is like an endless journey which leads nowhere. One gets the impression of having done a lot but there, the goal seems to be as far as it was in the beginning.

Coming across two dead moles "shapeless as flung gloves" on the road, the speaker contemplates the meaninglessness of their fate: the mole resemble bits of 'blue suede'; they look neutral as the stones as their coakscrew noses, 'their white hands/uplifted', 'stiffen in a family pose'. Generally the speaker becomes obsessed with the death she has witnessed. Entering the soft pelt of the mole, she imagines what it would be like to be one of these creatures:

They move through their mute rooms while
I sleep,
Palming the earth aside, grubbers

Down there one is alone.

And still the heaven
of final surfeit is just as far.

(The Colossus p.42)

The daily journey of the mole is futile and so, the speaker implies, is the dark journey of her own life.

The two dead moles encountered by Plath on the road are like that 'Blue mole' in Lowell's poem "Skunk Hour". Like Lowell she does not know the meaning of those two moles. They just act as the initiators or momentum creators of the train of images. It is all just like a child devel-
oping involuntary spirals of imagination when he encounters a passing patch of cloud in the evening sky. The moles, like the cloud patch in the child’s day dreaming, are not the causes of the train images. But the train of images in Plath’s poem is neither exulting nor comfortable as sublime romantic transport mechanisms. On the other hand they push her into terrifying revelators of fears of life, as though the poet is suffering in the squeezing clutches of a giant crushing her. The ‘mute rooms’ ‘palming the earth aside’ and the ‘grubbers’ speak the insufferable suffocativeness of the atmosphere.

**SOFFOCATION IN ‘THE BELL JAR’**

A couple of incidents from “The Bell Jar” would give us an insight into further bouts of angst that she experienced in her see-saw change of likes, dislikes; successes, failures, joys, sorrows; expectations, disappointments.

She was introspective and eager to talk about herself, the suicide attempt and the events that led up to it. She described the previous summer as a series of frustrations. A brief expedition in the new York world of fashion journalism triggered a spiralling depression from which she could not extricate herself as the summer wore on. What should have been a stimulating, exciting round of gala festivities produced only a mounting tedium that did not subside even at the chance to meet and interview outstanding figures in the literary world. She found the work artificial and banal. She tried several other occupations that summer, among them a stint as a waitress. When they all proved similarly disappointing she suggests in “The Bell Jar”, that she “could do nothing well except study and compile a superior academic record” 13. When she began in earnest, unproductive study of Joyce’s Ulysses for her honours thesis at Smith, the last shred of self
confidence withered. "I was nothing", she exclaimed, "a zero".

Coleman speaking on Specific neurotic patterns says:

Individuals who have a history of feeling inadequate and insecure, and of evaluating themselves in terms of exacting standards and high levels of achievement, tend to react to the slightest threat of failure with apprehension and anxiety out of proportion to the degree of actual threat. This in turn upsets their pattern of living and augments the total stress.

After several unsuccessful attempts to find an easy death she took a bottle full of sleeping pills to a secluded place in the basement of her mother's home in Wellesley Hills (she referred to it as a fruit cellar), she consumed the entire contents leaving a note that she had run away. The desperate family searched for her in all possible places; alerted the police for assistance but only after some days she was discovered in the basement by her own brother. When she was found she was half dead. "I couldn't even succeed at killing myself" she complained, "I took too many pills and became violently ill, but didn't die, after all". *(The Bell Jar, p.115)*

When she was under the spell of the sleeping pills, she must have made several attempts to rise and find her way but left a deep brown scar jutting across the cheekbone. She did not blame others for her depression, although she admitted feeling alienated. She talked freely about her father's death when she was nine and her reactions to it. "He was an autocrat", she declared, "I adored and despised him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead when he obliged me and died I imagined that I had killed him". And then she added, "the strangest part of the suicide attempt was regaining unconsciousness in the hospital. I don't believe in God or in..."
an afterlife, and my first reaction when I opened my eyes was No, it can’t be. There can’t be anything after death. I was terribly disappointed that even death couldn’t put an end to my consciousness.”  

Although she never identified the particular insights that had emerged as a result of her psychiatric treatment or discussed her relationship with her psychiatrist, she did recount an incident that in retrospect is poignant. It seems foolish now, she said, “But I stormed into the psychiatrists’ office and demanded a lobotomy—there seemed little reason to go on suffering and little hope that I would even recover. The psychiatrist laughed at me and shook his head. You are not going to get off that easily.”  

He said, From her remarks it was clear that she herself felt that her depression had resulted from an inability to maintain a sense of her own worth, particularly in the face of the high praise others invariably heaped upon her.

It is evident from the above discussion that all her glorification of death and after, including rebirth, is delusory, heresy and purposely inflated through imagination in order to poetically magnify the evil and pain. There should be some hidden unconscious reason for all this kind of personal anxiousness to seek an exit and escape from life and its reality. If we notice the spacio-temporal imaginative dimensions of a suicide it becomes very clear. Both the time and space experiencing are usually distorted. Instead of experience space-time continuum as an abstract unity, suicide patient segregates both into separate uncoordinatable entities. This is a neurotic act. But then for the self of the patient it is real and really unwithstandable during those moments of bouts of imagination. Space appears to be suddenly slipping and slipping out. The result of all such delusory state is the immediate emergence of anxiety which obliterates sense and sensibility. Again, sense and sensibility remain uncoordinated. As a result they are forced to invent for themselves incredible deductions
out of what they sense and thus motivate their sensibility to arrive at its own contrary meanings and imaginations which unfortunately thought of as the only realities. Thus it is the anxiety of the outset which initiates survival itself, into a self-terminable lot. In this extremity of thought they resort to extreme actions like swallowing a bottle full of sleeping tablets or taking recourse to still violent and painful methods of self-destruction. This is more or less the case with Anne Sexton also. Both Plath and Sexton initially acquired this anxiety Syndrome from the poetry of Robert Lowell, who in his turn is a confirmed neurotic.

