

Sylvia Plath and the Witch Mother

by Susan Schwartz

"Poetry is a form of self-discovery as well as redefinition for both poet and her audience and that its refigured images can help assimilate into consciousness new definitions of the feminine."

—C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, §355.

"The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead (s)he comes to life in signs."

—Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 38.

This analysis of Sylvia Plath is based on the concept of the witch, rather than on Plath's personal interest in the occult and witchcraft. Even more specifically, my analysis is based on her experience of the mother as a witch figure. She wrote: "When I am cured of my witch-belief, I will be able to tell her of writing without a flinch and still feel it is mine" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 447). Images of witches appear in various forms throughout history. They range from evil, ugly women huddling over a cauldron, like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, to cackling beings riding through the sky, like the wicked witches of the East and West in *The Wizard of Oz*. However the witch is portrayed, she is invested with unusual powers; lives on the edge of society; and is equipped with potions and mystical knowledge.

The scenarios of life stages with their challenges are depicted through literature and psychology, and reveal personal and collective dramas. Both render the psyche visible through metaphor and imagery, while symbolically detailing the intricate dynamics of what it is to be human. This is a dance between conscious

and unconscious elements, choreographed through the archetypal—reflecting the universal and the timeless aspects of personal and societal life.

Sylvia Plath exemplifies what has been called the "as if" personality type, referencing concepts by Jungian analyst Hester Solomon (2004). This perspective of the personality focuses on aspects formed from lack of loving attachment to the mother. The mother, in Sylvia Plath's case, seemed to have unconsciously projected her troubled personality, rather than health and warmth. Sylvia Plath described the relationship with her mother as having a constricting effect on her personality. She wrote: "WHY DON'T I FEEL SHE LOVES ME?" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 447). She developed a false presentation of cheer to hide her depression. This was repeatedly suggested in her poems like "Face Lift," and in numerous journal entries, revealing the psychological conflict and frustration from the convoluted emotional connection with her mother.

In poems such as "The Mirror" and "Medusa," Sylvia Plath includes images of the mother as witch, dragon, large fish, or serpent; grave, sarcophagus, deep water, death, and nightmare. She wrote: "you think all old women are witches" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 460). Additionally, the witch aspect of the mother archetype symbolically includes the secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, or anything that devours, seduces, poisons, and is terrifying and inescapable like fate (*The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, 82). In her positive aspect, the mother archetype is associated with solicitude, wisdom, sympathy, spiritual

exaltation, and helpful instincts for growth. Psychological possibilities and limitations emerge through a mother's experiences that are eventually transferred to her daughter. If the relationship is sufficient for both parties, the daughter's personality will thrive. When insufficient, however, internal conflict and depression can occur.

The development of self derives in part from the nature and adequacy of the mirroring from mother to daughter. Although Sylvia Plath desired maternal connection, she did not receive the emotional nourishment needed throughout childhood. Consequently, both her life and writing revealed that she had forged an alternate model of womanhood in response to her mother, and that better suited her personality needs. A basic and fundamental displacement occurred, as Plath strove to empower herself, and to establish an independent identity by rejecting the female passivity ideal that was predominant in both her family and in the larger culture she inhabited. Yet, the lure of the mother to closeness and love kept her dependent, while she resisted to be positively regarded by that very same mother. Because she betrayed inadequacy and low self-worth, she experienced the maternal negatively—and frequently in the archetypal form of the witch. In the poem "Witch Burning," Sylvia Plath iterated: "I inhabit / The wax image of myself, a doll's body. / Sickness begins here: I am the dartboard for witches" (*Collected Poems*, 135). These lines portray her body as lifeless, a shell. This theme also occurs in many fairytales, such as *Sleeping Beauty*, where the witch has the power to cast a spell over the daughter that is both paralyzing and long-lasting.

