

Introduction

Sylvia Plath's poems have been widely discussed posthumously by critics, and some associated her works with the term "Gothic." Ellen Moers, in the chapter "Female Gothic" in her influential *Literary Women*, defines the term "Female Gothic" as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic." (90) She highlights some major figures in the writings of Female Gothic and ends her survey with a poem by Sylvia Plath:

It was Plath herself, with her superb eye for the imagery of self-hatred, who renewed for poets---Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich, Erica Jong, and many others---the grotesque traditions of Female Gothic. Her terror was not the monster, the goblin, or the freak, but the living corpse:

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?---

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be

At home on me.

----Sylvia Plath: "Lady Lazarus" (110)

According to Moers, Plath is part of the Female Gothic tradition because of her

employment of terrifying imagery which, in comparison with the grotesque conventions adopted by most female Gothic writers, could be regarded as a renewal. Moers's words could be interpreted as a compliment to Plath's unique way of adopting imagery and she is probably the first and the only one that overtly places Sylvia Plath right in the Gothic tradition. Moers's viewpoint is interesting and innovatory as well because she puts Plath right in her list of the representative female Gothic writers which includes some of the most famous names, such as Mary Shelley and Emily Brontë. Moers's approach could be interpreted as a confirmation of Plath's orthodox position in the female Gothic tradition and her idea is creative because no other critics of Gothic literature have adopted a similar opinion. However, in contrast to its previous marginalized position from the 18th to the 19th century, Gothic literature has become a genre widely discussed and systematically analyzed by many critics in the 20th century. On the basis of the efforts made by these critics, it becomes possible for us to adopt a relatively established and objective norm while we are judging if a piece of work or a writer could be positioned in the tradition of Gothic literature. Therefore, to me, Moers's idea, though being very inspiring and innovatory, seems to be insufficient to convince me of Plath's orthodoxy in Gothic literature because it would be improper to arbitrarily term a poet as a Gothic writer simply because of a terrifying metaphor adopted in one of her poems.

Also the term "Gothic" is sometimes employed by critics, who do not directly term Plath as a Gothic writer like Moers does, to describe some of Plath's poems. For instance, Susan Van Dyne claims that Plath's *Ariel* poems "are uniformly more daring in the narratives she borrows and subverts in order to make her inward life visible" and "'Lady Lazarus' is one of the most Gothic of the lot" which mean to "give

offense” and “make outrageous claims.”(134) P. N. Furbank professes that Plath’s “myth-creating power is certainly extraordinary” and “no more Gothic lines could be conceived than some lines in ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree.’”(74) Also Caroline King Barnard terms Plath’s poetry as the “dark mythology” in which “a necessary gothic moon provides the light, and the yew tree stands blackly by.”(77) All of these three critics adopted the same term---Gothic---to characterize Plath’s poems. The exact reason why they adopted the term “Gothic” is unknown because they do not give a further explanation and also it seems that all three critics merely employ the term as an adjective connoting violence (Van Dyne) or darkness (Barnard) rather than a genre to be seriously studied. As a result, their description to Plath’s poetry only initiates the linkage between the two---Gothic and Plath’s poetry---but could not provide us with a satisfying answer to their interrelation. However, their adoption of the term at least suggests that there must be something very Gothic in Sylvia Plath’s poetry.

In the thesis, being initiated by these four critics, I would like to examine if Sylvia Plath’s poetry could really be positioned right in the long tradition of the Gothic literature. To remedy the insufficiency of these critics as I raised above, the approach to be adopted would be as analytical and comprehensive as possible: first of all, I shall try to define the characteristics of the Gothic literature as comprehensively as possible, and then, according to these characteristics, the correspondence between Gothic literature and Plath’s poetry will be examined. Therefore, in Chapter One, the conventional devices and the evocation of the feeling of terror---two features recognized in either the original texts of the Gothic fictions or the critical study on the genre---will be defined as two fundamental elements in Gothic literature. In Chapter

Two, the main focus will be on how the first element---the conventional devices in Gothic literature---is adopted by Plath in her poetry. In Chapter Three, how the feeling of terror is evocated in Plath's poetry and the significance of such a terror will be examined. And then, in the conclusion, according to the result of my examining in the second and the third chapters, I shall argue that Plath's poetry is standing right in the long tradition of Gothic literature because of its strong correspondence with the persistent elements in the Gothic writings and proceed to define the significance of such a correspondence.