Sylvia set her own goals which were unreasonably high. She was intelligent, she was successful on several occasions but then her desires soared higher than what she could really achieve. During the previous summer, she was forced into an untenable position, unable to react positively to the dream come true details of the journalism interlude but similarly unable to allow herself the luxury of failure. Too many successes, too many prizes and too many accolades going too far back had created a pattern of response that she could not break without help; She was like Cinderella who discovered that she didn’t want to marry the prince, but was helpless to stop the ceremonies.

She wanted to live up to the expectations of the society. On the one hand she disliked to conform to the many practices which she thought were ridiculous, and on the other hand she wanted that aura of glory from the acknowledgment of her people and the society. She also longed to experience life in all its colorful realities and beautiful complexity. The conflict from the contradictories was painful. If she seemed to be resolving the conflict that summer, “in a burst of new found confidence, the effect was illusory,”¹⁸ to quote the words of Paul Alexander.
In some ways Sylvia was the product of her times. While adjusting to modify herself, she developed a code of her own for living and tackling her problems. She resembles that section of people who kept their impulses and longings inside and showed a passive, submissive face in public.

On this, Nancy Hunter, one of Plath's critics says,

In her darker moments, Sylvia seemed to regard man as an object that could be manipulated at will. She absorbed the essence of people like doses of a unique psychedelic drug designed to expand her consciousness. Sometimes she seemed to forget that they had emotions and wills of their own.

Modern day feminist viragos in their saver moments also 'regard man as the object that could be manipulated at will'. To some extent Plath was under the influence of the present day feminist chatter of imposing and dictating autocratic terms and conditions to the male counterparts, particularly in the interpersonal relations. Plath too resorts to it inspite of her frigidity and falls into delusions.

Rollo May analyses the anxiety patterns as results of certain behaviour patterns in his book "Meaning of Anxiety". This analysis could be applied in the case of Sylvia Plath to understand her behaviour in the aforesaid paragraphs-

Prestige goals are dominant in our culture, social prestige being defined chiefly in economic terms. The acquisition of wealth is accepted as proof and symbol of individual power. Since success is measured against the status of others, the striving for success is essentially competitive. One is successful if one excels and triumphs on others. The goal of competi-
tive success not only arose by virtue of an emphasis on individual power set over against the community in the renaissance, but as this goal persists it tends always to increase the juxtaposition of the individual and the community. Being the dominant criterion of self valuation, it is accepted as the means of validating the self in one's own eyes of others. Whatever threatens, the goal is, therefore, the occasion for profound anxiety for the individual in our culture because the threat to values hold essential to one's existence as a personality i.e. essential to one’s worth and prestige as a personality. Anxiety arises as a result of the individualistic competitive pattern not simply when the individual finds his possibilities for success threatened but in many more subtle ways. “Anxiety arises out of the interpersonal isolation and alienation from others in a pattern in which self validation depends on triumphing over others. This anxiety was already discernible in many individuals of the renaissance,” says May.

Rollo May gives the following vicious circle:

Competitive individual striving -> intersocial hostility-> isolation-> anxiety-> increased competition striving. Thus the methods most generally used to dispel anxiety in such a constellation actually increases anxiety in the long run.

There are also moments when Sylvia Plath lost confidence not only in people but in her own mother and the doctor who was treating her. When she was totally depressed she felt that the doctor could not understand, the mother (despite her care and concern) was the butt of resentment, because communication seemed to have failed. Sylvia felt that her mother was in collaboration with the doctor. Thus in her desperation and angst nobody can find place in the seccaries of her interiorities.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,

staring from her hood of bone,
She is used to this sort of thing.

(Ariel p.85)

In the above lines of "Edge", 'moon' symbolises her mother. Both in suicide and matricide there is that wild revenge and hate usual to the psychiatric patients, with insane delusions. David Holbrook rightly points out "It is not a question of self pity, it is rather a question of psychotic delusion". The very psychotic delusion is directly related to the keenly infelt anxiety and Holbrook does not put his insight into this. But, he very correctly says that "the impulse to rebirth is that of revenge". If so, it is again anxiety that prompts her for much revenge.

'ANGST' FROM BEING A WOMAN

Among other things, Sylvia found it hard to accept her role as a woman. She fought tooth and nail within herself about the disparities that the customs and practices offered to men and women. In The Bell Jar Esther ruminates (as does Sylvia Plath in the poem The Disquieting Muses) on how she could not do any of the things other girls do normally, such as cooking and shorthand. "The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way... I was a terrible dancer" (The Bell Jar, p.132). In the poem, "The Disquieting Muses" the darning egg dollies prevented the protagonist from dancing, made her stone deaf and defeminised her. So, the failure to become feminine is linked with the failure of responsiveness, creative power, perspectives, and hope for a fruitful realization of potentialities under the influence of symbolic objects which are like a bundle of clubs, malignant male objects.
Mother you sent me to piano lessons
And praised my arabesques and trills
Although each teacher found my touch
Oddly wooden inspite of scales
And the hours of practicing, my ear
Tone-deaf and yes, unteachable.
I learned, I learned, I learned elsewhere
From muses unhired by you, dear mother.
(The Colossus, p.51)

The dread of failure of potentialities is made clear in the novel:
I saw my life branching out before me like the fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and off beat professions, and another fig was an olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more I couldn't quite make out.
(The Bell Jar, p. 142)

'Life branching out' substantiates the mothering instinct in its full blown imaginative mothering process. But Sylvia Plath maintains in herself a sort of male creative ego also. In fact her own mother and father prevail in her as alternating masks. To put it more correctly she puts on
her own personality the alternating masks of her own father and mother who she always hated in her conscious moments and desired to wreak revenge on them in her unconscious self. Her poetry turns out to be oracular involuntary outburst. Both feelings and emotions far surpass boundaries of civilised rhetoric and enter the areas of unspeakable ranges of boundless outbursts.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

(Ariel p.56)

The terrible inward conflict of grappling with one's maleness, as an incorporation of one's experience of identifying with the father and the others in this maleness, can be seen in the dream which Laing quotes from "Boss:"

.....A girl of twenty-five years dreamt about how all her family members turned into stones. The dreamer escaped into the room of her father. He stood in the middle of it. In her despair she rushed up to him, and, desiring his protection, she threw her arms round his neck. But he too was made of stone and, to her utter horror, he turned into sand. But she embraced him.