Plath wrote passionately about the complicated struggle to escape confusing maternal constriction. Jung wrote: "children are educated by what the grownup is and not by what (s)he says" (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 174). Although conflicted by the need to please, Plath strove to discover her self-meaning in ways other than through channels her mother provided. In fact, her journal entries and poems reflect disturbing, often raging, feelings. By contrast, the letters to her mother reflect antithetical emotions, as they present a happy and

energetic façade. Christopher Bollas described Plath as a person who deadens herself and her psyche. This description is based upon the deadened maternal figure within Plath's own psychic territory (Bollas, 74). Thus, for Plath, the mother realm was an unsafe place to display her real self. Jung's description of the negative mother complex is applicable in this instance. Specifically, he wrote in the essay, "The Mother Archetype": "a traumatic complex brings about dissociation of the psyche. The complex is not under the control of the will and for this reason it possesses the quality of psychic autonomy" (130–32). Thus, in her letters to her mother, Plath would exclude anything that could be perceived as flaws, sorrows, or traumas. Such exclusion was apparent in the numerous cheerful letters that hid anything that had been distressful to her—her marriage, in particular. The outer adaptation and false fronts were erected to protect, as she could not show her personality to her mother, or to anyone else.

Mother Oppression

Plath mentioned Jung in her journals when she wrote:

"The child in Jung's case-history contains confirmation of certain images in my story. The child who dreamt of a loving, beautiful mother as a witch or animal: the mother going mad in later life...a supposedly loving but ambitious mother who manipulated the child 'on the chessboard of her egotism'...However, I am the victim, rather than the analyst. My 'fiction' is only a naked recreation of what I felt, as a child and later, must be true" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 514).

Underscoring the negative archetypal and disjointed attachment between daughter and mother, Sylvia Plath's writing reveals a netherworld of maternal oppression. She wrote: "And I sit here without identity: faceless. My head aches... I'm lost" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 26). What she described as a psychologically empty, but powerful, mother left her with an internal vacuum.

Plath's writing was an exercise in mourning. The object of that mourning was the

mother she had struggled to access for positive connection. The bad witch mythologically represents an aspect of the negative mother complex. In her positive aspect, the mother is the life-giving nurturer, while her negative counterpart is the life-denying destroyer. According to Jungian analytical psychology, this bipolarization of the mother can cause the daughter to experience depressive moods, along with constant dissatisfaction with herself, and the whole of reality (Marie von Franz, 126). Plath's poem "Mirror" is replete with cold, impassive images that betray her negative feelings toward her mother, while "Lady Lazarus" reveals her fascination with death and renewal. She wrote:

"Now this is what I feel my mother felt...I have done practically everything she said I couldn't do...Except when I feel guilty, feel I shouldn't be so happy, because I'm not doing what all the mother figures in my life would have me do" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 432).

Sylvia Plath struggled to create a feminine identity that resisted her mother—that contrasted radically from that mother, and despite that mother's tyrannical influence over her. This struggle meant her self-creation had to occur through a series of identifications with and internalizations of other sources for environmental nourishment. Her original sense of internal emptiness was the basis for such identifications and internalizations (Solomon, 641). Thus, they evolved into the splits and dissociations that she wrote about—that functioned as the defense mechanisms for preserving her sense of real self.

Sylvia Plath's poems reveal the emotional stress in response to the maternal that obstructed her attempts to connect with her own self and with others. Lines from "The Moon and The Yew Tree," in particular, express disdain toward the maternal: "The moon is my mother / She is not sweet like Mary." An adequate maternal figure is necessary for secure and stable personality development, according to Jungian theory, and to other psychological approaches, such as those of Sigmund Freud, Donald Winnicott, and Melanie Klein. Depth analytical theory and child development theory acknowledge the necessity for correct maternal attachment—

close enough, but not smothering. Because they represent incomplete areas of personality development, and originate from earlier wounds, or from emotional neglect, negative maternal complexes can adversely affect a daughter's confidence, body image, and tendency to idealize others, while compromising her feminine initiative.