Chapter I

A definition of Gothic

It is not easy to define a term like “Gothic.” In 1762, Horace Walpole subtitled his book *The Castle of Otranto* as “a Gothic Story” and it was the first time the term “Gothic” is introduced to the literary world. Since then, many fiction writers in a similar vein have followed in the footsteps of Walpole, including such names as, only to mention several of them, Anne Radcliffe, William Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Edgar Ellen Poe, and Bram Stoker. After a long period of development, in the writings of the followers, Gothic literature has undergone some changes both in its devices and contents with a wide variety of the viewpoints of these followers. Also criticism of Gothic literature has always been prosperous since the eighteenth century and the interest in it lasts into the twentieth century. Critics have discussed Gothic writings in various approaches that are affected by changing critical positions, and Gothic literature has been moved from “previously marginalized sites designated as popular fiction or literary eccentricity”(Botting,17) to wider horizons of critical studies due to recent developments in literary and cultural theory. All the above approaches make a single, all-encompassing definition of Gothic literature more and more difficult.

Though giving “Gothic” a single and all-encompassing definition is difficult, in the process of my reading, I do find many critics employ a similar approach to explain what “Gothic” means in most readers’ minds: they make the concept clear by “naming” some conventions in Gothic writings. To take M. H. Abrams’s widely used *A Glossary to Literary Terms* for example, some Gothic conventions are listed under the

title “Gothic novel”:

The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences.(111)

A similar statement could be found in some other criticisms specifically on the Gothic literature. Fred Botting in his *Gothic* claims that there are some “stock features” which “provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties”:

Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominate.... Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes.... This list grew,... with the addition of scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double....(2)

David Punter, in his *The Literature of Terror*, also points out the conventional dimension of Gothic literature and makes a similar naming:

When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant. Used in this sense, “Gothic” fiction is the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires,

monsters and werewolves.(1)

Sedgwick overtly titles her book as *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* and makes a more straightforward statement of the phenomenon in Gothic literature:

Surely no other modern literary form as influential as the Gothic novel has also been as pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind (and you can tell that from the title), you can predict its contents without an unnerving certainty. You know the important features of its mise en scene: an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society....the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover....the tyrannical older man....the priesthood and monastic institution; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest....(9)

A similar list of Gothic features appears in most of the critical books of Gothic and an unnecessary repetition will be saved since the four passages quoted above would be sufficient. In these quotations, especially the last two, we could easily detect there is an apparent similarity among them---it is that they all imply the Gothic literature is a genre with obvious conventions and a list of these conventions is the most convenient method for the readers to grasp what Gothic means. In fact, this naming of some Gothic conventions works well for it gives the readers an immediate picture of Gothic, and is a convenient method for them to judge roughly whether a piece of work could be regarded as a Gothic one. Due to the similar approach these critics adopted when defining Gothic literature, it would be reasonable for us to assume Gothic conventions to be an essential element in Gothic literature.