After this dream, repeated four times, the girl became petrified physically. The sand, the glazed eyes, the stone are all found in Sylvia Plath's poems - even daddy cracks and crumbles. But the mother, as a source of creativity itself, is stony too and she found horrifying gulfs and shifting shadows where she should be. If any female element appears, it is red,
voracious, malignant (Purdah, Stings, Lady Lazarus). In “Three Women” ‘mother earth is the vampire of us all’. ‘her mouth is red’, ‘old winter face’, ‘old barren one’, ‘old time Bomb’. In “Three Women” from which these phrases come, the third voice sees her baby as ‘my-red terrible girl:’ her cries are hooks through the glass. Encounter between female element beings is always like this in her work.

For Sylvia Plath, as we observe in most of her later poems, life loses its value. She tends to identify human life with inanimate things in nature. In the poem ‘Ariel’ we can observe this identification. In the simplest sense, ‘Ariel’ merely relates a morning ride from the moment where the speaker mounts her horse, poised for movement, to its culmination in the violent and destructive flight through space. But the poem is not about the morning ride; “rather, girl, horse and the movement of galloping merge to create something different.” to quote Perloff. As the motion accelerates, the speaker cannot distinguish the brown furrow ahead from the brown neck of the horse; both are oddly felt to be beyond her, out of her reach, and she cannot catch up. Vaguely, the new being that is both girl and animal is aware of ‘Nigger-eye/ Berries’ on the side of the road, ‘Black sweet blood mouthfuls’ that cast ‘dark/Hooks’ to catch her, but she is immune to their touch. In her new trance-like state, she sheds the empty shell of her body, her thighs and hair;

Black sweet blood mouthfuls
Shadows
Something else

Hauls me through air—
Thighs, hair;
Flakes from my heels.

(Ariel, p.37)

Taken out of herself, She can be part of the foaming wheat, the 'glitter of seas' before her. Thus the identity not only of the rider but also of the horse is dissolved; the newly created self is an arrow or the dew.

.....

Melts in the wall
And I
Am the arrow,
The dew that flies

(Ariel p.37)

The above poem gives us an idea of the tension that Sylvia was experiencing as she was pulled apart by love and anxiety. Both this love and anxiety are born of the same generic force called the mothering instinct. But everything in life, for that matter life-in-itself is threatened by inevitable loss through death. The 'Ariel' in fact celebrates poetically the possible manner in which life culminates into death. For a moment it is the 'arrow'; in the very next moment it is the 'cold dew' that flies suggesting at the ante of the 'air' that is, water in its cold dead form. Life in its momentary experiencing form is the theme of 'Ariel' the very uncontrollable airiness of air in being an element.

Coleman says, :

The handling of hostility, for example, tends to be especially difficult for the neurotic, who typically feels forced
to take a complaint, subservient, self suppressing attitude
toward others as the price of security, love and acceptance.
The blocking of his own strivings to be a person leads in-
evitably to strong feelings must be controlled and denied at
all costs to avoid possible rejection by others to maintain an
image of himself as a worthy person.

In the first poem of 'Ariel'- 'Morning Song' we observe her matter
of fact mechanical attitude and understanding of the human preliminaries
for the birth of a child. The love that exists between a husband and a wife
is sacred and out of this sacred bond children are born - a testimony of
their love. But, for Sylvia, it (event of birth) is mechanical and is com-
pared to the winding of a watch. Just as the watch goes on based on the
winding so also, for Sylvia, the sex act of husband and wife is mechanical
and the birth of a child is the result of that winding. The speaker's dawn
is not one of love and joy but one of anxiety - motherhood both frightens
and fascinates her. The 'winding' of a watch metaphor is significant.
'Winding' is an act of life ('wind') breathing into that mechanical instru-
ment called 'watch'. But the literal meaning 'watch' in the sense of keep-
ing a concerned observation, is important here. She means to imply that
'winding' as an act is being observed by that unborn watchful eye; and it
understands the lack of concern for the outcome, that is, the birth of a
child. Hence, we cannot expect concerns in this purposive world. All
concerns emerge out of responsibility; and responsibility is love, caring
and protection. The elemental world into which a child is born abounds in
irresponsibility. That is the way the elements behave themselves. Life
thrown into the elemental furies and contradictions leaves no place for
safety or security. On realizing this state of affairs human conscience as
protectionless as it is, falls into inconsolable anxiety which paralyzes the very being. The necessary courage-to-be in the world gets shattered; and all existence becomes a doubtful base. The newborn child is likened to a statue. 'Our voices echo magnifying your arrival'. But it needs no such joy. 'Your nakedness shadows our safety'. Here 'child is not father of man'. He is just a shadow. Another word for 'shadow' is 'shroud' meaning the ghost. Thus 'child is ghost of man' is a fearful non-responsive agent causing all anxiety. The initiation into life similarly sounds like an assembly-line process: 'The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry/took its place among elements, (Ariel, p.11). The infant's cry becomes a dead matter and what should be most living is dead. The persistent second-person address, the close bond established between the "I" and the "You" implicates the mother in the child's drama. If her infant is merely a mechanical thing, the poem suggests, it is ultimately because, she is also dead.

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry-
Took its place among the elements.

(Ariel p.11)

The poet's angst transforms the baby into a 'New Statue' in a 'drafty museum' It's parents are standing like 'museum walls'

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival, New statue.
In drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

( Ariel p.11)
Even the human cry becomes an object, a rising balloon. And one feels that both mother and child, the “I” and “You”, are inside the balloon, unable to get you, to have contact with the ‘normal’ world of living creatures.