The negative mother that the witch archetype represents feeds an internalized cycle of self-hatred, oppression and revenge. Without the possibility of developing secure self-identity or attachment to the mother, mimicry and falsity take over. According to Hester Solomon, an individual's personality is "in a state between what they fear in their own minds and what they fear in the outside world... Or, they are living in never land, a place of infinite postponement and half-identity" (639). Because the person becomes self-absorbed, little is fully felt, or experienced. Moreover, the self is impoverished from early traumatizing experiences with the longed-for and idealized m/other (Solomon 639). As she betrayed her struggle to forge a coherent self from the warring fragments of her psyche, life for Sylvia Plath was safer behind the persona masks that offered illusionary subterfuge.

Subject to the power of the witch/mother and trying to be the best at everything, Sylvia Plath became internally diminished. Wanting to be everything and loved by everybody, she became increasingly caught up in the need to please the mother until she was ultimately exhausted. Whatever she did psychologically, she was trapped by the fears of displeasing the mother, whom she described as capable of overpowering, or even, destroying her.

Plath wrote in her story, "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams": "Whatever the dream I unearth, by work, taxing work, and even by a kind of prayer, I am sure to find a thumbprint in the corner, a malicious detail to the right of center, a bodiless midair Cheshire cat grin (156–57). This quotation reveals the wounds of early attachment that had generated her emotional anxiety and need for perfection. It also suggests her experiences of lack and invisibility that had left her with an incomplete self-image. She had written in her journal: "My world falls apart, crumbles. The center does

not hold" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 149). She wondered if she was lovable and experienced shame, vulnerability, and fear, as she struggled to satisfy the unsatisfiable witch/mother. Under the spell of this witch/mother, she could not succeed in any of her undertakings, nor could she find sufficient approval.

Yet, Sylvia Plath's talents were apparent in her ability to flay open her psychic flesh to expose her anguish—the tortured depths of her inner world. She tried to exorcise the emotional horrors, even as her personality became increasingly fragmented throughout her struggle to cope with them. Thus, she adopted the various personas that allowed her to remain concealed when, in fact, they suggested the inner monsters that plagued her. She wrote: "Masks are the order of the day, and the least I can do is cultivate the illusion that I am gay, serene, not hollow and afraid" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 63). The performance of a unified self is deceptive when her primary experiences were self-fragmentation, and the inability to construct a unified personality. The divided self is the theme of several Plath poems. In "Two Sisters of Persephone," one woman personifies the ego, and is situated outside the house; the other, the shadow self that inhabits the interior of that same house. This interior shadow self represents the disintegration of self, and the silencing of voice. These characters could also signify the desire for union, as they are sisters. Plath wrote:

"Two girls there are within the house
One sits; the other, without.
Daylong a duet of shade and light
Plays between these" (31)

The girls represent selves, related but separate, opposite and yet, coexisting. The poem references Persephone of classical Greek mythology, a maiden who experienced a wrenching separation from a mother to whom she was close. Plath wrote:

"Something deep, plunging is held
back. Voice frozen. What inner decision,
what inner murder or prison break must I
commit if I want to speak from my true
deep voice in writing...and not feel this
jam-up of feeling behind a glass-damn

fancy-façade of numb dumb wordage"
(*The Unabridged Journals*, 469–70).

In other words, she felt as though the constructed self-image she exhibited to the outer world had to eclipse the real self hidden within.

The protagonist in Plath's short story, "Tongues of Stone," feels like an imposter, as these lines suggest: "poisons ... gathering in her body, ready to break out behind the bright, false bubbles of her eyes at any moment crying: Idiot! Imposter" (*Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, 264). In Sylvia Plath's descriptive psycho-anatomy, the mouth opens on "a large darkness," "the blind cave behind the face" where "the dybbuk" hides (*The Bell Jar*, 82). At the beginning of life, the daughter attaches herself to the mother's breast and imbibes the milk that should be nourishing. For Sylvia Plath, however, the emotional counterpart to the lactic nourishment that she received from her mother proved otherwise. Lack of nurturance causes the body to feel mechanical, as Plath suggests in "Poppies in July." Specifically, these lines in the poem present the body as insensate: "I cannot touch you. / I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns." "Lady Lazarus" represents the body in a similar manner: "unwrap me hand and foot—the big striptease." Ultimately, Sylvia Plath embedded in her poems images of the body, or of orality, that were fraught with ambivalence and discomfort. These poems also betrayed the absence of safety, or preference for the maternal, the feminine, or for her very own body.