But to define “Gothic” merely as a genre pervaded with conventions is insufficient and not specific enough for any other genre would have its own set of conventions. For instance, the medieval pastoral is “a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life, the sheperds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting.”(Abrams, 202) and romance, “in common usage”, “refers to works with extravagant characters, remote and exotic places, highly exciting and heroic events, passionate love, or mysterious or supernatural experiences.”(Holman, 436) Both genres have their own specific set of conventions. To have a more precise definition of Gothic literature, it would be proper to begin with the precursor text itself---Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*--- since it is the object of other imitators. In the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole offers an idea that is crucial for the readers to identify effects produced by the Gothic:

Terror, the author’s principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is often contrasted by pity that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions.(15)

In this passage, Walpole has indicated clearly that the principal purpose of Gothic writing is to provoke the feeling of terror in the readers’ mind, and it becomes an essential and consistent characteristic to define whether a work can be regarded as “Gothic” or not. For instance, the haunted castle has been the setting of many Gothic novels and is considered to be a significant convention in Gothic writing. It is true that we could find many Gothic terrors happened in a ruinous castle but we could not say that “all” the Gothic stories set their background in a castle. The pervasion of Gothic conventions is an important feature but no single one of them is found to be

persistent in all Gothic writings. However, if a story can provoke the feeling of terror, it is usually regarded as being in line with the Gothic tradition though it lacks some of the Gothic conventions. This formula is especially valid in consideration of the Gothic literature in twentieth century. For instance, both Fred Botting and Anne Williams include the films of the Alien trilogy¹ in their lists of Gothic literature. These three films obviously adopted only few of these conventions but narrate a story of terror resulted from the scientific progress that is especially significant in the technological world today.

From Walpole, we learn the strong link between Gothic and terror. To have a deeper understanding about the feeling of terror in Gothic writings, we have to ask another question: what's the content of the Gothic terror? Is it produced simply by the appearance of ghosts and occurrences of supernatural events, or is there some other significance behind it?

The first Gothic novel---The Castle of Otranto---tells the story of a feudal family with the combination of supernatural events, the haunted castle, the hero and heroine persecuted by a powerful villain. The mixture of these elements created an atmosphere of suspense and terror. In comparison to its contemporary works, Walpole's book obviously digresses from the literary taste of his time. In Walpole's time, the literary taste was dominated by the so-called neoclassical aesthetic values which exhibited a strong traditionalism---a distrust of radical innovation and great respect for classical writers. However, Walpole's story of terror and fancy showed a totally different aesthetic taste from this kind of standard. Also it was a time of Enlightenment which was founded on a belief in the superiority of reason. In the preface to the second edition of his book, Walpole appeals to new ideas about writing.

He states that this novel “was an attempt to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern.” In the former one, “all was imagination and improbability”; in the latter one, “the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life.”(19) Walpole’s dissatisfaction about the neoclassical traditionalism and the overly emphasis on reason were well perceived and his intention to create a new way of writing was also clearly expressed in these words. His intention to reconcile the unnaturality and the improbability of the medieval romance with the realistic way of presentation is not well achieved in his novel because the presentation of marvelous events prevails. However, the freedom of imagination and his individual artistic genius do overstep the boundaries of neoclassical taste. Walpole’s attempt is often read as a subversion against the fashion pervading the eighteenth century England. Maggie Kilgour points out that the rise of Gothic is “a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural forces, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason” and “a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of order and unity”(3) as well. David Punter asserts that what is terrifying in Walpole’s story is not “a use of supernatural” but “an ironic use which is meant to interest and amuse us by its self-conscious quaintness”(53) According to Punter, this “ironic use” of “quaintness” is Walpole’s deliberate design to manifest the terror of the reason-worshipping social climate.

The 1790s was a time when the greatest number of Gothic novels was produced and consumed. It was also a time that the terror of French Revolution swept the Europe. In the political scene, the French Revolution was the most violent challenge to the monarchical system and a tide of destruction dissolving and threatening the

social order. In literature, such political radicalism was well reflected in the Gothic images of violence and excessive passion. Gothic terror was presented in realistic scenes of revolutionary mobs in the neighboring country across the Channel. For instance, in Mathew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, the description of the riotous mobs destroying the monastery is resonant with the demolition of the French Monarchy, and its lack of a clearly moral standard echoed the instability of the domestic order after the revolutionary mobs. Such an ambiguity of morality was also presented in Anne Radcliffe's novels. Botting has pointed out the ambivalent position of Radcliffe's works:

In many ways the text [of Radcliffe] follows the moralistic pattern of eighteenth-century works like Richardson's *Clarrisa* in its depictions of suffering virtue, to affirm values of domesticity and female propriety. In Radcliffe's novels, however, women are never completely confined to the home and family though, on one level, that is considered to be their proper place.(70)

Despite the seemingly rational explanations and strong moral conclusions, the female protagonists are usually free to go from one place to another in Radcliffe's works rather than being restricted within the domestic place. For instance, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, instead of being restricted in a rural chateau in which she was brought up, Emily has transferred from one place to another for different causes, such as her father's death or in order to escape from the menace of Montoni. This shows a certain degree of the author's doubt in the conventional value of domesticity. In Radcliffe's works, the distinctions of virtue and vice reflected the changing value of her time and became rather precarious.

The following age, the Romantic Period, “was an age of radical individualism, in which both philosophers and poets put an immensely higher estimate on human potentialities and powers.”(Abrams, 3) The neoclassical ideal of a limited intention and the conception of men and women as an integral part of an organized society are denied. However, in this period, the result of the strong confidence in human capacity was also questioned and became the source of terror in some Gothic fictions. In Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the suffering of Melmoth is due to his quest for the unattainable knowledge and power, and the wanderer became the nightmare of others as well as his own. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the monster was the result of the uncontrollable desire and imagination in the human mind.

The nineteenth century could be called an age of science. The rapid progress in scientific theory resulted in economic prosperity and the emergence of the middle class which challenge the hierarchical order of traditional society and conventional beliefs. People in England face such a violent change with an ambivalent attitude. On one hand, they were excited and satisfied with the political and economical preeminence of the British Empire; on the other hand, in a world made alien by technological change, they felt anxious and threatened. The progress of science brought about the rapid expansion of knowledge which disturbed man’s conventional belief in human possibility, and the articulation to their fears about the scientific transgression of accepted limits became the leitmotif of many writers of Gothic stories. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* published in 1818 was probably the earliest text exploring people’s fears toward the scientific transgression. Robert Louis Stevenson, in his *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), followed the tradition of Mary Shelley by disclosing the duality of human nature in terms of science².

After a short survey to some important phases in the development of Gothic literature, I hope the significance of Gothic terror would be clearer. Ever since the first time it emerged, each Gothic story tells the terror of its time. With the progress of the human history, the content of its terror also changed, so we may say that the Gothic terror is always innovated and revised in each era. It is also because the terror it tells is that pertaining to its contemporaneous society and people that it could be well accepted by the reading public in each phase of its long process of development. Gothic Terror caused by contemporaneous threats has always been deep rooted in people's minds; it is the patterns of emotion inherent in the society. If we read the Gothic stories simply as ghost stories that are designed to terrify people, we could not comprehend what Gothic literature really is.

To sum up, the Gothic literature is composed with both old and new elements. On one hand, many Gothic writers followed the footsteps of Walpole and established a set of conventions that pervaded almost all the Gothic writings; even in the latest Gothic stories these conventions are still widely used. The set of conventions has become one of the oldest heritage in the more-than-two-hundred-years' Gothic tradition. On the other hand, Gothic literature digs out the terror deep-rooted in its time. It tells the stories about the tyranny of reason, the suppression of emotion, the uncertainty of morality, and the sense of instability resulted from the scientific progress³ which were sources of anxieties to people in different historical stages. The terror it tells is always in pace with the society and is always new. In the following chapters, I will examine the correspondence between Sylvia Plath's poetry and the Gothic literature. In Chapter Two, the main focus will be on which Gothic conventions and how these conventions are adopted in Plath's poetry; in Chapter Three,

I will try to find out the kinds of terrors by which Plath tells in her poetry. Finally, on the basis of the discussion in the previous two chapters, we might judge if Plath could really stand in line with the Gothic writers.