. . . . An now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

(Ariel p.11)

‘The clear vowels rise like balloons’ suggests the meaningless hue and cry of humanity or what the startford Avon land called ‘sound and fury signifying nothing’. Only vowels in the alphabet cannot contribute to any meaning. They are as agonising as the pure elements. All talk of human concern is an increasing endless outcry in the wilderness.

The images are most carefully chosen to intimate the speaker’s tension, the pull between love and anxiety. She identifies clearly with the child and feels totally responsible to it— but that she cannot believe that she herself is human. If one has no identity, the poem implies, having a baby cannot be more than winding a fat gold watch; the new world of motherhood is a frozen one where breath is as ephemeral as the life of a moth. The whole problem of Plath lies in her frigidity. Her frigidity itself was born of imaginary phobias and fears concerning her male partners. In the intimate company of man, she is incapable of reaching blissful sublimities. This kind of vacuum in experience is very often true in respect of all women one time or other. But in the case of Plath it is probably a routine experience. Therefore, she does not feel womanly joy and contentment in the child birth. Her sadistic intentionality desires that the child were good
if dead. This is exactly opposite to normal human experiences. But, poetically she is capable of terrifying and dreadful imagination. In being melodramatic in imagery she even leaves Elizabethan melodramatic poets like Webster and Merston behind. She is palpably macabre and ghastly.

Godiva, I unpeel—

Dead hands, dead stringencies.

(Ariel p.36)

On analyzing another poem “Tulips” one can notice the angst of the speaker. There are two important images represented by ‘white’ and ‘red’. ‘White’ stands for death and ‘red’ stands for life. This poem is written about the time when she was recovering in the hospital. The first part of it speaks about her emptiness, valuelessness:

I am nobody; I have nothing do with explosions
I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
And my history to the anesthetist and
my body to surgeons

(Ariel p.20)

The world of her hospital room is white - ‘White lids’, ‘White caps’.

Into this white, dead world, in which the speaker’s self has become ‘a thirty year old cargo boat’ intruders come in the form of ‘red tulips’, flowers sent to the patient to brighten her room up. And now an odd metamorphosis takes place. The seemingly mindless tulips come alive and threaten the dazed emptiness of the white hospital world. Their redness
begins to hurt the speaker. The tulips now ‘breathe’, they have ‘tongues’, the red petals become red bad sinkers round my neck. As the red flowers become larger and more ominous, the frightened ego withdraws and sinks.

The red tulips image has an oblique reference to the menstrual cycle in her person, and a more complacent objective suggestion at the male exhibitionistic phallic innuendoes. ‘The red petals’ had multiple affairs and equally multiple failures. The following lines further clarify the sinister imagery.

The tulips are red in the first place, they hurt me.
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby,
Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.

(Ariel p.21)

The ‘redness of the tulips talks to my wound’ further consolidates the painful nature of her affairs with male partners. She hates men to utter misanthropic dimensions of Jonathan Swift. She sneers at men just like Swift sneers at women.

The flowers watch her and eat her oxygen while she becomes a ‘cut-paper shadow’, they have ‘eyes’ but she has ‘no face’. The drama is complete; because they become flesh and blood in the speaker’s imagination; the tulips force her out of her earlier whiteness, her passive extinction, and she hates this active intrusion. In her anxiety, she equates the tulip petals with the ‘red blooms’ of her heart which insists on beating despite her desire for death. Finally, life returns with the taste of her hot tears: health is a far away country but at least now it is remembered. The
spell of the hospital room is broken.

- The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
  They are opening like the mouths of some great African cat,
  And I am aware of my heart; it opens and closes
  It’s bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.

  (Ariel p.22)

The ‘great African cat’ being tiger, Plath considers male human animal as dangerous as a man eater. According to her it should be behind bars like dangerous animals, that is, to be zoo stuff. But the case of her own heart is different (it opens and closes/ it’s bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me’) a clear indication of a child like self-love. On the same parlance male animal being put ‘behind bars’ also speaks for the child like curiosity to keep the male animal at a safe distance ‘behind bars’ and visiting it again out of child like passion to visit the zoo.

**LIFE TO OBJECTS**

Angst is also witnessed in the instances when an object becomes endowed with human traits. This can be observed with a surgeon’s analysis in the poem Cut’.

The poem begins with a common incident of injuring one’s thumb while cutting onions in the kitchen. She was fascinated by the accident and seems somehow wants the injury. Her focus moves from her thumb to something outside with which she wishes to sympathise. Thus the bleeding thumb becomes a ‘little pilgrim’, a ‘bottle/ of pink fizz’, which in turn becomes a platoon of soldier’s (red coats).
What a thrill-
My thumb instead of an onion

Little pilgrim
The Indians axed your scalp
Your turkey wattle
Carpet rolls

A million soldier nun,
Red coats everyone.

(Ariel p.23)

It becomes so poignant and so absorbing that the speaker becomes the thumb, losing her sense of identity and her rational awareness that this is only a piece of flesh, a part of her body.

The series of identifications that follow are most hostile: the thumb now becomes a ‘Saboleun’, a Japanese suicide pilot (‘Kamikaze man’). Watching the ‘balled pulp’ the speaker understands truth suddenly.

How you jump
Trepanned veteran
Dirty girl
Thump stump

(Ariel p.24)

A ‘trepan’ is a surgical instrument in the form of a crown-saw, for cutting small pieces of bone, especially from the skull. This gives the impression that ‘thumb’ is a miniature man with a wounded skull. ‘Trepan’
also means trapped, snared, thus the little veteran is doubly doomed. Thus the poem comes round to completion of frightening reality that 'Thumb stump', this 'dirty girl' is none other than the speaker herself.

A cut thumb will never be the same after one has read this strange poem in which angst is focused, in which an unspecified fear of being alive and an imaginative projection into something alien-a piece of thumb coalesce.

In her poem “Fever 103” we come across this feeling that she seems to attach no value to her life yet her words as the poem testifies, are living creatures.

My head a moon
Of Japanese paper, my golden beaten skin
Infinitely delicate and infinitely expressive.

