

CHAPTER III

JOHNNY PANIC AND THE BIBLE OF DREAMS

“Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams” was published in 1977. Sylvia Plath wrote a considerable amount of prose. About seventy stories, mostly unpublished, are extant. She started several novels, but only one sizeable fragment ‘Stone Boy With Dolphin’ survives from anything before The Bell Jar. After The Bell Jar, she typed some one hundred thirty pages of another novel, provisionally titled Double Exposure. That manuscript disappeared somewhere around 1970.

The first edition of this book, published in 1977, was made up of a selection from seventeen stories, together with some pieces of her journalism and extracts from her journal. At that time to assume that she had either lost or destroyed as failures all the other stories written. Just as that collection was being published however, a large quantity of Sylvia Plath’s papers emerged in the Lilly Library at Indiana University, acquired by the library from Mrs. Aurelia Plath, the writer’s mother, and among these were the type scripts of over fifty stories- dating from her first attempts at writing up to roughly 1960, though most of them very early works.

This second edition contains the thirteen stories included in the first edition together with five of her more interesting pieces of journalism, and a few fragments from her journal, and in part IV, a further nine stories selected from the Indiana Archive. All items are given approximate dates of composition in so far as that is known. We really know that when she wanted

merely to record, with no thought of artful shaping or publication, she could produce some of her most effective writing and that appears in her journals.

This collection of short stories, prose and journal excerpts was published in 1977 in Britain, and two years later in the United States we really know that as Ted Hughes points out in his introduction to Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams, the writer's painful subjectivity was her real theme.

This text "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" is divided into four parts.

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Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams (1958)

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The Shadow (January 1959)

Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men (May 1959)

Part I : The more successful short stories and prose pieces :

"Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" (1958) is a collection of prose, the title story of which reflects her experiences at the Massachusetts General

Hospital. "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams", was first published in Atlantic Monthly in September 1968, but she wrote this story in 1958. This is one of her best stories. In this fantasy about a hospital typist who becomes a dream connoisseur, she wrote in natural sounding, humorous prose. Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams story is told in a slangy, tough woman's voice. It was a breakthrough in fiction to a recognizable artistic voice that Sylvia had not yet made in her poetry, and she wrote five more stories during the spring of 1959, each one a success.

"Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams" contains two shorter images rather than major events that move into "The Bell Jar". The first is simply the description of a woman who enters the psychiatric clinic and whose dream the narrator seeks to record. The woman was brought to Emergency Room because her tongue was stuck out and she could not return it to her mouth. This occurred during a party for her French-Canadian mother-in-law, who she hated worse than pigs. This same character appears equally briefly in the novel, in the state psychiatric ward, as Mrs. Tomolille. Again she has a hated French-Canadian mother-in-law, and again her symptom is the uncontrollable tongue which sticks out until it's swollen. The second image is more powerful, for it is crucial to ~~with~~ the story and the novel. The narrator's experience of electro-shock treatment. In "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams," the final scene is the administration of the shock treatment. In the misapplied shock, the

narrator sees her first direct sight of "Johnny Panic himself. He comes into view as she is 'shaken like a leaf in the teeth of glory, while the air crackled with blue-tongued lightning- haloed angels: The same treatment is likewise described in "The Bell Jar, when Dr.Gordon fails to properly administer the shock. 'Then something bent down and took hold of me and shoot me like the end of the world. Whee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light'.

Here in this short story we really know that there is a dream of dreams:

"In this dream there is a great half-transparent lake stretching away in every direction, too big for me, to see the shores of it, if there are any shores and I am hanging over it, looking down from the glass belly of some helicopter. At the bottom of the lake so deep I can only guess at the dark masses moving and heaving are the real dragons. The ones that were around before men started living in caves and cooking meat over fires and figuring out the wheel. and the alphabet. Enormous is not the word for them; they have got more wrinkles than Johnny Panic himself."¹

The story is as strong a narrative as the novel. In part, this is because of the stylistic change to first person. For the first time we have a conscious persona dealing with the experience of the breakdown. There is no additional narrator-filter to feeling and understanding the character. Further we see really

in this story, 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' is a short story which contains a very central theme of Plath's, one which she is building up to in 'The Bell Jar' and one which has appeared in other stories throughout the fifties, not related to the breakdown. In Johnny Panic, for the first time in the stories relating the story of her breakdown, Plath's narrator is not becoming aware of the conflict, she already understands it and has begun to act in response to it. It is this recognition and choice of action which thematically is the focus to almost all of Plath's fiction, even those stories which stand apart from the drafting of The Bell Jar.

In this story it is not totally coincidental that the two strongest characters in Plath's fiction, Esther Greenwood and the narrator of Johnny Panic are writers. Plath's major fictional characters from Elizabeth Minton (in Sunday at the Mintons) forward, are all incipient artists. That is not to say that all, or most, are professional artists. Rather, they are, as so many characters in feminist fictions, engaged in creating themselves reshaping the world around them to give significance to the actions and places in which they spiritually and actually reside. They come to see themselves as the creation of an imagination at odds with the culture and people around them. They are constantly striving to keep at bay the deadening, self-invalidating, oppressive sterility of the real world; a world which devalues their experience and prohibits new patterns of thought and self awareness. Their true world is the realm of imagination, even

if this imagination leads to socially defined madness. When not so extremely labelled, the characters are at least alienated from the technical, coldly rational world they exist in. They escape from this real world to the one of imaginations, for none can accept a world which denies the power of fantasy, denies the right of each individual—regardless of gender—to be fully developed and fulfilled, denies the fears and thoughts of adults without replacing them with stronger beliefs and dreams.

Another essay 'America! America!' (1963) was published in *Punch* in April 1963. In this essay Plath mourned the American education system did a poor job of recognising and nurturing individual talent. In this essay we really see that 'Eccentricities, the perils of being too special were reasoned and cooed from us like sucked thumbs.' There was no place in America, Plath decided, for "the embryo rebel, the artist, the odd?"²

"The Day Mr. Prescott Died" (1956) was published in *Granta* 1956/1957. Sylvia Plath wrote The Day Mr. Prescott Died for Mr. Kazin (*The Day Mr. Prescott Died*) Ben Nash, the editor, has done fine illustrations, I really think. In this essay Sylvia Plath also describes Mr. Prescott was twenty years older than Mrs. Prescott, and she was just waiting for him to die, so she could have some fun. Mr. Prescott was a grumpy old man. For him a cross word for everybody, and he kept getting that skin disease on his hands. When Mr. Prescott died at that time it was a bright day, a hot day. Sylvia again says

that when Mr. Prescott died at that time Sylvia got nervous only when we turned up the little gravel drive by the old yellow house the Prescotts owned on Devonshire-Terrace. There was this little stir in the dark of the living room and Mrs. Prescott came out to meet us. Lastly Sylvia says that, Mr. Prescott always loved to swim, and who died in such way.

The wishing Box, (1956) first appeared in 'Granta' 1956 and 1957. In this story, Agnes Higgins despairs of her loss of dreams. She can remember her infinitely more creative childhood days, but she seems doomed to be unable to recapture them in the adult world in which she now lives. Suicide finally releases her from her empty reality to another world, some far country unattainable to mortal men where she is waltzing with the dark, red caped prince of her early dreams. More importantly, Agne's death is a triumph, not a defeat, for she does reenter the world of the imagination. Similarly, in 'Stone Boy With Dolphin', Dody Ventura longs for something to happen, for something to happen, for something to match the intensity of her dreams. Her dreams are peopled by visionaries. Several other stories use fantasy to show the feeling of isolation of the unusual or gifted person. 'The Wishing Box' recounts a rivalry between newly weds about the quality and quantity of their respective dreams. Here, she treats Agnes and Harold's marriage as a dreaming contest; he spending one third of his life among celebrities and fabulous legendary creatures, while her mind empties of even the usual banal

nightmares, 'without a single image of its own toward off the crushing assault of smug autonomous tables and chairs, let alone his gratifying technicolour visions. She soon gives up the competition, the implication being that they have only one identity, one store box of wishes, between them, despite the surface distinctness of their lives. Agnes tries to populate her mind from elsewhere with novels, television, drink, but her only way of restoring a balance of imaginative power is an unanswerable final tableau.

Although all the characters mentioned are mad, their madness is that Dody and her creator craves. This same craving is most graphically presented in 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams', where the narrator's entire life's goal is to be the recorder of dreams, the treasurer of the imaginative world which both underlines and runs counter to the pragmatic world we recognize as reality in this story.