Chapter II

Gothic Conventions Adopted in Sylvia Plath's Poetry

Though Gothic is well recognized by many critics as a genre with a specific set of conventions, it is not easy to define exactly what this “specific set of conventions” contains because it is an enormous system. Anne B. Tracy's *The Gothic Novel 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* is a very detailed study of the Gothic fiction written during the time it was most prosperous and thus many of the Gothic conventions were established. Under the “Index to Motifs” there are more than two hundred items and many of them appear in more than twenty Gothic novels of that period. It surely is impossible, and nor is it necessary to apply all these conventions one by one to testify Plath's poetry.

In my reading of both---Gothic writings and Plath's poetry, I found there are indeed some similarities between them: the highly-stereotyped protagonists and their use of the device of double. Both items are parts of the most recognizable devices in the long tradition of the Gothic conventions and also each of them is widely adopted by Sylvia Plath in her poetry. So, in my examination on the conventional Gothic elements in Sylvia Plath's poetry, these two aspects will be the main focus of the discussion. I would give each of them a more precise definition and then examine the correspondence between these conventional features and Plath's poems.

The Stereotyped Protagonist

According to the lines by Abram, Botting, Punter, and Sedgwick quoted in Chapter One of my thesis, the staple plot of Gothic writing is normally about “the

sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain,”(Abrams, 111) about “heroines preyed on by unspeakable terror,”(Punter, 1) and the heroine is often an easily “fainting”(Botting, 2) one with “trembling sensibility.”(Sedgwick, 9) In many Gothic novels, the portrayal of heroine as a deceived victim caught up in a series of flights from her persecutor recurred very often. For instance, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Isabella flees from the castle to evade the advance of the ambitious and unscrupulous Manfred (Chapter One); in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily runs away from the persecution of Montoni who tries to secure Emily’s estates by menacing and murderous means (Chapter Six). The male protagonist as the persecutor and the female one as the victim become what Punter calls “the highly stereotyped characters”(1) in Gothic literature and constantly appear in many Gothic stories in which the tension is thus generated in the dynamics of the persecutor and the persecuted.

Furthermore, the persecutor in these Gothic stories is usually a father figure, either in a priestly role like Lewis’s monk or an elderly mentor like Radcliffe’s Schedoni and Maturin’s Melmoth. William Patrick Day, who regards the character as one of the three conventions pervading in the Gothic literature and makes a detailed explanation of his features in his book, claims that:

The most important aspect of the conventions governing the Gothic protagonist is the disappearance of the romance hero. The fantasies havea male antihero who shares some characteristics with the quest hero of the romance but who is also marked by a demonic quality as well as Faustian egotism.”(16)

According to Day, the male protagonist in Gothic stories is usually a Faustian figure

driven by his excessive thirst for power or even godhood. Besides, in order to satisfy his quenchless thirst, the Gothic antihero is also the transgressor of conventional laws and limits, the one who mercilessly oppresses others. Such a demonic figure becomes one of the most significant features in Gothic conventions.

When reading Sylvia Plath's poetry, we could find that the male characters are frequently endowed with similar demonic qualities like those of the Gothic antihero. I shall start with Plath's famous poem—"Daddy"—because the poet's portrayal of the male characters is so vivid that it provides us with a good example to explore how the poet usually characterizes her male protagonists. In this poem, there are two male characters: the speaker's daddy, and the man in black. About the character "daddy" the poet makes him analogous to a gigantic statue:

Marble heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

Where it pours bean green over blue

In the waters off beautiful Nauset. (8-13)

All the words remind the reader of the image of the colossus which symbolizes a huge dominating figure. In her earlier poem, "The Colossus," the metaphor of the colossus is also used to symbolize the image of the father in the speaker's mind. In both poems, the daddy is delineated as a man with strong will and the one always occupying the commanding position while the daughter lives like a shadow under his enormous statue. In addition to the gigantic father image of the colossus, the poet also

associates the daddy to some other evil and violent personages. The first one is that of a Nazi:

I have always been scared of *you*,
 With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
 And your neat mustache
 And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
 Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You---
 Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through. (41-47)