"As If" Personality

Becoming conscious of mother and daughter images helps a daughter form her identity as a woman. Ideally, the autonomy and confidence in her body and psyche would be generated, but not overly influenced, by social dictates. However, Sylvia Plath was burdened by projections from her mother that were primarily based on the prevalent ideals of womanhood at the time. Regarding such projections, Jung wrote: "She started out in the world with averted face...and all the while the world and life pass by her like a dream—an annoying source of illusions, disappointments, and

irritations" (*The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, 99). The emotional distance, feared disapproval, or blame that Sylvia Plath ascribed to her mother culminated in an intimacy vacuum that left her with unfavorable images of the mother and of her self.

Needing love and attention, Sylvia Plath tried to deceive herself and others. She felt she had to put on a performance, acting "as if" she fit a prescribed image, while she was actually searching for her real self. Consequently, she presented to the outer world the achiever's pleasant, verbally gifted, and high-functioning persona. Yet, behind her empty cheer, and behind the images of veils and mirrors that prevail through her poetry, one can sense the negative effects of the witch mother, and her spell on her complicated self-development. Like the "as if" personality type, her core self was, according to Christine Bristzolkis, "organized around a lost moment of origin, which, though endlessly reconstructed, was not recovered" (40). When unable to get close to the maternal, a daughter feels unlovable, and this perception alienates her from her own body—even escalating into a hatred of life.

The "as if" personality, like Sylvia Plath's, experiences early on the unfolding of the self that meets what Hester Solomon has called "a blank and hostile environment so misattuned that she felt unseen and/or noxiously related to [it]" (641). Sylvia Plath needed a benevolent inner structure for security, identity and attachment, especially since these eluded her from the outset. She wrote: "I feel her apprehension, her anger, her jealousy, her hatred. I feel no love, only the Idea of Love, and that she thinks she loves me like she should" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 432). She continually expressed guilt about her mother's sacrifices, but hatred and apprehension toward disapproval were mingled with that guilt. She wrote: "Main Questions: What to do with hate for mother" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 437). She remained conflicted between the pressure to adopt the conventional external face of a loving daughter, and the urge to acknowledge the inner resentment she could not openly express to her mother. This conflict led to emotional losses, inadequacy, and unresolved mourning. As Sylvia Plath wrote: "How to express anger creatively? ...Mother's choices

cut her life down to a dry chattering stalk of fear" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 438). She acknowledged her mother's power to generate her self-dissatisfaction and abasement. She also expressed frustration with "the old witches for whom one sets out plates of milk and honey," lamenting that "[t]his is not easily done. How is it done?" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 447). These words suggest she had felt the mother's crushing annihilation of her real self, and the guilt-inducing resistance to the mother's refusal to recognize her autonomy. Yet, she continued to feel she could secure her mother's approval only if she were to fashion herself according to her perceptions of maternal expectation. However, the mother cannot accept the daughter's separateness that results from fear of the mother's intrusiveness.

Regarding mother-daughter dependency, Jung wrote:

"The more unconsciously destructive the mother is to herself, the less the daughter can bear to separate from her...She clings to her mother, while at the same time unconsciously striving, almost against her will, to tyrannize over her, naturally under the mask of loyalty and devotion. The daughter leads a shadow existence, often visibly sucked dry by her mother and she prolongs her mother's life by a sort of continuous blood transfusion" (*The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, 89).

Sylvia Plath tried to distance herself from the internalized engulfing mother, a process over time that drained her emotionally. She expressed anguish in her journal entry: "WHAT DO I EXPECT BY 'LOVE' FROM HER?" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 448).