'A Comparison', (1962) was published in 'The Listener' in July 1977. This story "A Comparison" was written for a BBC Home Service Programme, The World of Books, broadcast in July 1962. In this story she says I am not talking about epic poems, we all know how long they can take. Again Sylvia says that, I am talking about the smallish, unofficial garden variety poem. How shall I describe it? a door opens, a door shuts, everything is changed in a minute. Again she says that regarding ~~novel~~, how would the novelist manage that. In a paragraph? In a page? Mixing it, perhaps, like paint with a little

water, thinking it, spreading it out. She gives here a comparison novel and poem, she says like if a poem is concentrated, a closed fist, then a novel is relaxed and expensive, an open hand; it has roads, destinations.

Sylvia Plath has commented on how this process worked. In her story comparison of novels and poems, she writes -

“I do not like to think of all the things, familiar, useful and the worthy things, I have never put into a poem. I did, once, put a yew tree in. And that yew tree began, with astounding egotism, to manage and order the whole affair. It was not a yew tree by a church on a road past a house in a town where a certain woman lived... and soon, as it might have been, in a novel. Oh no. It stood squarely in the middle of my poem, manipulating its dark shades, the voices in the Church yard, the clouds, the birds, the tender melancholy with which I contemplated it - everything! I could not subdue it. And, in the end, my poem was a poem about a yew tree. That yew tree was just too proud to be a passing black mark in a novel.”³

Lastly Sylvia Plath says that, perhaps, I shall anger some poets by implying that the poem is proud. The poem, too, can include everything, they will tell me. And with far more precision and power than those baggy, disheveled and indiscriminate creatures we call novels. Again Sylvia

supported that the pattern does not insist so much, she says like the door of the novel, like the door of the poem, also shuts. But not so fast, nor with such manic unanswerable finality.

The Fifteen - Dollar Eagle, (1959) was published in the oldest and most prestigious of American Periodicals, the 'Sewanee Review', about watching a heroic sailor bloodily tattooed. At the same time Sylvia Plath was quite content to be accepted by homely the Mademoiselle. With the American desire to make it, her ideal till her poetic genius took over, was through stories and journalism to be rich, famous and travel, while remaining a wholesome and nice American girl.

"The Daughters of Blossom Street", (1959) was published in the London Magazine (1960/61). Her story about Mass General, now titled The Daughters of Blossom Street. In this story she manages something like the metamorphosed autobiography of The Bell Jar, turning a brief job she had in 1958 as Secretary to a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital into a cold, gleeful vision of sharable nightmare.

Context (1962) was commissioned by the London Magazine. In this story we really know that in 1962, she wrote book reviews of both childrens and adult books, worked on essays for both the BBC and Punch, finished the radio play that paid substantially, and made plans to become a regular BBC contributor and reader. In 'Context' defined what she saw as her role as a

writer in clear and emphatic language. In this story she also described as a political poet.

According to Plath here, her role as a poet was to write about the real world, 'the terrors of mass extinction' and the rest of life's problems, in ways that would create art. Even in a New States man review of childrens books, where she lamented atmospheric contamination from bomb-test fall out, here she stressed the artist's responsibility to be aware of practical concerns of life. The poet should be involved in all aspects of living.

In this essay here really see that Sylvia's immense knowledge of literature, gave Plath a number of options when she came to write the poem of the fall, which are often considered autobiographical. Some experience from the writer's life may serve as catalyst for the work; but the materials of fiction and poetry are often drawn from other experiences, other literatures, besides the obviously personal ones. Plath's 1962 poems are certainly about anger, about the complexities of the modern family structure, about women's roles in marriage and life. But they are about much more than Sylvia Plath's personal situation in 1962. These 1962 poems of Plath's remarkable antiwar painting. Here really Sylvia Plath says in the 'Context'. She says that my poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. They are not about the terrors of mass extinction, but about the bleakness of the moon over a yew tree in a neighbouring graveyard. Here the

testaments of tortured about the night thoughts of tired surgeon. Here Sylvia tells that these poems are deflections. Again Sylvia says that the real issues of our time are the issues of every time the hurt and wonder of loving; making in all its forms, children, paintings, buildings and conversation of life of all people in all places. Sylvia says I delight in are possessed by their poems as by the rhymes of their own breathing. Again she says that their finest poems seem born all of a piece, not put together by hand, certain poems in Robert Lowell's life studies, for example; Roethke's greenhouse poems.

Lastly in this essay 'Context', she says that the great use of poetry is its pleasure, not its influence as religious or political propaganda. Certain poems and lines of poetry seem as solid and miraculous to me as church altars or the coronation of queens must seem to people who reverse quite different images. Sylvia says that I am not worried that poems reach relatively few people, as it is, they go surprisingly far-among strangers around the world.

So 'Context' was a five paragraph assessment of her poetry for London Magazine. In this essay "the poets I delight in possessed by their poems as by the rhythms of their own breathing"⁴. The real stunner, though, is the first of the four journal passages, printed here, from the time of her Fulbright studies at Cambridge. Parts of it are naive and self conscious, if not trite, but even when Plath strikes a conventional pose for herself, it's totally engrossing and

often revealing one. There is not enough of it, however; the selection gives only the basest sampling of the range and quantity of her material.

The Fifty-Ninth Bear, (1959) was published in the London Magazine in 1960. In The Fifty Ninth Bear, opposes Norton and Sadie as they contest to find bear number fifty-ninth during their all-too-competitive vacation. In this story we also see that the woman protagonist is made to feel inferior for being outside the pale of social convention. ?

We really know that the dream is often destructive of the narrator 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams' and 'The Wishing Box', of hero in 'The Fifty-Ninth Bear' it is the dream of a moment as commentator has said, both-girlish and deadly. Plath's special talent is not merely the creation of that moment but the naming of its shattered pieces. About this story Ted Hughes says that she must have known this was sentimental pastiche aimed at a popular market, just as in the story. She knew what was wrong, a stiff, artificial piece about a man killed by a bear, ostensibly because his wife willed it to happen, but none of the deep emotional undercurrents gone into or developed. I just cannot get out myself.

'Mothers', (1962) was published in October 1972, in McCall's who changed the title to The Mothers Union. Likewise in this story pick on opportune experiences, and their claim to being in the story section rests on the exoticism of the events in question. She is surprisingly inept at inventing

structures, even ordinary plots, taking refuge instead in archaic, would-be way, to rescue directionless narratives.

“Ocean 1212-W” (1962) was broadcast on the BBC in 1962, and published in *The Listener* in 1963. “Ocean 1212-W”, Sylvia Plath’s contribution to the BBC series “The Writer and His Background”, was broadcast in August, 1963, about six months after her death. Since this talk is a most important clue to an understanding of Sylvia Plath’s development both as a poet and as a person, it seems justified. To summarize and comment on

those parts.

According to Sylvia Plath’s own account “Ocean 1212-W” was the telephone number of her grandmother, and Sylvia Plath chose it as the title of her autobiographical sketch for reasons that a careful reading of the text will make clear. She recalls her grandmother, Mrs. Schober, as a vivacious, practical woman always busy at something; baking, cooking, or tidying up after a hurricane. On the hot April day in 1935 when Sylvia first learnt that her mother would come home with a baby, an event that will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter, Grandmother hummed and thumped out her bread dough with suppressed excitement. Mrs. Schober could seemingly perform what to the child must have looked like miracle. She says that with a cods head and tail my grandmother could produce a chowder that set, when chilled in its own triumphal jelly.

The vivid description of the hurricane and its disastrous effects provides us with another example of the enduring impression her grandmother's practical ability made on Sylvia Plath as a child. The grandparent's house was saved, probably thanks to a sea wall built by her grandfather, but everything was in a men. 'Sand buried her furnace in golden whorls, salt stained the upholstered sofa and a dead shark filled what had been the geranium bed, but my grandmother had her broom out, it would soon be right.

The main reason for Sylvia Plath's fondness her grandmother appears to have been even deeper, the grandmother was, in an almost mystical way, closely connected with the sea. When calling her grandmother the child thought of the telephone number "Ocean 1212-W" as "an incantation, a fine rhyme, half expecting the black earpiece to give me black, like a conch, the susurrous murmur of the sea out there as well as my grandmother's Hello."⁵

To Sylvia, as to most children, the sea meant play and pleasure, it was an much a natural part of her life as it was of the lives of the adults. When guests came they all gathered on the beach on rugs with thermoses and sandwiches and coloured umbrellas as if the water-blue, green, grey or silver as it might be, were enough to watch. But Sylvia was not satisfied with merely watching the sea. She describes how as a baby, she crawled straight towards the sea and was rescued by her mother from an approaching wave at the last

moment, and later we are told when I was not walking along side the sea I was on it.

Sylvia Plath dwells on the details of her childhood by the ocean with a kind of wistful insistence that reveals the strong impression made on her by what she strikingly calls the cold, salt, running, hills of the Atlantic. As will be seen below, the sea is very much present in her poetry, particularly in The Colossus. The sea evidently meant much more to Sylvia Plath than the beautiful stones and shells that she collected on the beach. She writes.