(Ariel p.58)

Quite ironically Rollo May confirms that the emergence of individual freedom is very closely connected with anxiety; indeed the possibility of freedom often arouses anxiety, and how the anxiety is met will determine whether the freedom is affirmed or sacrificed by the individual. The child's need to break the original ties of independence on its parents always involves anxiety. In the healthy child this anxiety is overcome by new relatedness to his parents and others on the basis of a larger degree of self-direction and autonomy. But independence from parents brings with it an insupportable degree of anxiety (as in the case of the child of hostile or excessively anxious parents), and if the price in increased feelings of
helplessness and isolation is too great, the child retreats into new forms of dependency, in the words of May.

The Ontological manner in which anxiety is related to the existential choices and freedoms gets further confirmed by Sartre in his postulates on Nausea. If so, according to the existential thinkers, the conscious spurs created by 'anxiety' and 'nausea' have their positive dimensions also. The very wreck of the personality created by this anxiety paves way for challenging creative poetic imagination in Plath. It is altogether a different matter that the same feelings of anxiety hasten Plath into her suicide pact with destiny.

The absolute negative dimension of anxiety syndrome in Plath puts forward its dangerous portents. Morbid and maribound imagination is not something new for great poets. Shakespeare had it in abundance. All the romantic poets maintain it as a puzzling poetic curiosity. Only they did not allow it to perculate into their daily lives. However, the tall question emerges if Plath's suicide attempts are well thought of and determined attempts at the assertion of her sense of existential freedom and choice or they are just neurotic bouts of emotion born of the lack of 'necessary-courage-to-be' in the world. The generations of mystic philosophers and poets always suggested that human life, as we have it with all its metaphorical and empirical constraints, is not worth living at all. But this is only a passing thought in them. In the case of Plath, somehow, it became a strong conviction. Almost all her poetry envisages this conviction in great unwithstandable proportions. The palpitating unwithstandability at all is the artistic creation of her poetry; and this she does like a great genius consolidating this thought. But, then, we do not read poetry for thoughts. We go to it to seek a height, an elevation, a transport and a
transcendence. Plath offers all these poetic elements, even when she is talking about the worthlessness of living this cursed human life. All what we have—is this love human life. But the height of conviction to say ‘chi’ (resenting ‘no’) to its needs a great poetic courage. It is ironic that this poetic courage in her equanimity slips out the nerve-eating childlike innocuous predilections. It is all as though she says that ‘it is my life; I live/ suffer/ die, it is the way I like’. If so it is a great poetic assertion of existential freedom in capitals.

**PLATH’S FATHER AND ANGST**

Let us now examine the ‘Angst’ in her writings and life from the viewpoint of her relationship with her father. Alvarez points out that Sylvia Plath blames her father as “the root cause of her suffering” and in her poetry she constantly returns to her relationship with the dead father in an attempt to overcome and, if possible, accept the consequences of his death.

When, in the British council interview the reporter claims that ‘Daddy’ is ‘the sort of poem that a real American could not have written’ because ‘Dachau, Anschwitz’, and ‘Mein Kampt’ do not mean so much to Americans, Sylvia Plath replies:

Well now, you are talking to me as a general American. In particular my background is, may I say, German and Austrian. On one side I am a first generation American, and so my concern with concentration camps and so on is uniquely intense. And then, again, I’m rather apolitical person as well, so I suppose that’s what part of it comes from.
The above reporter forgot the difference between literal and metaphorical usage of words. The expressions 'Dachau', 'Auchwits' and 'Mein Kemp' are being poetically manipulated here by Plath in order to express her acute sense of unbearability of life for her in her familial set up. The familial constraints are at once particular for her, and also sexual in the sense that some sort of uncontainability in the traditional familial institutions is an in-felt experience by almost every child. Plath poetically exploits this vaguely wide spread frustration and resentment of almost all the children towards both the parents. The expressions like 'oedipus' and 'Electra complexes', 'patricide', 'matricide' and 'infanticide' are common usages in the modern psychological studies. Therefore Plath's indictment of her father in "Daddy" is not a matter of unwithstandable sensationalism.

Generations of critics ruthlessly overemphasised Plath's autobiographical platitudes and the consequent note of irreverence in the explications of her "Daddy". They forget that Plath passionately followed the English Metaphysical poets (more particularly John Donne) in analogically implying the Catholic Christian traditions where 'Yahova (God)' is conceived as unfeeling, 'autocratic father' subjugating vehemently all the freedoms and choices of the humans as a metaphysical rebel like Elizabethan Donne and the existential Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger and the French novelist Marcel Proust. The most important metaphorical influences on Plath in her irreverence towards family members is that of Emily Bronte. It is Bronte's personal hatred of her father that hastened her to conceive the ghastly character of Heathcliff. Plath creates Heathcliffian elemental furies in her poetry.

Preparing for the reading of her "New Poems" of which "Daddy" is
one, Sylvia Plath gives an explanation to the psychological complexity of
the speaker of the poem-

The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra Complex. Her
father died while she thought he was a God. Her father was
also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the
daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she
has to act out the awful little allegory over before she is
free of it.31

The innermost personal fury is a profound characteristic evacuation
of angst like that of an existential rebel clumsily stiffed with what all that
is said of Electra Complex. However, it is all an ‘awful little allegory’ in
order to achieve a sort of catharsis or cleansing self-clarification. Such
poetic cleansing or catharsis is the end result and the message of the
poem.

Freud explains in a number of his works that in dreams or in art, “we
may confront or manipulate in play, or dreams, or the presentation of what
in life was or is traumatically unbearable, a source, ever, or aesthetic
pleasure.”32 Plath considers ‘The Bell Jar’ as an autobiographical appren-
tice work which she wrote in order to free herself from the past.

The fact that death of her father hurt her deeply can be deduced from
what she writes—

And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside child-
hood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine
first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a
bottle- beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth.

The chief problem remained to find an answer to the urgent question of how to overcome the far-reaching effects of his death. It is in this intricate tension that she experienced deep Angst.