The daddy is no longer a giant the speaker adores but a Nazi she is scared of. Near the end of the poem, the image of the daddy undergoes the third transformation:

There's a stake in your fat black heart
 And the villagers never liked you.
 They are dancing and stamping on you.
 They always *knew* it was you. (76-79)

Again the daddy is delineated as a violent and blood-thirsty figure---a vampire maintaining his life by drinking others' blood. The figure of a vampire is a character frequently found in many Gothic stories, such as Le Fanu's "Camilla," John Polidori's *The Vampyre*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and they become a widely-known subgenre in the tradition of Gothic literature. In the poem, the poet uses three metaphors---the colossus, the Nazi, and the vampire---to express the speaker's ambivalent feelings toward her daddy and the mixture of the three creates a figure of both deity and demon. On one hand, he is higher and stronger than others, someone to be worshipped and admired, like the Colossus. On the other hand, like the Nazi and the vampire, he is a

persecutor that oppresses others cruelly. Just like the antihero in the Gothic stories, the daddy Plath creates is no longer a fond one to whom most of us are accustomed. Instead, he is the combination of the two extremes---God and devil---which makes him a more complicated character in his daughter's mind as well as in the reader's.

The other male character in the poem is "a model"(64) made of the daddy to compensate for the speaker's loss of her daddy. Bibliographically, Plath's father died in her youth ("I was ten when they buried you."[57])⁴ Just like her daddy, what the man brings to the speaker is hurt rather than comfort for he is "the black man who/Bit my pretty red heart in two."(55-6) The metaphors of the Nazi and the vampire are employed again to manifest the similarities between her father and the man. The daddy is "a Fascist"(48) with "neat mustache,"(43) "Aryan eye"(44) and "a brute" with "the brute heart"(50) and the man "in black" is the one "with a Meinkampf look"(65) which intends to remind the readers of the image of Hitler; her daddy is the vampire killed by the villagers with "a stake" sticking into his "fat black heart"(75) and the man is "the vampire who said he was you (the daddy)/And drank my blood" for "seven years."(72-3) The identical metaphors are shared by two different characters to elaborate the same effect they have on the speaker. Though the speaker's intention is to make "a model of"(64) her father to compensate for her loss, her intention eventually proves to be detrimental and defeats itself because this "model" turns out to be but another oppressor.

In "The Jailer," a similar image of the male character is also found. The jailer is the only male character in the poem and, being a guard of the prison, the jailer is "the rattler of keys"(5) that deprives the prisoners of their freedom. To the speaker, the rattle of keys is that "all he can come up with"(4) for he brings her nothing but

restriction and control. The word “rattler” also reminds the reader of the poisonous rattlesnake which threatens and causes bodily injury or frequently death. The jailer plays the same dangerous role as the rattlesnake to the speaker for “He has been burning me with cigarettes, /Pretending I am a negress with pink paws.”(18-19) In addition to someone who controls, the jailer is a physical torturer as well. To escape from the jailer and find remedy for her pathetic condition, the speaker “dream of someone else entirely”(27) all day but it only results in a far worse situation:

And he, for this subversion,
Hurts me, he
With his armor of fakery,
His high cold masks of amnesia. (28-31)

Instead of physical abuse, this time what the jailer imposes on the speaker is mental torture because of his coldness and disguise. The jailer, because of his position, has the threatening power and a morbid vehemence as well to cause the speaker all forms of pains. Such indifference to the need of others and vehemence to cause other’s pain have a strong resemblance to Montoni, the villain who also imprisoned the female protagonist in Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

Montoni had been otherwise engaged; his soul was little susceptible of light pleasures. He delighted in the energies of the passions; the difficulties and tempest of life, which wreck the happiness of others, roused and strengthened all the powers of his mind, and afforded him the highest enjoyments, of which his nature was capable. (182)

An unwholesome tendency of sadism is the feature shared by both the jailer and Montoni and also what makes them oppressors to others.