“and in one wash of memory the colours deepen and gleam, the early world draws breath. Breath, that is the first thing. Something is breathing. My own breath? The breath of my mother? No, something else, something larger, farther, more serious, more weary.”⁶

This passage easily lends itself to various speculations about the meaning of ‘breath’. thus Charles Newman comments on part of it in the following way :

“That breath, discounting our own hindsight now, is both the echo of her future voice, as well as her first sense of ‘otherness’, with whom, in a variety of guises, she will argue the possibility of existence throughout her life.”⁷

I do not claim that this is all wrong, but I do find the whole sentence very obscure. As a matter of fact, in her sketch Sylvia Plath herself provides us with an explanation of the word 'breath'. Summing up the first pages about the sea, she answers her own questions of whose breath she hints at by simply concluding. "The breath of the seam, then."⁸

The first time Sylvia Plath mentions that terrible sense of 'otherness' which Newman refers to is in the passages where she reports the birth of her brother. This event was apparently a great shock to Sylvia who upto then had been an only child. She describes her feelings in detail, the narrative, which covers two pages, testifies both to the importance of the event and to Sylvia Plath's insight into the psychology of a child.

Sylvia Plath tells us that her mother had been away for three weeks; the child felt lonely; 'Her desertion punched a smouldering hole in my sky. How could she, so loving and faithful, so easily leave me?' The grandmother told her about the surprise a baby, Sylvia Plath continues, and says that, 'I hated babies, I who for two and a half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth, babies.' This is a quite normal reaction in a child, especially an only child, who suddenly realizes that a new born sister or brother is intruding on its right to be the centre of the parents'-interest. Sylvia

Plath describes the impact on her of 'this awful birthday of otherness' in the following way :

"Hugging my grudge, ugly and prickly, a sad sea urchin, I trudded off my own... As from a star I saw, coldly and soberly, the separateness of everything. I felt the wall of my skin : I am I. That stone is a stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over."⁹

The shock caused in the child by the realization of a rival probably coincided with the discovery of her own ego. (She felt the wall of my skin : I am I.) Of course, this is ^a very much a case where after thought should be taken into consideration, but even so, it can hardly be denied that Sylvia Plath's poetry is evidence enough to prove how accurately she analyses her own dilemma here. This feeling of the 'separateness of everything', which can be traced almost step by step in her poems was to deepen fatally. It is therefore no overstatement to speak of a crisis in Sylvia Plath's childhood.

According to Sylvia Plath's own account in 'Ocean 1212-W', the child, strolling along the beach, was struck by the idea that the sea might comfort her, perhaps send her a sign : "A sign of what? A sign of election and specialness. A sign I was not forever to be cast out."¹⁰

And the sea did send her a sign : she found a wooden monkey which had been washed up by the waves. Really we know that Newman recognizes

the importance of the 'sign' in his discussion of this far-reaching experience in Sylvia Plath's early life. He regards the wooden monkey sent to her by the sea as "an antidote to the loss of her specialness."¹¹ Thus he pays due attention to Sylvia Plath's own words when she writes further down : - "So the sea, perceiving my need, had conferred a blessing. My baby brother took his place in the house that day, but so did my marvellous and even priceless baboon"¹² As far as we can judge Sylvia Plath here suggests that her feeling of 'separateness' was soothed, perhaps even partly cured.

Really in this story, the real fact we know that, the most decisive turning point of her childhood seems to have been her father's death in 1940, which changed her life completely, both with regard to her outward circumstances and her spiritual development.

According to Charles Newman, "Her mind and the world, her sea and the real sea do not divide until she is nine."¹³ We really know that the crisis which Sylvia Plath experienced when her brother was born should be understood. As has already been suggested, the sense of "the separateness of everything" was to become the basic predicament of Sylvia Plath's life and also one of the main themes of her poetry.

Really in Sylvia Plath's autobiographical sketch 'Ocean 1212-W' no includes her father as earlier. This is a strange in view of what we know of her deep affection for him. Not until the very end does she mention him, after the

description of the hurricane, which is final memory of her early years. She sums up :

“And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood.

My father died we moved inland. Whereupon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle, beautiful, in accessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth.”¹⁴

To brief statement, ‘my father died’, we moved in land has a shocking effect on the reader’s mind, probably because no mention of the father has been made earlier in the story. Of course, this concentration in expression might well be a device deliberately used by the author for artistic reasons. In our opinion or impression is, however, that Sylvia Plath here reveals that the memory of her father’s death still hurts. It is as if she did not dare to go into details on this point. The abruptness of the statement immediately followed by the notion that her early years were brusquely cut off from her life and enclosed ‘like a ship in a bottle’, indicates the decisive change that was caused by the death of her father.

“Snow Blitz”, (1963) was published in Punch 1963. ‘Snow Blitz’ this is a wonderfully comic essay she wrote about it all for ‘Punch’, was misleading, another example of her ability to retell her experiences for what, ever effect she chose. In this essay really the weather had trapped her.

As Trevor Thomas commented on Sylvia Plath's 'Snow Blitz' essay, 'In reality she was anything but the brave little woman of her apocalyptic account. She was frightened and pathetic as she appeared at my door all muffled up with scarves and dressing gown.' Despite her poor health and the weather, however, Sylvia was trying to maintain a regular writing schedule. She had enrolled Frieda in a nursery school for three hours every weekly morning. such type of weather also, she wrote 'Ocean 1212-W, and America! America! also. From such condition we really see that her effort of writing literature.

Part-IIInd: Other Stories

'Initiation' (1952) was published in Seventeen January, 1953. In this story she described throughout freshman year Sylvia's social situation remained unsettled. She was planning to break off with Bob Rideman, now a junior at University of New Hampshire, although she invited him to Smith for a fall weekend and saw him over thanksgiving. In this time her challenge at Smith as she saw it was a good catch. At that time Sylvia saw herself as a giantess, five feet nine inches tall and weighing one hundred thirty seven pounds, and a scholarship student as well. She convinced herself she was doomed to be a wall flower, as described so well in her story. 'Initiation', and so she was willing to date anyone who asked her out. One of her blind dates, a twenty five year old disabled veteran, took her on a long walk and suggested

they have a sex. Sylvia wrote about to her mother, wondering naively whether she should see the man again. But in her journal she described the experience.

"Sunday at the Mintons", (1952) was published in 'Mademoiselle', in August 1952. Sunday at the Mintons took the five hundred pounds first prize in the 1952 Mademoiselle fiction context. At that time Sylvia was also successful on campus. She belonged to several councils, boards, and committees and was asked to be on the board of 'Smith Review', the campus literary magazine.

In her 1952 story, 'Sunday at the Mintons', Plath manages a double focus on two characters, the shadowy and fragile sister Elizabeth Minton and her brother Henry. As Plath wrote to her mother about the story, 'it was a step for me to a story where the protagonist is not always ME, and proved that I am beginning to use imagination to transform the actual incident'. She also commented that, since the beginning of the story was to real and ordinary, its eventual worth surprised her : "I cannot get over how the story soared to where it did." Plath had seldom written about men protagonists; her successful treatment of Henry Minton is in some ways unexpected. As her letters make clear, Henry was a much-changed version of Dick Norton (Buddy willard of The Bell Jar), and Elizabeth was Plath as she saw herself in the relationship with Norton. In many ways, she was extending characterization from her earlier fiction.

In this story treated as Fantasy, 'Sunday at the Mintons', pivots on the differences between Elizabeth and Henry. Plath's metaphors establish lines of sympathy between readers and Elizabeth, but the story's beginning is a risk because Elizabeth is presented as an inept older woman, a retired librarian who needs the support of her more successful older brother. Sylvia Plath opens the story with Elizabeth's wish that her brother, for whom she now keeps house, were not so "supremely fastidious."¹⁵ Henry's neatness, however, is not Elizabeth's real worry. She is less critical of his personality traits than she is afraid that the differences between her traits and Henry's will spoil their life. "Sunday at the Mintons", is a survival story. Elizabeth, after years of being self-supporting and independent, is now faced with the need to please Henry who owns the house, is older, more successful, and male. Plath establishes all these facts in the masterful opening of the story, almost through indirection. After Elizabeth has wished that Henry were less particular, the narrative stops and Plath moves in sonorous, hesitant sentences to a description of the scene :

"She leaned dreamily aslant his mahogany desk for a moment,
her withered, blue-veined, fingers spread whitely against the
dark, glossy wood.

The late morning sunlight lay in pale squares along the floor, and the dust motes went drifting, sinking in the luminous air. Through the window she could see the flat sheen of the green September ocean that curved far beyond the blurred horizon line.