I am the ghost of an infamous suicide.
My own blue razor rusting in my throat.
O pardon the one who knocks for pardon at Your gate, father-your hound-bitch daughter, friend.
It was my love that did us both to death.

(Collected Poems p.117)

From these times, it is quite evident that Sylvia Plath suffered deeply from the loss of her father. Evidently, one can sense the urgency of suicide in the desire of Sylvia to join her father. Bronte's Heathcliff is the archetypally exaggerated father figure of the author, and so is the case of father figure in Plath's "Daddy". The most sensuous and utmost violence are poetically stuffed together as in some mysterious Baachanelian revels or in the African Hudo nocturnal sessions.

In "All the Dead Dears" Sylvia expresses a close link with the dead. This does not mean that she is friendly with the dead. She hates them and feels that they are longing to get hold of her and drag her into their fold. This tension between keeping her to herself and the fear of losing herself in the dead is another event of Angst in Sylvia born of intensely felt death instinct. Here 'Death is not the mother of beauty' as in the case of Wallace Stevens. It is the mother of all conceivable archetypal dreads and
phobias. These dreads and phobias require for themselves a sort of arresting poetic beauty. Thus the aesthetic stands of Wallace Stevens are indicated. This is very clearly evidenced in her poem "All the Dead Dears".

From the mercury-backed glass
Mother, grandmother, great grand mother
Reach hag hands to haul me in,
And an image looms under the fishpond surface
where the daft father went down
With orange duck-feet winnowing his hair-

(Collected Poems pp.70-71)

These lines evince rather pathetic emotional dependency, a wish to steady her own shaky frame of mind by way of leaning on the heroic figure on her own autocratic father.

The tension that arises in Sylvia Plath from her relationship cannot be bypassed. We witness quite frequently her love, hatred; likes, dislikes, joys, sorrows, wanting and rejecting. Her personal problem regarding the early demise of her father left an indelible impression upon her. This loss of her father went a long way and until her suicide she could not reconcile this loss, nor could she accept it. The result was a life long anxiety nurtured permanently in the sub-conscious self. With gradual onset of Physical growth and mental maturity every organism in nature seeks distance and objectivity from their source of origin and birth. In some species it is almost immediately after the birth. But in humans the period of attachment prolongs for quite sometime, probably until the incumbent achievers self-withstandability in all respects. It is equally natural that homo sapiens after due growth and maturity develops a sort of critical objectivity as
against the affectionate parents also. This sense of critical objectivity coupled with excessive emotional attachment towards her parents since they both are grossly antithetical towards each other, contributed for some psychological conscious abnormalcy in Plath, and the said abnormalcy, under the weight of the antithetical contradictory forces contending for supremacy, contributed for a restless anxiety filled authenticity in Plath. Therefore, the very theme of her poetry is a painfully private subject matter; and she superbly manipulates her private subject matter into a poetically characterised anxiety confectioned into images full of positive abhorance. When this abhorance catches heat and obtains the height of existential angst (anxiety) the poem resembles the short story of Chekov or Flanbert. The poetry soaked in anxiety was a fashion in her; and in any case particularly suits her kind of sensibility. The personal sense of her own tortured psychohistory and psychobiography through its very constructedness mirrors forth (in concave and convex lenses) a general plight of humanity culminating into great poetry.

Examining "Full Fathom Five" of "Colossus" we get a glimpse of the anxious moments - moments of tension from the separation from her father due to his early death -

Old man, you surface seldom.
There you come in with the tide's coming
(The Colossus p.35)

Plath's father was certainly not an 'old man' when he died. But in the American pop dialectal conversational culture to call father an 'old man' is a show of irreverence as a mark of in-felt resentment towards him. Huck in Mack Thain's Huckelbury finn calls his father his ancient. In
Twain, it exhibits humour. But in Plath it is a show of utter hatred towards her father ghost that does not leave her alone.

We can notice the contradictories in the above lines indicating one's own tension within. Her own attachment-detachment to her father is like the tides of the sea-never constant. There are moments when she was not affected by the death of her father but then, that was not so, his memory is constantly gnawing her.

Her father’s memories have never really left her. She is constantly hanging on to him loving in one moment and hating him yet in another moment. She expresses her undesirable dependence on him almost suggestively extending to a keenly felt ‘Electra passion’ seeking sublimations, as it happens in some Greek mythological cores as myth around mystle toe and alder.

Moving on to “The Beekeeper’s daughter” in Colossus we see one similarity i.e. the unreachableness of her father. In “Full Fathom Five” he is at the bottom of the sea difficult to get there; and in the “Beekeeper’s Daughter” he is sovereign king unapproachable.

Hieratical in your frock coat, maestro of the bees,
You move among the many breasted hives,
My heart under your foot, sister of a stone.
(The Colossus p.66)

The very title ‘Full Fathom Five’ has a suggestive reference to Puck’s song in Shakespeare’s The Tempest.

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change.

Here, Ariel explains the immortalization of Ferdinand’s father— that he lies at the bottom of this vast ocean but in a new form with his body parts transformed anew. They have become one with the ocean. His bones have taken the form of Corals; in place of ‘eyes’ there exist ‘pearls’ signifying the beauty of the dead man. He further explains that he has turned immortal since his body parts far from decay, have been metamorphised, this identifying with that of the sea.

However, the direct influence on Plath is from The Waste Land of T.S. Eliot:

I remember
Those pearls that were his eyes.
“Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?”