Such a brutal male is also found in "Pursuit," one of Plath's earlier poems. In the poem, the speaker is pursued by a panther-like man and she is well aware of the danger he might bring to her at the very beginning: "There is a panther stalks me down: / One day I'll have my death of him."(1-2) The image of the panther embodies the threatening characteristics the man possesses:

His greed has set the woods aflame,

He prowls more lordly than the sun.

.....

Insatiate, he ransacks the land

Condemned by our ancestral fault,

Crying: blood, let blood be spilt;

Through the image of the panther, the inhuman thirst and the beastly quality of the man are manifested. The man's quenchless eager for blood reminds us of the figure of a vampire who maintains his life by drinking other's blood in many Gothic stories. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the blood-drinking Count is thus delineated in his first encounter with those hunting him: "There was something so panther-like in the movement---something so unhuman, that it seemed to sober us all from the shock of his coming."(364) Both Plath's male character and Stoker's *Dracula* employ the same metaphor of the panther to convey the features of blood-thirst and beast-like shared by their male protagonists. Besides, in *Dracula*'s bloody hunting, it is always the female, such as Lucy or Mina, who becomes the prey of the vampire's sharp white teeth. The same taste is also shared by Plath's panther-man:

In the wake of the fierce cat,

Kindled like torches for his joy,

Charred and ravened women lie,
 Become his starving body's bait. (21-4)

 To quench his thirst. . .
 He eats, and still his need seeks food,
 Compels a total sacrifice. (38-40)

In the man's act of pursuit, women are always those lie "charred and ravened," the innocent victims caught up to satisfy his incessant desire for blood, like Lucy and Mina in Stoker's story. Though Plath does not employ the metaphor of the vampire as explicitly as she does in "Daddy" when delineating the male protagonist, the similar features are nevertheless easily detected and the strong link between the vampire and the panther-man is undeniable.

In the three poems discussed above, Plath endows all the male characters with the demonic features of what William Patrick Day called "the egoist," "the antihero" in Gothic literature. Also these male characters, like the villain in the Gothic stories, are more or less a father figure since they all occupy the manipulating and dominating position. Still there are some other Plath's poems with the same authoritative and brutal male personages. In "Little Fugue," the speaker's father is like "a dark funnel" (22) that is "Black and leafy,"(24) and "a yew hedge of orders"(25) that is "Gothic and barbarous."(26) The father in "Full Fathom Five" is an authoritative deity who defies "questions"(39) and "other godhood."(40) And in "Conversation Among the Ruins" which is a poem "on the painting by Giorgio de Chirico,"(noted by Hughes in *The Collected Poems*, 275) the male character is also delineated as a forceful figure that "stalks" with his "wild furies"(1-2) and has "stormy eyes."(7) Sylvia Plath seems to

frequently endow the male protagonists in her poetry with more negative temperaments which highly correspond with those of the Gothic villains.

As for the female protagonists in the Gothic literature, we have pointed out earlier that they are usually the persecuted ones and also those sensitive, easily fainting ones. Besides, Day has also made a more detailed description of their features:

The heroine of popular novels that today can be found in bookstores under the section marked "Gothic Romances". . . . is the direct descendant of the Gothic heroine of the 1790s. . . . this young woman is well-bred, passive, and respectable. . . . These characters [the Gothic heroines] are thrust into the underworld through no apparent fault of their own. The worst that can be said of them is that their virtuousness makes them prey to villains. . . . These characters are obviously and inescapably victims. Their conceptions of themselves and of proper behavior render them passive in the face of terror. (16-7)

And Day also termed these Gothic female protagonists as "the sentimental heroines." (18) Therefore, according to Day, passivity and sensitiveness are two significant qualities that feature the victimized female characters in Gothic literature.