On a fine day, if the windows were open, she could hear the waves fall. One would crash and go slipping back, and then another and another. On some nights, when she was lingering half-awake about to be engulfed in sleep, she would hear the waves, and then the wind would begin in the trees until she could not tell one sound from the other, so that, for all she knew, the water might be washing in the leaves, or the leaves falling hushed, drifting down into the sea.”¹⁶

In this story Plath conveys the feeling that Elizabeth might have stood there for hours, had not the next line been ‘Elizabeth’, Henry’s voice echoed “deep and ominous down the cavernous hallway.”¹⁷

As the story continues, Plath uses charged descriptions of Elizabeth, she feels as if she is a little girl, obedient and yielding, as she had been long ago. She moves nervously. Descriptions of Henry are all solid, judicial and one thinks of Plath’s comment after her first date with Dick Norton, ‘he knows everything’. Henry’s conversation with Elizabeth consists of his giving

commands, barely disguised as questions. Have you finished tidying the study? and his lamenting her capabilities, 'you have not changed in all these years', 'Day dreaming again, Elizabeth?'. What Plath manages to do in these few pages is move the reader far past the expected interplay between the siblings : Henry will be less than a tyrant and Elizabeth more than a servant at the story's end. Elizabeth's mode becomes defiance rather than submission.

Her sense of defiance appears early. Even while she cleans the study, Elizabeth is critical of Henry's traits. when he implies that she is inefficient she moves to the kitchen, with the merest suggestion of an indignant flounce. Nothing this tone, Henry worries about her impertinence, but Elizabeth's real subversion is much more private a condition of a semi-fantastic treatment of reality. Early in the story, Elizabeth looks at Henry without her glasses, unclearly. Plath recounts that she "felt an odd pleasure in observing him without her glasses. He was invariably so clear, so precise, and now for once he was quite thoroughly obscured."¹⁸

Later, as Henry lectures her at dinner, she simply stops listening to him.

The insights Plath gives us into Elizabeth's imagination are the key to her believability as a character. To stop listening would be much less interesting

than to think about what she does :

"Now she found it quite simple to escape Henry's censure unobtrusively by drifting off into a private world of her own,

dreaming, musing on anything that chanced into her thoughts. She remembered now about how the horizon blurred pleasantly into the blue sky so that, for all she knew, the water might be thinning into air or the air thickening, settling, becoming water.”¹⁹

Elizabeth is angry about her role, her subservience, becomes clear in the next image Plath chooses to describe her. As she gets the dessert, “her full lavender skirt brushing and rustling against the stiff, polished furniture. She felt oddly that she was merging into someone else, her mother perhaps. Someone who was capable and industrious about household tasks.”²⁰

This fearful for her own identity Elizabeth then makes an imaginary feint to place Henry in a less powerful position in the shadowy light of the dining room, while she imagines a long overdue confrontation.

Plath shifts attention from Elizabeth’s fancies to another scene of confrontation between the brother and sister, here confrontation that is always outwardly amicable. The difference between their cognitive and life styles is treated succinctly in comic dialogue, aided by charged descriptive words and another of Elizabeth’s metaphoric visions :

“Last spring....”

“The week of April Sixth,” Henry prompted.

“Yes, of course. You know, I never thought”, she said, “of what direction I was going in on the map... up, down or across.”

Henry looked at his sister with something like dismay.

“You never have!” he breathed incredulously.

“You mean you never figure whether you are going North or South or East or West?” “No,” flashed Elizabeth, “I never do. I never saw the point.”

She thought of his study, then, the walls hung with the great maps, carefully diagramed, meticulously annotated... she imagines herself wandering, small and diminutive, up the finely drawn contour lines and down again wading through the shallow blue ovals of lakes... Henry was looking at her still with something akin to shock. She noted that his eyes were very cold and very blue. ... Elizabeth could see him now, standing brightly in the morning on the flat surface of a map, watching expectantly for the sun to come up from the East.(He would know exactly where East was)... Feet planted firmly he stood with pencil and paper making calculations, checking to see that the world revolved on schedule.”²¹

Although she asks Henry to help her learn the skills he takes for granted, Elizabeth withdraws into herself, 'cherishing.. the vague, imprecise world in which she lived.'

Plath recreates that world for us then, in sentences longer and more incremental than those of the rest of the story, and we are reminded of Sylvia's own life long struggle to excel academically, to compete in a largely male world. The brilliance of her father and his world, her implicit competition with her brother Warren, her subordinate relationship with men whether doctors and writers, it took Plath many years to see that her kind of intellect was as valuable as more easily classifiable kinds of ability.

The next image Plath uses in the story is, in fact, that of the interior of the human mind, as if tea pot lids could be removed and the writer, peer inside to find out what they were thinking'. Elizabeth describes her mind as, 'dark warm room, with coloured lights swinging and wavering, like so many lanterns reflecting on the water, and pictures coming and going on the misty walls, soft and blurred paintings. The colours would be broken down in small tinted fragments, and the pink of the ladies flesh would be the pink of the roses, and the lavender of the dresses would mingle with the lilacs. And there would be, from somewhere sweetly coming, the sound of violins and bells'. In contrast we really know that, Henry's mind would be, "flat and level, laid out with measured instruments in the broad, even sunlight. There would be geometric

concrete walks and square, substantial buildings with clocks on them, everywhere perfectly in time, perfectly synchronized.”²²

The complexity of the relationship becomes more pronounced in the last section of the story. As on most Sundays, Henry and Elizabeth take their walk to the ocean. Feeling like a balloon partly because of her full skirt, partly because of her fantasy of being free. Elizabeth enjoys as well the solidity of being safely to Henry’s arm. And when she drops their mother’s brooch into the sea rocks below, she is sure Henry will be able to retrieve it for her. In the closing scene, fantasy suffuses the story, Henry is scooped away by waves and Elizabeth sails off into space, no longer submissive enjoying herself thoroughly, blowing upward, now to this side, now to that, her lavender dress blending with the purple of the distant clouds. Sylvia Plath’s typescript ends with Elizabeth’s high pitched, triumphant, feminine giggle. Coming back to Henry, but the story as printed has a return-from-reverie last paragraph, with Henry jogging Elizabeth from her day-dream and leading her back to the house, submissively. Even within sight of her airy freedom, however, Elizabeth has worried about Henry, and the evident death-wish for him is ameliorated by her concern.

“Sunday at the Mintons”, consequently is one accurate image of Plath’s recognition of a subordination she wanted to avoid, caught with humour; and

sympathy, and balanced with the compensation of security, safety, solidity that a man such as Henry could provide.

Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit, (1955) was published in 'Smith Review' spring 1955 and another story "The Shadow" (January 1959) several of Plath's stories from the 1950s provide a wistful picture of the poet persona searching for a stable concept of justice and honour a way to live that satisfies both her needs and those of conventional society. Both "Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit" and "The Shadow" are stories about a girl who feels herself different from the rest of the neighborhood children. Whether she is ostracised from the group because she is more adventurous or tougher, as when she bites Leroy Kelly in 'The Shadow' or is erroneously charged with ruining her friend's snowsuit, she is made to feel that being different is morally wrong. "Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit' and "The Shadow" stories are also autobiographical, in some senses. Both stories take place the year World War II began, and the fact that Plath's father was German became of primary importance to the neighborhood. That Plath handles the major issue of prejudice in fiction seemingly so personal and impressionistic is another mark of her increasing narrative skill.

In 'Superman and Paula Brow's New Snowsuit', in this story Sylvia Plath presented real picture of her own that is this story is like autobiographical type of story. She says like also :

“the year the war began I was in the fifth grade at the Annie F. Warren Grammar School in Winthrop, and that was the winter, I won the Prize for drawing the best Civil Defence Signs. That was also the winter of Paula Brown’s new snowsuit, and even now thirteen years later, I can recall the changing colours of those days, clear and definite seen through a kaleidoscope.”²³

‘In the Mountains’, (1954) was published in ‘Smith Review’ Fall 1954. ‘In the Mountains’, ‘Tongues of Stone’, ‘Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams’, serves almost as apprentice pieces for key scenes in The Bell Jar, containing episodes with the same actions, characters, images, sometimes even the same words. Beyond these apprentice pieces, however, a reader discovers that not only do Plath’s stories stylistically show her direct movement into the writing of ‘The Bell Jar’, but they also mirror her continued thematic concern with two interrelated ideas, first, the idea of living and sustaining a life of the imagination, and second, the socio-mythic form of this theme.