But, however, the purpose of Plath far exceeds the poetic intentions of both Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot. In calling her father ‘maestro of the bees’ she suggests her father as a romantic, flurting hero. Her repressable desire to seek the companion of her father is suggested in the line ‘My heart under your foot’. The ‘maestro of the bees’ who moves among the many breasted hives delicately alights on the flowers with his caressing feet. It expresses her heart’s desire to be caressed by the feet of the ‘maestro’. It is not she, but her ‘heart’ (the desiring part) that is imaginatively and vicariously transported under the feet of her father, who himself is at
'Full Fathom Five' in the deep sea. In relegating him to the depths of the sea she also gains a sort of sublime pleasure gained out of her innermost patricide-complex, just imagined in an artistic manner of morbid thinking. The real poetic elation comes when she considers herself as 'sister of a stone' meaning thereby that she is not like a flower; and she is as inanimate and frigid like a 'stone'. Even then her desire for companionship of father compels her to cherish all sorts of imaginative excesses. She probably realises for a moment the sinister nature of her imagination and the possible injustice she is perpetrating on her mother in coveting her place in relation with her father. Quite in a guilty half-hearted manner she clarifies in the following line that her competition with her mother is just for the prerogative of being a queen. It is not in the prerogative of motherhood.

While in "Full Fathom Five" it is a physical impossibility, in the line below, it is a positional distance. She considers herself humble, simple and a subject of the king. But, at the very next instance, she considers herself a queen. As a subject there could be no relationship on equal terms.

"Here is a queenship no mother can contest."
(The Colossus, p.66)

Here too there is that suggestion of sadistic pleasure of inflicting injury and death to the father. In the bee culture the male bee immediately dies after mating queen bee. Plath herself humourously suggests that she is like the queen bee and it is a challenge to her dead father figure to come and possess her if he can dare do it.
Thus she becomes a queen and expresses her rebellion towards her mother while desiring to enter into a prohibited relationship with her father. She equals herself with her mother or even above her.

“A fruit that is death to taste; dark flesh, dark parings.”
(The Colossus, p.66)

She was aware, at the same time, of the consequences of such a choice: it is not customary, it defies nature and it is unaccepted in the society.

Ted Hughes says, “As far as I can judge, ‘This statement refers to the acknowledgment of the insight she had apparently gained into the relationship between her dead father and her own complex self’.36

I shall never get you put together entirely
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.
(The Colossus p.12)

The above lines refer to her mental agony of her fruitless attempts to finish her work on her father. She is not able to rectify her relationship with her father. Here, father is like god who remained an unattainable puzzle for her.

Thirty years now I have laboured
To dredge the slit from your throat
I am none the wiser
(The Colossus p.12)
Once again, we notice a big disparity expressed between the father and the daughter. The daughter is small, helpless before the Colossal statue of her father who is godlike. She expresses her disappointment and helplessness in making any good impact in her relationship with her father-

My hours are married to shadow,
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.
(The Colossus, p.13)

In the subsequent lines of the poem, one can notice a development of the relationship in the mind of Sylvia Plath. She expresses her wish of marrying her father who is the king who marries the speaker, who is the queen-

Father, bridegroom, in the Easter egg
Under the coronal of the sugar roses
The queen bee marries the winter of your year.
(The Colossus p.66)

The expression ‘Winter of your year’ is very important here. Winter is the last of the cyclic seasons and as such it stands for the completion of death of the year. The ‘queen bee’ in cherishing a desire to love the ‘bridegroom’ ultimately consummates the death of the ‘bridegroom’. The bee culture love affair metaphor suits the poetic purpose of Plath in suggesting at her passion for her dead father. There is also a veiled metaphysical hint at the Biblical idea of Jesus being the groom and church his beloved. Looked from this angle the poem flashes forth expressively new
meanings. All the verbal sinistrality and carnal emphasis readily alters into a spiritual world of religious ideas. But such allegorical parallelisms were very common in Metaphysical Donne and others. But in Plath, because of the influence of her teacher Robert Lowell the autobiographical confession of the unconfessionable becomes very prominent. Even then, Plath’s poetic strategy is not as repulsive as Lessing, Levertor and Sexton who wrote - “...far too graphically about women’s bodies with the purpose of evolving cheap sensual properties” in the words of Spivack. Plath’s autobiographical and metaphysical learnings save her from such stigmas.

Moreover, Plath’s ultimate concerns in her autobiographical poems is more a way of expressing her anxiety concerning the nastiness of being-in-the world of inevitable realities of birth, growth and death rather than a gross ‘confessionalistic mode’ of depicting ‘manic depressions’ enticing self-pity and sentimental sympathy from the readers. Plath’s poetry sends readers into deep existential dilemmas.

Thus “The Beekeeper’s Daughter” goes one step further on “The Full Fathom Five”.

This inability of reaching her father is expressed again in “The Colossus;” where she considers her father a damaged statue and she is busy mending and cleaning the statue without any hope of completing the task.

“I crawl like an ant in the morning”
(The Colossus, p.12)

Her desperation of her father reaches its climax in the poem “Daddy”, “Ariel”.
There is a strong fear expressed where her father was concerned. She was strongly aware of his German descent and thus considers herself a Jew. This comparison gives an indication of her suffering. Just as the Jews suffered under the merciless hands of the Germans, so too Sylvia Plath suffered under the dictatorial hand of her father.

I have always been scared of you,
With your Luft waffe, your gobbledygoo,
And your neat moustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer man, O you

(Ariel p.54)

She saw every German as her father in the sense that mercilessness, cruelty, lack of love, stubbornness being the characteristic features of all Germans including her father. Every German standing for her father and vice versa a matter of her poetic hallucinatory imagination and it well suits her purpose of her evacuating her energy.

I thought every German was you
And the language obscene
An engine, an engine
Chuffering off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to walk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

(Ariel pp. 54, 55)

Her poetic manner of transporting her father into every German fur-
her gets confirmed in the above lines. It all serves her duel poetic purpose of showing a sort of extreme violence and revolt against the then autocratic regime of Hitler in Germany and her dead and gone figure of her father, leaving her fatherless, that is, protectionless. It is all as though Nietzsche declaring with intense personal animus in his Zarathustra that ‘God is dead and man is left forever an orphan to pursue his life in unrest’. To be like a Jew appears to be a raging contagious and pest. On thinking of her father/Jew she feels she herself was getting contaminated with that killing bug. Having come face to face with evil she too turned into evil itself, even if it were undesired.