In her poem, "Medusa," the mother is portrayed as a threatening, smothering figure, who is also signified by the wound, or the "red stigmata" that calls for annihilation through the cannibalistic rage expressed in the line: "I shall take no bite of your body" (*Collected Poems*, 225). As she conjures up nightmarish seascape images, she includes within the poem a pun involving her mother's first name, "Aurelia," which also refers to a type of jellyfish. The speaker of the poem violently rejects the

smothering, controlling mother whom she also envisions as an airless receptacle. Plath produces a network of images, transforming the text into a kaleidoscope of shifting identifications: "stony mouth-plugs," "unnerving head," "red stigmata," "old barnacled umbilicus," "placenta," "cobra light," "Communion wafer," "Blubbery Mary," "bottle," "eely tentacle" (*Collected Poems*, 224–26). The swirl of metaphors suggests the inability to locate a central mother figure. A highly unstable construct, the actual mother and feelings about her vanish behind the litany of mythical and metaphorical representations.

Sylvia Plath repeatedly wrote about her struggle to express herself because she had the type of mother who could not comprehend that the daughter has an inner life that is distinct from hers. This struggle becomes painfully clear when identified as the underlying subtext of *Letters Home* (1975). In this relational dynamic, the mother cannot perceive the daughter's psychic vitality, and consciously, or unconsciously, withholds permission for her to be a unique and autonomous individual. Without the possibility of developing a secure self-identity or attachment, the groundwork of the self seem unavailable to the daughter. Thus, in this dynamic the mother assumes the negative aspect of the witch, and is feared as such. According to Neslihan Ekmekçioğlu, Sylvia Plath projected vitality without feeling alive, while her self was divorced from her body, and she was tormented by a nagging sense of depersonalization (94). The bodies of the women in her poems are variously undefined, melancholic, cut up, ravaged, and impersonal. Moreover, the veiled selves within the poetic images are petrified, cracked, patched-up, disillusioned, or divided (Ekmekçioğlu, 96). This wide range of selves Plath wrote about prevented her readers from knowing who she really was, despite her personal quest toward self-discovery. She wrote poignantly in her journal about the problem: "Putting up pretty artificial statues. I can't get outside myself" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 507). Perhaps this façade was her only way to avoid the power of the witch/mother.

With the absence of positive maternal attachment, Sylvia Plath's mother assumed for

her the negative aspect of the witch. Consequently, she felt compelled to pretend to love that witch mother to preserve from destruction the authentic and vulnerable self. Her self-presentation to her mother, and to the world at large, became enshrouded with an aura of false cheer. This cheerful façade, would, in turn, generate feelings of self-alienation that, at times, left her drugged by inertia, and living in a trance-like state with little sense of self-worth.

Such feelings would catalyze both external and internal dissociations and adaptations that would lead to self-deprecating behaviors and thoughts. Experiences of shame, embarrassment, anxiety, and smallness of self would also lead to the emotional and psychological distance that characterizes the world that the "as if" personality inhabits. Such distancing resulted in Sylvia Plath's personal coldness and, an aura of impenetrability that, although off-putting, were actually based on vulnerability. Consequently, she would disable access to her total personality. These defense mechanism aspects locked the internalized witch/mother in a cycle of self-hatred, oppression, and vengeance. Her poem, "Lesbos," suggests the history of this destructive self. She wrote: "You say I should drown my girl. / She'll cut her throat at ten if she's mad at two" (*Collected Poems*, 228).

Behind what could seem like her grandiosity and need of recognition lay the masks and layers of sorrow and emotional lack. She alludes to such layers in "Tulips": "And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself" (*Collected Poems*, 161). Her writing suggests that she was trapped within a condition of ruthless self-absorption, and that she was obsessed with emotionally and psychologically disturbing imagery. In fact, her writing derived from ambivalence toward the mother: while she uneasily experienced the mother as threatening, she continued to desire that same mother's love and approval. Thus, her writings reveal narcissistic, early, unmet needs, together with the aloneness of her interior battles, as she tried to dissolve her mental and emotional fusion with the mother. Moreover, her many guises formed a kind of carapace, or a shell, that attempted to mask the void within herself, or what she had persistently described as an

agonizing hollowness at the core of her being. Her poem, "Edge," suggests the effects of this internalized deadness that originated in her relations with her mother. She wrote:

"Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little
Pitcher of milk, now empty
She has folded
Them back into her body as petals"
(*Collected Poems*, 272).