‘In the Mountains’ also rehearses a scene for ‘The Bell Jar’ Isobel, a young college woman, goes to visit her boy friend, Austin, who has been in a TB sanatorium for six months. This parallels Esther Greenwood’s later visit to Buddy Willard under the same constraints. Isobel comes to visit to find an unchanged in Austin, “Still strong, she thought, and sure of himself, and even now, although everything was changed for her, she felt a touch of the old

hurting, fear, just remembering the way it had been.”²⁴ And it is this awareness that she needs to articulate to Austin. In a discussion about marriage in general, their differences are highlighted. Austin implies his desire for a commitment, a marriage, while Isobel, in her newly changed persona, explains that she is not ready to consider such a step. ‘Affairs are one thing’, she said ‘But signing your life away because you are lonely, because you are afraid of being lonely, that is something else again’.

“He gave her a quick look - ‘That sounds funny coming from you’.

‘May be’, she said defensively. ‘But that is the way I figure it’.

‘That is the way I figure it now anyway.’²⁵

For the first time in their relationship, Austin is vulnerable and expresses his need for Isobel. But part of his attraction to her is still the result of seeing her as appropriate to be his wife. Austin notes she is attractive, just as his doctor’s wife is attractive, just as a doctor’s wife should be. He sees her as fitting a role, a role which he needs filled, not necessarily one she wants to fill. He recalls all the things they have been through together, but where they serve to be fond memories for him, Isobel recalls, ‘how it was all so lovely and hurting then. How everything he said had hurt her’. Where he is now able to proclaim his need for her, she is no longer as needing of him, nor does he offer her anything beyond his need. We really know that in the end, when he

reaches out for her, thinking to claim her, she is stricken, immobilized and feels them surrounded by a landscape hushed and stills frozen and deathlike.

In the story, the reader is made aware of the change in Isobel, as we are similarly made aware in The Bell Jar of the change in Esther. However, in “In the Mountains”, there is less overt understanding of the cause of Isobel’s change. The novel form allows Plath to finally put all the isolated scenarios together, to juxtapose them until the common conflicts become clear. Esther’s rejection of Buddy is more clearly a rejection of not just the individual, but also the prescribed role which her relationship to Buddy threatens to lock her into. Likewise, the almost malicious pleasure that Buddy feels when Esther breaks her leg and thus becomes less threatening, less independent is missing from the short story. In the story, the reader can still pity Austin, if only slightly; in the novel, Plath gives us little option to disliking Buddy almost as much as Esther does because we see the large issues capitulation to his vulnerability and vision would represent.

‘All the Dead Dears’, (1956/57) was published in Gemini, summer 1957. Sylvia Plath here says that in what way Lucas was died. Here Sylvia gives briefly his dying condition. First of all Lukas’s daughter says that Lukas went upstairs after dinner, and when his daughter Daphne called him down to drive out, it was two minutes before he came, she says that his face was puffed funny and his lips kind of purple. Again Dora Sutcliff says that, Lukas tried to

hang himself many times but he was saved. She had heard the story of Lukas hanging countless times, but at last he was dears to all persons was dead.

Again Sylvia Plath, gives here, another example of the Great-War time, and various ends of those who thrived and those who died in the war, these also the 'all the dead dears' to human beings, or human society.

Day of Success, (1960) was published in 1976. We really know that in the 1959-60, Sylvia Plath was quite content to be accepted by the Mademoiselle. with the American desire to make it, her ideal, till her poetic genius took over, was through stories and journalism to be rich, famous, and travel, which remaining a wholesome and nice American girl. The day dream is spelt out in embarrassing fulness in 'Day of Success', the last of the second selection of stories here, those which Ted Hughes rightly considers inferior to the first batch. There the wholesome girl is the wife, the genius is the husband, and it ends happily, when the husband, having sold a play for acting and publishing on the same day, decides to buy the country cottage that she has always longed for.

'Day of success', which tries to disclaim any such parasitism, must be one of the creepiest instances, an attempt at a woman's magazine story about a young wife and mother coping with her writer-husband's sudden breakthrough into realms of money and fame. It is saccharine sweet, and entirely deliberately fails to hide its bitterness. The first paragraph buries the heroine under a pile of

freshly folded nappies and has her proudly contemplate the forest green cord drapes she is hemmed by hand as the phone rings for him, a small, black instrument of doom. A brisk lady producer making a lunch date sets her fantasizing about author and producer collaborating on the birth of something wonderful, luring him away from herself and their baby-daughter. It is a terrible, stuff, with the feeblest of happy endings, a parody of the Zest with which she threw herself into the role of housewife and insisted on an exaggerated separation of roles in the earliest part of her marriage. Here in this story, 'Day of Success', when the hopeful husband sells a story and tries to buy her a present, the heroine asks for a pram big enough for twins.

Part-III : Excerpts from notebooks :

Cambridge Notes (February 1956)

In 'Cambridge Notes' Sylvia Plath describes the problems in her life, as well as she wrote about love and fear during the month of February 1956. For this purpose Sylvia wrote her notes on following dates. February 19, Sunday night, February 20, Monday, and February 25, Saturday. In these dates she wrote notes regarding fear also. In her life there had been cry of deformed babies, mostly owing to the excessive use of drugs like thalidomide. Plath's fear of bearing a deformed child, a certain, growing dark and ugly, was quite agonising after such a long wait for one to come. We really know that, Plath did have to spell of happiness born of being wedded to her man and being

proud mother of his two healthy, meanwhile Ted Hughes bought a country house at ^{Devon} by pooling at all the meagre resources together. Being free of bleeding rent²⁶ to landlords, this added both physical and emotional stability to their marriage. Fear however was not far behind. Her momentary joy was tarnished by Plath's premonition that she would lose her husband to some more attractive woman. This fear was in her mind even before her marriage. She says in her notes, I fight all woman for my men. My men. I am a woman, and there is no loyalty, even between mother and daughter, both fight for bed of mind and body. Soon enough the imaginary fear of losing her man to other woman turned out to be a nightmarish reality and Plath separated from Ted Hughes. This led in its wake to an inrush of anger, frustration, and rekindling of all old fears. Her horror of doctors and hospitals was so profound that it almost seemed she would rather bleed to death than encounter them again. We really know that again she feared death of the imagination runs throughout all of Plath's fiction in the decade preceding publication of 'The Bell Jar'. Plath's characters reverse cry also, they wish to dream, not steep, much less just exist. As Plath explains in her 'Cambridge Notes',

“What I fear most, I think, is the death of the imagination.

When the sky outside is merely pink, and the roof tops merely black: that photographic mind which paradoxically tells the truth, but the worthless truth, about the world. It is that

synthesizing spirit, that shaping force, which prolifically sprouts and makes up its own worlds with more inventiveness than God which I desire. If I sit still and do not do anything, the world goes on beating like a slack drum, without meaning. We must be moving, working, making dreams to run toward; the poverty of line without dreams is too horrible to imagine; it is that kind of madness which is worst, the kind with fancies and hallucinations would be a bosch-ish relief."²⁷

'Widow Mangada, (Summer 1956), and Rose and Percy B, (1961/62),

The Cambridge passages are embarrassingly egotistic in passages containing detailed. In passages containing detailed observation of outer behaviour and visible surroundings, 'Widow Mangada' and 'Rose and Percy B', she is wonderful but also frightening. The Widow Mangada was devious and on the edge of modern. Percy B was no doubt all the more disgusting in his prolonged dying because of his false teeth, and his wife Rose was shallow and a bit of a scrounger. But, though the impression must be wrong, since one feels the pity and involvement oneself, there is the sense of someone who sees things almost indecently clearly.

'Charlie Pollard and the Beekeeper's'(1962)

'Charlie Pollard and the Beekeeper's' prose was published in June 1962. Charlie Pollard, is a loose prose draft of 'The Bee Meeting'. Sylvia

Plath really says that in this prose draft today, guess what, we became beekeepers. We went to the local meeting last week attended by the rector, the midwife, and assorted beekeeping people from neighbouring villages to watch. Mr. Pollard make three hives art of one by transferring his queen cells, under the supervision of the official Government bee-man. She says that we all wore masks and it was thrilling. It is expensive to start bee-keeping, but Mr. Pollard let us have an old hive for nothing, which we painted white and green, and today he brought over the swarm of docile Italian hybrid bees we ordered and installed them. For this purpose we placed the hive in a sheltered out-of-the-way spot in the orchard - the bees were furious from being in a box. Ted had only put a handkerchief over his head where the hat should go in the beemask, and the bees crawled into his hair, and he flew off with half-a-dozen stings. Sylvia says I did not get stug at all, and when I went back to the hive later, I was delighted to see bees entering with pollen sacs full and leaving with empty- at least I think that is what they were doing. Sylvia says that I feel very ignorant, but shall try to read up and learn all I can. If we are lucky, we will have our own honey, too. Lots of people are really big keepers in town with a dozen to twenty hives, so we shall not be short of advice, when we have our first honey.