The second important idea of “Daddy” is that her father was the cause of her suffering. All along she suffered, went through moments of tension due to her father’s early death-

... the black man who
Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
at twenty I tried to die
and get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do

(Ariel p.55)

The Phrase - ‘Pretty red heart in two’ expresses Plath’s anxiety about her position in a world without her earliest mentors (father and mother) is fuelled by her conviction that the self is deeply and irreparably divided. The division ensures that she was always pulled in at two opposite directions: she is attracted by the idea that her self is a lovely precious possession and at the same time the self is also an object that remains beyond
the control of its possessor and perennially tormented by plunging the
being into 'either/or' dilemmas-concerning survival in a world not meant
for it. In this context Plath's biographical situation is exactly like that of
her third mentor, Rober Lowell. Referring to Robert Lowell, Terri Witek
comments as follows:

"In the autobiographical prose, Lowell often imagines those
two possibilities as the figures of his own complex and
embattled parents, each of whom offers a problematic alter­
native role model. His depiction of these two conflicting
forces, each with its claim on him is as painful as it is
informative; his choices show the powerful dilemma into
which the poet is thrust each time he tries to choose be­
tween alternative image of his own identity".

Plath's own condition is exactly like that of Robert Lowell. It is
interesting to note here that Plath might be sympathetically emulating the
example of Robert Lowell, quite unintentionally.

Towards the end of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights it was con­
spicuously suggested that Heathcliff made a personal arrangement with the
Sexton to secretly sleep in the grave of Cathy during nights. This gets
confirmed again suggestively, when one side-plank was missing from the
coffin box of Cathy in the pit when it was verified. Thus the preternatural
influences of Emily Bronte on Plath get confirmed. It is all a strange
platonic love between two souls: one dead and the other hell bent on
dying. Then, death through cherished suicide is a liberation (a Nirvana) for
Plath in her poetic moments of acquisite ecstacy. John keats intimates us
in his "Nightingale Ode" that he had been 'half-love in love with easeful
death’. In Keats it is a romantic morbid nostalgia. In Plath it is an ever growing self-consuming unrealistic passion for death. This passion for self-consuming thoughts of death is a contagions catered by her teacher Robert Lowell, of course in his manic depression’ lunatic moments. The whole confessional movement is just like the theme of Hamlet practically suffered and relived by that generation. Lowell is the ‘big mad’ without Hamlet himself, after whom the drama is named. If so, Sylvia Plath is a ‘little mad’ comparable to Ophilia; and without her Hamlet himself would have been incomplete. Hamlet without Ophilia is unthinkable. The “confessional movement” of Lowell would have been a total blank without Plath playing Ophilia’s role in it.

A. Alvarez says,

“What comes through most powerfully I think is the terrible unforgiveness of her verse, the continual sense, not so much of violence- although there is a good deal of that- as of violent resentment that this should have been done to her. What she does in the poem is, with a weird detachment, to turn the violence against herself so as to show that she can equal her oppression. And this is the strategy of the concentration camps. When suffering is there whatever you do, by inflicting it upon yourself you achieve your identity, you set yourself free.”

In stating ‘not so much violence... as of violent resentment that this should have been done to her’. Alvarez appears to shift the emphasis from rebellion to the autobiographical counters, as though Plath is an exclusive,
complex infighting with herself as a lost for good introvert. He, however, half-heartedly reconciles to the context of metaphysical ‘violence’ in parenthetically acknowledging ‘although there is a good deal of that’ that is, violence in her poetry. The real existential fact with Plath is that she could never get adjusted to the real facts of life in the here and now in her human set. There is always that gross insufficiency of fulfillment continually haunting her being-in-the world. This is not something exclusive of Plath. Generations of Morbid thinkers also thought like-wise and poets used such morbid particulars for their poetic creative purposes. Alvarez further considers the metaphoric use of the German Concentration Camps as real targets of her rebellion and revolt. Even that image of her father; who died when she ‘was just eight’ years of age, conveniently suited her metaphoric purpose of giving vent to her pent up feelings of anxiety born of the unfortunate and unassured state of human existence. Her constant passionate desire to get united with her dead father is also a convenient poetic mode of making arresting images. It is altogether a different matter that she ultimately committed suicide; and the reasons for that may be spotted elsewhere. During the poetic moment, when she wrote her poem “Daddy” it is her metaphysical poetic rebellion that mattered much; and she had involved all the possible introvertical metaphoric particulars from her dead father to the Nazi concentration camps. Atleast Alvarez is certainly true in stating ‘when suffering... you set yourself’. This is the existential manner of acquiring identity in order to re-assure oneself that one is a being-in-the world.

Sylvia Plath never stops swinging like a pendulum between likes and dislikes: love and hatred.

You do not do. You do not do...
...I used to pray to recover you.

Ach, du..........

(Ariel p.55)

One can comfortably argue that Sylvia Plath went through an immense amount of angst as she was trying to extricate herself from her father figure psychologically. She was bound to him so intricately that the poem 'Daddy' gives us a paranoiac view of her pain and suffering.

The chronological accounting of her frustrations later, her attempts of suicide at twenty to the age of thirty, are all desperate attempts to extricate herself from the image of her father resulting in intense angst. Could this be a dramatization of the speaker for purgation and purification? However, the poetry is certainly an artistic imagination leading to an expression of this angst. The struggle, the attempts of the dispossession of her father was often through a direct confrontation and this was always an image of her father, a monster of her imagination. She made attempts to get rid of this monster in a consistent, imaginary artistic manner. The existential manner in which she poetically celebrates fear, dread and nausea further clarifies Plath's profound metaphor making capacity as a poet; and as an impassioned ideas concerning life and death. This aspect is being taken up in the next chapter.
NOTES


4. Words taken from the poems of Sylvia Plath.


7. Ibid p.269

8. Ibid., p.269.


12. The Colossus, pg. 42.

13. The Bell Jar p.27.


15. The Bell Jar p.32.


17. Ibid p.37.


23. Ibid. p.55


29. Alvarez, on Sylvia Plath, as quoted by Ingrid Meleander, *Poetry of Sylvia Plath A Study of Themes*, pg.27.