The perceived lack of maternal love produces an emotional vacuum; the feeling of being unlovable brings despair, and distance from physicality. These perceptions escalate into various forms of self-attack that, in turn, lead to attempts to numb out. Plath wrote: "Yet I fight against a simple-mindedness, a narcissism, a protective shell against competing, against being found wanting" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 512). Frantic and unable to find contentment, she searched for the ideal, rather than the real. Eventually, the façade of brilliance began to collapse.

Sylvia Plath's psychological splits emerged through her writings to lament the distance set up between who she was in actuality, and who she wanted to become according to her self-idealizing perception. She struggled to resolve this discrepancy through speculations. For example, she wrote: "ASK ABOUT MOTHER LOVE: Why these feelings. Why guilt: Magical fear Mother will become a child, my child: an old hag child" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 456). She feared the devouring mother's needs, as if she had the power of a bad witch, and this fear, in part, provoked the aggression she directed against herself.

The Mirror

Sylvia Plath's writings reveal her poignant struggle for life—to be authentic, even as she desperately attempted to fill the terrifying psychological gaps within herself through fame and accomplishment. Her writings also reveal the connection between mourning and creativity, a search for repair and acknowledgement. She described the processes for transformation through the repeating cycles of death and rebirth. Although the mother assumes the negative guise of the

witch in her writings, she nevertheless, desired the comfort and security associated with a mother's love for her daughter. She alluded to the painful management of inner conflicts that derive from her experiences of the bipolarized mother when she presented the tension of opposites in poems like "Lady Lazarus," "Electra on Azalea Path," and "A Mad Girl's Love Song." Regarding the mother archetype and its relation to creativity, Jung wrote: "The creative work arises from the unconscious depths—we might truly say from the realm of the Mothers" (*Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, 103). Thus, Plath's writings were attempts to alleviate the burden of lingering emotional needs, desires, and disappointments that were destabilizing for her, due to her sense of unrequited love from the mother.

Plath's poem, "The Mirror," suggests the outcome for a woman who is trapped within a negative psychological condition. The woman in the poem's mirror is undefined, her face featureless and unanimated by hints of personality. The poem concludes with these lines: "In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish" (*Collected Poems*, 173). Both the fish and the old woman could represent Plath's cold and unsatisfied mother, objects of her disdain, and of her anxiety that she would become like her mother through the aging process. Moreover, these images invoke the stage of life upsetting to the "as if" personality type. For the speaker of the poem, beauty is defined by youth, a quality that the aging woman lacks. The negativity with which the woman and fish, and by symbolic extension, the mother, are invested, suggests that Plath's ego and persona attempted to function without the reality principle that the aging woman personifies. Thus, she killed herself at the young age of thirty. Her death by suicide is also explicable through the fish's habitation of watery depths and, by symbolic extension, the depths of the spirit, to which she was inexorably drawn.

The mirror in this poem illustrates the distressing internal situation limiting the capacity for a woman's integration, individuation, and development. Moreover, the mirror has linear borders that represent secure defenses around a single cohesive surface. The

mirror is attributed as truthful and masculine, and endowed with aggressive negative judgements, rather than tenderness. In other words, the mirror seems hostile toward the woman. Questions arise: What is it she sees in this harsh mirror that keeps her coming back, day after day, despite the distressing nature of the experience of looking into it? Is the mirror her depth? Or, is it a reflection of how flattened-out she finds herself?