Part-IV : Stories from the Lilly Library :

'A Day in June' (1949). In this story, 'A Day in June, Sylvia describes the tension between fear of the sexual and fascination with it gave these stories a sensuality, which she also caught in 'A Day in June', a story about adolescent girls. About this story she says, in her journal, however, presented a much more caustic Sylvia, who described dating as this game of searching for a male, of testing, trying. She wrote with wicked humour about the strong smell of masculinity which creates the ideal medium for me to exist in; she also described, perceptively, the real sexual conflicts she endured. Sylvia says in this story I can only lean enviously against the boundary and hate, hate the boys, who dispel sexual hunger freely, while I drag out from date to date in slobby desire, always unfulfilled, the whole thing sickness me. She ironically called herself the American virgin, dressed to seduce. She says also like we go on dates, we play around and if we are nice girls, we demur at a certain point.

In this story we really know that, there was a sexual dimension to the farm experience as well, Ilo, a Latrian immigrant, was walking there before going to New York to start a career as an artist. He had been studying art in Munich. Sylvia's interest in drawing led to friendship, but she was frightened when Ilo French-kissed her and she realized how attracted to him she was. One of her college stories, called, "The Estonian", describes that attraction.

The Green Rock (1949). In this essay Sylvia Plath really described her visit to seashore and she saw the Green Rock there. In this essay she described the Green Rock and there atmosphere. She says there was a gleam of blue between the crowded city tenements. The dingy buildings with their identical fronts were like stage scenery, but behind them the ocean sparkled in the warm June sunlight; this is the description where Susan and David are living. David here says that first of all we are going to the beach, near the beach there was a lonely little cove at the end of the street, too small for public bathing. It was here that the children liked to play in the summer time. There near the ocean Susan ran along with David closely. Near the ocean the road dipped to the beach, and the sand had drifted up over the tarred surface. When Susan and David went to the seashore, there is something within her soared at the sight of the cloudless sky and the waves washing on the shore with a scalloped fringe of foam. There is the land behind her was a ledge, a narrow shelf from which she could fling herself into the vast blue space. Here Sylvia described the childrens were silent as they moved down the beach, searching for shells into the line of the last high tide. There is the sound of the water rushing in and then withdrawing with a sigh filled their ears. Again she described the seashore, the retreating waves foamed about the large, flat rock. As she started at the noisy, receding waters, a delightful idea came to her. David and Susan wandering here and there near the seashore there is occurred the green

rock, both have liked the rock was like some docile animal. There are the children loved to climb up the friendly, irregular surface of green rock, and play all sorts of magic games. They know that sometimes the rock would be a sailboat in stormy seas, and sometimes it became a lofty mountain. Both also mounted the creating wooden steps to the porch. They walked as toward the beach. There at least, things would be the same, the ocean, the sand, and the green rock.

The beach looked smaller than they had remembered it, and there was something strange and alien concealed beneath the smooth sand and calm, unruffled surface of the water. There was an emptiness that rose to meet them and a queez silence above the lapping of the waves. It was like entering a familiar room after a long absence and finding it vacant and desolate.

Again Susan and David go to the green rock, there is the magic must still remain by the green rock. Near the seashore there is the boulder, seemed to have diminished in size, it lay among the pebbles, a heavy, inert shape and green rock and there is nothing more. Wherewere the castles the sail boats the mountains that once had been. Now only the rock remained, stark and bare.

Among the Bumblebees (Early 1950s) -

Among the Sylvia Plath's stories collected in 'Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams', many are obviously based on Sylvia Plath's own experience.

'Among the Bumblebees', written in 1950 for a Smith College English Class, she created the picture of a daughter bereft after the death of her father.

The story opens with the Biblical- sounding, "In the beginning there was Alice Denway's father, tossing her up in the air until the breath caught in her throat, and catching her and holding her in a huge bear hug."²⁸ From that initial comforting image of the father as protector, in control whether he is in the ocean or on campus, Plath describes his descent into illness and death. In the closing scene when the child Alice monitors the weak pulsing of his heart, she realizes that he is about to die, that he has forgotten her as he has withdrawn into the 'core of himself'. She has already lost the powerful parent who had earlier made her feel as if, with him, "She could face the doomsday of the world in perfect safety."²⁹

Once her father was dead, Sylvia was less sure about her place in the world, about her mother's ability to care for her- about her very existence. But she continued to benefit from the love of her strong mother and the Schober family, as well. Her father's death may have struck like a hurricane, but the efforts of her extended family helped her rebuild her young, promising life.

Really 'Among the Bumblebees' describes in remarkable depth a young girl's feelings when her father dies. We really know that in her short stories many of the events she writes about in 'The Bell Jar' were

autobiographical, readers have assumed that her short fiction has sprung from those same roots even in the case of fanciful stories.

Tongues of Stone, (1955)-

Ted Hughes indicates that Sylvia Plath, launched herself into 'The Bell Jar' in 1960. But at least the four stories written between 1954 and 1959 deal with some of the same material. One in particular, 'Tongues of Stone' (1955), uses the experience of a young girl's nervous break-down much as Plath uses it in 'The Bell Jar'. In this story, atleast six key incidents appear first in this story, before being transformed and interpolated into the novel. The start of the breakdown is the same in both pieces. The main character is suffering from extreme apathy, anxiety. In 'The Bell Jar' Esther enters the first Clinic, Walton, after three weeks of not sleeping; in 'Tongues of Stone' the character is at the end of two months of sleeplessness. In setting the scene, the 'Tongues of Stone' narrator explains, "It was sometime in October; she had long ago lost track of all the days and it really did not matter because one was like another and there were no nights to separate them because she never slept anymore."³⁰ Both young women try to forestall their depression by looking for intellectual occupations to, literally, kill time. Each tries particularly hard to read, only to find the print on the pages of their books indecipherable, 'dead black hieroglyphs', and "fantastic untranslatable shapes, like Arabic and Chinese."³¹ Both are denied solace by their alienation from the dead intellectual world

represented by the printed books. But more obvious in their similarities than these parallels of general circumstances are the active steps in their attempted suicides and their subsequent treatments. Looking at these steps, the reader can see Plath's movement from a rather flat narrative to the evocative and powerful personal voice of the novel. The apprentice piece has all the isolated units but does not have the developed style, theme or political focus of The Bell Jar.

First, in both 'Tongues of Stone' and 'The Bell Jar', each of the girls visits her sleeping mother and comes to an important realization, there is neither parental security nor any meaningful reason to continue being in either the present or the future. In 'Tongues of Stone', the main character slips into her mother's bed and, lying beside her, "Listening to the thin thread of her mother's breathing, wanting to get up and twist the life out of the fragile throat, to end at once the process of slow disintegration which grinned at her like a death's head everywhere she turned."³²

The girl (who remains nameless throughout the story), has sought out her mother. By getting close to her, the girl hopes to save off the fears and despair she feels. But the mother can neither solace nor protect her daughter. Asleep, she is even unaware of the girl's presence. She is perceived by her daughter as fragile and disintegrating, not a possible heaven or shelter against the death her daughter seen everywhere, even in her. This same incident

occurs in 'The Bell Jar', but some of the narrator's feelings have changed. In the novel, the mother is less mutual victim, another fragile throat which can be stopped, and more a despised perpetrator of circumstances, a guardian of the world's values and actions. The main character, Esther, looks at her sleeping mother, listens to her piggish snozes, and explains,

'... for a while it seemed to me that the only way to stop it, the sound in her mother's throat would be to take the column of skin and sinew from which it rose and twist it to silence between my hands.'³³

Not only is the mother more unattractive in this version being piggish and irritating, but the action of strangling her is not done to stop a mutual disintegration, a slow and painful change, but more to assuage Esther's aggressive dislike of what her mother represents. She and her mother are struggling against one another, tussling between their expectations for Esther's future and Esther's own desires. Neither is totally passive. Esther views the strangling not as euthanasia, but as a means of effectively changing her own world. Where in 'Tongues of Stone', the girl creeps into her mother's bed for solace, in 'The Bell Jar', Esther Greenwood merely looks at her mother from the bed-room door, not seeking communion with a source of safety so much as observing the enemy.

After this scene, both stories show the female protagonist trying to escape the world around her by hiding under the mattress of her bed. In each case, she hopes to be crushed, to never reawaken to the oppressive world of sleepless, meaningless, comfortless living. In 'Tongues of Stone', the girl leaves her mother's bed, "Creeping back to her own bed, then, she had lifted up the mattress, wedging herself in the crevices between mattress and bed springs, longing to be crushed beneath the heavy slab."³⁴ More immediately, the same scene is enacted in 'The Bell Jar',

"I crawled between the mattress and in padded bedstead and let the mattress fall across me like a tombstone. It felt dark and safe under there, but the mattress was not heavy enough. It needed about a ton more weight to make me sleep."³⁵

In the second scene, the tone is sharper. The slab has been defined as a tombstone, the oppression and death imagery are more overt. Plath's character recognize consciously what she is seeking the safe dark of death and what it would take to achieve it about a ton more.

Both girls then attempt suicide actually reach out to take hold of the darkness, but are discovered at the last moment and saved. Upon first awakening from their drugged state, each believes herself blind. In 'Tongues of Stone', the narrator explains that :

“At first they thought she would be blind in that eye. She had lain awake the night of her second birth into the world of flesh, talking to a nurse who was sitting up with her, turning her sightless face toward the gentle voice and saying over and over again, ‘But I cannot see, I cannot see.’

The nurse, who had also believed that she was blind, tried to comfort her, saying ‘There are a lot of other blind people in the world. You will meet a nice blindman and marry him some day.’”³⁶

In this scene the nurse is an acknowledged presence, someone known and staying with the girl, not just beside her. She is described as gentle and comforting, albeit not well-informed. This same scene is recreated in ‘The Ball Jar’, only this time the nurse’s presence is not so immediately felt as sympathetic.

“I opened my eyes.

It was completely dark.

Somebody was breathing beside me.

‘I cannot see! I said-

A cheery voice spoke out of the dark. There are lots of blind people in the world. You will marry a nice blind man some day.’”³⁷

Although, the changes are slight, they do match up with the more sinister and detached feelings of Esther in the novel. The nurse in the second presentation is not known immediately, she is somebody. She is not with the girl, she is beside her. Although she is cheery, unlike the original image of comforting presence, we have no reason to assume her intentions are personal; rather, they smack of habitual, professional cheeriness.

Each girl also tries to strangle herself, although the timing of the attempt varies. In 'Tongues of Stone', the girl is in the sanatorium, frustrated and depressed that the insulin treatment is not working. She considers strangulation as a means to end the continuing depression and self-disgust :

“One night she hid the pink cotton scarf from the raincoat in the pillowcase when the nurse came around to lock up her drawers and closets for the night. In the dark she had made a loop and tried to pull it tight around her throat. But always just as the air stopped coming and she felt the rushing grow louder in her ears, her hands would slacken and let go, and she would lie there panting for breath, cursing the dumb instinct in her body that fought to go on living.”³⁸

In 'The Ball Jar', Esther Greenwood considers and experiments with strangulation as one possible form of suicide, trying a number before the final

attempt with sleeping pills. At first, in her version of the scene, she hopes to hang herself, but finding no adequate beam in the house, she explains:

“I sat on the edge of my mother’s bed and tried pulling the cord tight. But each time I would get the cord so tight I could feel a rushing in my ears and a flush of blood in my face, my hands would weaken and let go and I would be all right again.

Then I saw that my body had all sorts of little tricks, such as making my hands go limp at the crucial second, which would save it, time and again whereas if I had the whole say, I would be dead in a flash.”³⁹

In this scene, the body’s instinctual response is more malevolent; it is not simply ‘dumb’, but it has all sorts of little tricks. In ‘The Ball Jar’, the character’s paranoia and mind-body split is strongly felt. The world is active in its oppression, the body active in its rebellion to the will.

Finally, both stories describe the insulin treatment used to combat the character’s suicidal depressions. Each story starts with the appearance of a nurse to administer the insulin injection. In ‘Tongues of Stone’:

“At seven the nurse came in to give the evening insulin shot. ‘What side?’ she asked, as the girl bent mechanically over the bed and bared flank. It does not matter, the girl said. ‘I cannot

feel them any more'. The nurse gave an expert job. 'My, your certainly are black and blue', she said."⁴⁰

In 'The Ball Jar', the characters are both detached as well. The section is a little less calm, however, since we are atleast aware of what Esther seen when she views herself.

"The nurse gave a little clucking noise. Thus she said, 'which side?' It was an old joke. I raised my head and glanced back at my bare buttocks. They were bruised purple and green and blue from past injections. The left side looked darker than the right.

'The right.'

'You name it'. The nurse jabbed the needle in, and I winced, savoring the tiny hurt."⁴¹

It is also useful to note that Esther does feel something in this episode : Pain. And that is welcomed, for it is something instead of the dull apathy of the first scene.

The final movement in each story is the breakthrough caused by the girl's reactions to the insulin treatment. In each case, the reaction signals the momentary lifting of the oppressive atmosphere, the depression, and bell jar which each of the character is laboring under. After what has seemed a

fruitless waiting in 'Tongues of Stone', the girl's reaction occurs, accompanied by a proliferation of growth and light images.

"In the blackness that was stupor that was sleep, a voice spoke to her, sprouting like a green plant in the dark.

'Mrs. Patterson, Mrs. Patterson, Mrs. Patterson!' the voice said more and more loudly, rising shouting. Light broke on seas of blindness. Air thinned.

The nurse, Mrs. Patterson, came running out from behind the girl's eyes. 'Fine', she was saying, 'Fine'. Let me just take off, your watch so you would not bang it on the bed.'

'Mrs. Patterson', the girl heard herself say. 'Drink another glass of juice', Mrs. Patterson was holding a white celluloid cup of orange juice to the girl's lips."⁴²

As the ending of the short story, this scene optimistically portends a healing conclusion. The sun has returned; in fact, it is speaking directly to the girl. Both the blackness she emerges from and the real world represented by the nurse are positive; the first is the plant; the second, warm and round as an apple. The air is clear, the light quite literally and figuratively dawns. The girl herself speaks words and listens to a voice which apparently signals the start of

a new world. 'The Ball Jar', the parallel scene follows the same progression, but has a slightly different tone.

"I had fallen asleep after the evening meal. I was awakened by a loud voice, Mrs. Bannister, Mrs. Bannister, Mrs. Bannister, Mrs. Bannister. As I pulled out of sleep, I found I was beating on the bedpost with my hands and calling. The sharp, way figure of Mrs. Bannister, the night nurse, scurried into view.

'Here, we do not want you to break this.'

She unfastened the band of my watch.

'What is the matter? What happened?'

Mrs. Bannister's face twisted into a quick smile.

'You have had reaction'.

'A reaction?'

'Yes, how do you feel?'

'Funny, sort of light and airy.'

Mrs. Bannister helped me sit up.

'You will be better now. You will better in no time.

Would you like some hot milk?'

'Yes.'

And when Mrs. Bannister held the cup to my lips, I fanned the hot milk on my tongue as it went down, tasting it luxuriously, the way a baby tastes its mother."⁴³

In this scene, several things have changed. In 'Tongues of Stone', the girl is the first one to focus on the change in both herself and her surroundings. She feels different and it is not just her, but the atmosphere, the world which is light and airy. In 'The Ball Jar', Esther feels 'funny', 'light and airy.' But we have no sense of whether the external world is in accord. In 'Tongues of Stone', the girl seems to have become attuned again to the physical, natural world. In 'The Ball Jar', the natural world referred to is that of mother and child, not the most hopeful image when taken in the context of the heavily negative connotations given to that relationship throughout the rest of the novel, both before and after the scene. We really know that Esther's own relationship with her mother, her sense of all mothers- hers and Buddy's - as circumscribing her opportunities, the notion that becoming a mother herself would kill her chances to be writer, a complete person in her own right.

Really, Sylvia Plath, is using the same material, even some of the same phrases and images, in this early story and 'The Ball Jar'. Equally obviously, there are some significant differences in her presentations, many of which seem caused by an increased thematic awareness on Plath's part in the novel. In 'Tongues of Stone', we have a description more than 'clearly delineated

conflict. The causes of breakdown, the fears for the future, the active resistance of the girl to both medical help and her surroundings, are never presented. It seems doubtful that the girl herself is aware of all the factors surrounding her previous actions. We are given a third-person, limited view of the events. All conflicts and conditions leading to the suicide attempt are cloaked. In the expanded scope 'The Bell Jar', on the other hand, the older Esther, the narrator, has moved to a recognition, frequently frustrated and angry, of the social and familial forces which lead to her breakdown. Her mother is seen in sharply critical relief. Her male doctor is at best indifferent to Esther's struggle; at worst he denies its value. It is a world of stultified options and intellectual sterility which places Esther under the bell jar. It is this thematic awareness even more than a stylistic change which gives 'The Bell Jar', a power lacking in the earlier story. This same factor accounts for much of the difference between the other apprentice pieces and the novel.