The mirror reflects a woman who is comparable to Sylvia Plath's bipolarized self-image. The mirror is the brilliant, silvered surface she presented to the world as both woman and poet—the strictly disciplined achiever, who glitteringly fulfilled all expectations. She strove to be perfect in the mirror of maternal and cultural standards of elegance, beauty, and high achievement. She endorsed the required social cast of her personality: aesthetic, frozen in a cover girl smile, a woman who is a reflection of the "as if" personality.

She wrote: "reading Sigmund Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' and the process of 'draining the ego' that is exactly the feelings I have getting in the way of my writing, mother's clutch" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 447). The witch power that affected her writing was ascribed to her mother, and provided the subtext throughout her journal entries. Moreover, she attributed her suicidal tendencies to "a transferred murderous impulse from my mother onto myself" and the fear of her mother's appropriation of her writing, husband, success, and life. Her struggle to be real and to access her genuine self meant, "to write good fiction—to retranslate life, to get outside [herself] and picture the world with no glazing" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 485). To do all these things, she had to free herself from the negative witch/mother.

Jung wrote: "Looking at the fantasies...the instincts developing the personality...introversion of libido produces a new attitude... a new potential...and compensatory reaction in the unconscious" (*The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, 252). According to Jungian psychology, personality repair results from the union of conscious and unconscious psychic contents.

For Sylvia Plath, this union would mean that the mother and the witch would somehow need to coexist harmoniously within her psychic territory, rather than lurking there antagonistically.

Andre Green claimed that when "the mother is essentially and emotionally unavailable this can cause depression and narcissistic wounding." Moreover, he has stated that "[t]he creative emanates from the struggle with the negativity and while...never absent, her absence can also mean overriding presence" (Kohon, 114). Sylvia Plath was never released from the internalized negative maternal/witch and its devouring aggression. Although she often expressed desire for renewal, she could not bear the weight of all her inner conflicts, and took her own life—after rapidly writing some of her most famous poetry.

The personality begs to relieve the pain of yearning and melancholy to express its individuality and creativity. Plath wrote: "When I am cured of my witch belief, I will be able to tell her of writing without a flinch and still feel it is mine. She is a sad old woman. Not a witch" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 448). Her writing process evolved into a personal drama that struggled toward revising collective attitudes that continue to limit women's potential. Moreover, her words strove to transform the object-woman into a powerfully creative figure that is no longer passive nor subject to destructive maternal energy. Therapy enabled her to realize that she must be true to what she called her "own weirdnesses" (*The Unabridged Journals*, 521). This drive toward self-loyalty led her to resist the good girl role she had enacted before her mother. Unconsciously constrained to identify with her mother, she was subject to fits of rage and depression, even as she revisited straitjacketing feminine ideals. Thus, she struggled to access the witch mother's energy within her own psyche to reduce its powerful, crushing dominance, and to appropriate it for her own unique self-expression.

Summary

This paper discussed how the mother

archetype can assume the negative aspect of the witch for a woman, and how the archetype can limit her psychic development. It was written from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology to specify how the mother affected the life and writings of Sylvia Plath. The process of extricating the self from the mother's witch energy involves engaging with psychic wounds; reclaiming negative maternal aspects; and breaking away from self-delimiting, culturally imposed maternal ideals, even while acknowledging the strengths of the mother archetype in its totality. The mother/daughter relationship is healthy when it can enable differences, generativity, love, and growth. Developmentally, the daughter can then create her own style of being. For Sylvia Plath, such self-fashioning was fraught with extreme conflict because she felt the pressure to become the person that her mother wanted her to be, rather than who she was in actuality. She concealed behind an attractive façade the inner chaos that her writings betrayed. In fact, she wrote to appropriate the power attributed to the mother, and thus, revealed a complex emotional and psychological struggle to disengage from the witch/mother that proved ultimately self-destructive. Although her life had been sacrificed in this disengagement process, the process itself is valuable.

As Jung said: "Woman today...gives expression to...the urge to live a complete life, a longing for meaning and fulfillment, a growing disgust with senseless one-sidedness, with unconscious instinctuality and blind contingency" (*Civilization in Transition*, 130).

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