'That Widow Mangada', (1956), was published in Autumn 1956. In this story, 'That Widow Mangada', Sylvia Plath described, Widow Mangada's nature towards Make and Sally - What type of help done by Widow Mangada towards Make and Sally. In the opening of the story, Sylvia says that Make and Sally travelling by bus from Alicante to Villaviento. At that time Make and Sally have some luggage. Sally was leaning over the seat in front of her, exclaiming at the brilliance of the sea, when, all at once, the little black haired

woman in the ahead turned around. She was heavily made up and wore a pair of dark sunglasses, that is Widow Mangada, her brilliant doctor husband was died and she became widow. When Widow Mangada and Sally and Make met at that time, there discussion on Spanish language. Here Widow Mangada says to Make and Sally, I myself have a house in Villaviento, she ran on hire, a lovely home, with a garden and kitchen and right side on sea also. And hence such type of convenience there is available and Make and Sally give the house on rent basis. This house is like comfortable, beautiful, kitchen right side, Garden rights, and old balcony also. Really Widow Mangada, her stylish white lace dress revealed a black ship underneath; her blue-black hair was elegantly marceled in a forth of little waves of curls. Widow says to Mark and Sally here hotels are very expensive hundred pesetas (a silver coin) a night, for one person only, then all the little extra charges. Near her house, there was ocean, bay them the lay before then, vivid, blue rimmed by a crest of orrange hills. The Widow Mangada's house is well, and all facilities are available, and such house was rented by Make and Sally. Make and Sally says to Widow Mangada 'I am a Writer', and for this purpose all we want is a quiet place where, we can write for the summer. Really in this story we know that widow's nature was like generous, co-operative because, she says to Mark, 'I will not charge service. But you understand', she glanced up quickly, 'you must not tell anyone'. The other's will pay service, but you and I, will be friends. Really

her nature was good as well as sympathetic, really she was a great landlady, she was also a poet, as well as short story writer. Near the house of Widow Mangada, many types of tourists are coming and going, as well as vendors also. One night in the house there was not available light and water, only Widow know what type of machine was primed so it would work only for the Widow. Such type of co-operative Widow Mangada given facilities to Make and Sally; she was a very good natured woman.

'Stone Boy with Dolphin', (1957, 58) -

In this story, Dody Ventura is the outsider, an American in England, a woman writer among men. Tough and cynical, she long for something to happen to set her even further apart, and yet simultaneously draw her into life, 'let something happen, something terrible, something bloody.' Frustration has Plath's humour to rapier intensity, and when Dody drunkenly bites the cheek of the poet she has been eager to meet, she feels somehow vindicated. His rejection of her sexual approach turns her back into the relatively unfeeling woman she has been and her later reaction as Hamish, her casual date, makes love to her is frighteningly passive.

"What I do, I do not do. In limbo one does not really burn.

Hamish began kissing her mouth, and she felt him kiss her.

Nothing stirred. Inert, she lay staring toward the high ceiling

crossed by the dark wood beams, wearing the worms of the

ages moving in them, riddling them with countless passages and little worm-size labyrinths... Fallen into disuse, into desuetude, I shall not be. It is simple, if not heroic, to endure.

And then at least Hamish just lay there with his face in her neck, and she could feel his breathing quit.”⁴⁴

The little image of the story establishes the dichotomy for Dody- the rococo statue in her countryard needs to be shattered just as her own stoic calm needed to be jarred. Dody was capable of remaining aloof from other people, and in that separation lay danger. ‘Listen, I have got this statue... I have got this statue to break’, Dody mumbles to Leonard when they first meet. After he kisses her, she acknowledges ‘in the centre of the maze, in the sanctum of the garden, a stone boy cracked, splintered, million-pieced.’ Leonard has appeared to be the man she could respond to and for Dody, sexual awakening is an image for personal fulfilment - so his rejection is doubly crippling. In this story, the theme of person as an outsider carries a more obvious sexual connotation. Woman is not only inferior intellectually and emotionally, but physically; Dody becomes not only an outsider but a victim. Even once she returns to her room and re-establishes her identity, the tone is somber; ‘The cold took her body like a death. No fist through glass, no torn hair, strewn ash and bloody fingers. Only the lone, lame gesture for the unbreakable stone boy in the garden. Dody slept the sleep of the drowned.

Really Sylvia Plath's story 'Stone Boy With Dolphin', is one of Plath's most elliptical stories ~~may~~ stem from the fact that in the late 1950s, very few people were writing explicitly about sexual experience. To be descriptive-except through the image of statutory, was a risk Plath was not yet ready to take the fact that 'The Ball Jar' has banned even in the 1980s suggests that Plath's approach to sexual topics was ahead of its time, and our own; Plath's publishing that novel under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas also suggests her feeling that some readers would find the fiction objectionable. Her deference to the established literary conventions suggests that Kathleen Spivak is right when she describes the lives of Plath and Anne Sexton, as Bostonian women writers, as lives of frustration:

"Both Anne and Sylvia had a strong drive toward conventionality and perfection, a view of 'life as it should be' that left no room for their wild emotions and imagination. Sylvia's anger and hatred, when finally unleashed, were insatiable."⁴⁵

Really, 'Stone Boy With Dolphin', is certainly an angry story, but its anger alternates with extreme passivity, the portrait of the young American woman which results is fragmented and troubling. Plath will later speak more directly, although still in metaphor, about her need for vengeance against the superior, rejecting persona of the male poet.

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“Above the Oxbow”, (1958)

‘Above the Oxbow’, was published in the year 1958. ‘Above the Oxbow’ in this essay Sylvia Plath describes to visit the Oxbow. From here what are real picture Sylvia sees from ‘Above the Oxbow’, she described from this essay. First of all she says that on all the mountain that was hot, August day Luke Jenness had not seen a thing moving. There was traffic slack on that days. The rickety remains of the old mountain top hotel. There are many tourist cars parking. At the same time, there was telescope opened its magnifying eye on the Oxbow, the green flats of Hadley farms across the river, and the range of hills to the north, toward sugarloaf. At that time you could see upto New Hampshire, even as clear days, but today heat hased the view, sweat did not dry. From this station Luke leaned arms folded, on the white painted railing, looking down at the river. Sylvia Plath says that Abraham Lincoln had stood where Luke was standing, and Jenny Lind, the famous singer. She had called the view of the valley a view of Paradise. And hence all the visitors wanted to know such types of things like, they really did not know that what date the hotel go up. Near the hotel there are some paid different percent parking fee. There were also some servants near the hotel. In this way Sylvia Plath describes the Oxbow.

'Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men', (1959) -

'In Sweetie Pie and the Guttermen, Myra Wardle, a young, childless married woman who has lately started wondering about babies, and simultaneously has taken to tearing off low-hanging leaves or tall grass heads with kind of wanton energy, tells of viewing a birth with her medical school boy friend while she was in college. The details she remembers and the horror she feels at the process are reiterated almost word for word by Esther Greenwood. Myra remembers walking in the hospital, past 'blind, mushroom - coloured embryos in the jars' and 'four leather-skinned cadavers, black as burnt turkey. In 'The Bell Jar' we really know that Esther Greenwood, too, sees four cadavers with leathery, purple black skin', and big glass jars of jet uses. But what lingers with both women most strongly is the memory of the drugging of the patient and her subsequent forgetfulness of the pain of child birth. Both blame the invention of the drug, which does not stop the pain, just induces later forgetfulness of the pain of childbirth. Both blame the invention of the drug, which does not stop the pain, just induces later forgetfulness, a twilight sleep, on the sinister intents of men. Both view men as acting for their own good without a concern for women's experience. Myra first describes here horror at the false security induced by the drug.

“Although erased from the mind's surface, the pain was there,
somewhere, cut indelibly into one's quick - an empty, doorless,

windowless corridor of pain. And then to be deceived by the waters of Lethe into coming back again, in all innocence, to conceive child after child! It was barbarous. It was a fraud dreamed up by men to continue the human race; reason enough for a woman to refuse child bearing altogether.”⁴⁶

Esther Greenwood later recalls the same scene, using even the image of ‘that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain, and nothing that if women knew or remembered the pain they would forget about having children altogether. More than ‘Tongues of Stone’, written in 1955, ‘Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men’, written in May of 1959, shows not just the same incident but Plath’s increased thematic awareness. Myra has begun to focus on her discontent- more importantly, finding its source in the negative implications of her role as wife and mother. She finds herself having to bite back her views concerning being ‘just’ a mother. She is depressed at the thought of joining the rest of the women in this reproductive role and blames men for devising means to keep women unconscious of the pain involved. For Myra, this pain extends beyond the labour process and stretches into the rest of her potential life time as a mother. Myra’s depression is presented less as a result of a personality defeat and more as an understandable disgust with an undesired, unfulfilling expectation. She has begun to move into a clearer awareness of gender delineation and the politics of sexuality.

Plath's short stories show her development as a fiction writer. Stylistically and thematically they prefigure and serve as her apprenticeship for 'The Bell Jar'. Without them as test grounds, 'The Bell Jar' could not have been so rapidly produced, so strongly presented.

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