The modes of the female character as the victimized ones are various in Plath poetry. The most obvious example is the three poems we have just discussed: "Daddy," "The Jailer," and "Pursuit." In "Daddy," the female character, and also the speaker in this poem, is the miserable daughter long living in the shadow of her brute, giant-like father:

....black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. (2-5)

In accordance with the Nazi image adopted by the speaker to feature her father, the speaker parallels her own status to that of a Jew “being sent to the concentration camps in “Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen”(33) since her relationship with her father is analogous to that of the oppressor and the oppressed. Out of the wish to “recover”(14) her daddy, the speaker finds herself a substitute---the man in black, or the black man who turns out to be but another oppressor biting her “pretty red heart in two” and drank her blood for years. Her image is a helpless and passive one, typical of a Gothic heroine. In “The Jailer,” the speaker is a female character trapped in the stillness and barrenness of life since every day “The same placard of blue fog is wheeled into position/ With the same trees and headstones.”(2-3) The repetition of the word “same” illustrates the changeless condition of the speaker and also her dissatisfaction with it. However, stillness is not all the content of her life. What is more intolerable is the injuries the male, the jailer, inflicts on her: she is the sexual slave to the jailer for she has been “drugged and raped”(6) to satisfy his sexual desire, “his wet dreams,”(10) and she is also the sacrifice, the “carapace” “smashed”(14) and “spread to the beaks of birds”(15) The speaker, being totally defenseless to the hurts, could only be a passive victim because of the crime she might not commit since it is “indeterminate”(33) and, in her heart, she has been dead “with variety---/ Hung, starved, burned, hooked.”(34-5) In “Pursuit,” the speaker is one of the women that are “kindled like torches”(22) for the panther-man’s joy. Being pursued and appalled by him, the speaker is “flayed by thorns” and “haggard through the hot white noon.”(9-10) to “rush from” the man’s “secret want”(42-3) But still the hunting is

not over:

Entering the tower of my fears,
 I shut my doors on that dark guilt,
 I bolt the door, each door I bolt.
 Blood quickens, gonging in my ears:

The panther's tread is on the stairs,
 Coming up and up the stairs. (45-50)

The threatening tone of the last two lines seems to suggest the triumph of the man and the doomed fate of the speaker.

In all three poems, in response to the role of the persecutor the male protagonists play, the female speakers are invariably delineated as the persecuted one. They are trapped and hurt for guilt not theirs but because of the male's malice and violence instead and the only thing they can do is to passively accept all forms of persecution the male impose on them. Their traits fit in well with those of the Gothic female protagonist who is always a passive victim. For instance, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Hippolita, Manfred's virtuous wife, while suffering from Manfred's unfaithful intention to divorce her in order to marry Isabella, still claims to others that "It is not ours to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and ours husbands, must decide for us." (87) Such a total submission to the will of the male becomes the feature frequently found in many of the Gothic female protagonists and is also a characteristic making them prey to the male, just like the female speakers in some of Plath's poetry.

The second feature Day regards as the one permeating in most Gothic female protagonists is their extreme sensitivity to the outer world. In Anne Radcliffe's *The*

Mysteries of Udolpho, a passage with the description of the features of its female protagonist, Emily, provides us with a good example to have a closer look on such a characteristic:

She had discovered in her early years uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence; but with these was observable a degree of susceptibility too exquisite to admit of lasting peace. As she advanced in youth, this sensibility gave a pensive tone to her spirits, and a softness to her manner. . . .(5)

It is suggested that the extreme sensitivity of the female protagonist is probably the most distinguishable trait detected in her and also one of the main reason of her coming miserable situation. Such a noticeable sensitivity with which Radcliffe invested her female protagonist could be found in many other Gothic fictions and, in some of them, the sensitivity of the female is usually revealed by her over-reaction to an outer object. For instance, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the female protagonist is the youth with the eyes "both of sensibility and chagrin."(197) In her childhood, such a feature enables her to bear "a most enthusiastic sense of admiration" to the "bird of paradise, nestling in a wreath of convolvuli and rosebuds" painted on a china plate; while she was in "some fearful pangs of mental suffering," it is the same feature that makes "the plumage of the bird, the tints of the flowers seemed strangely faded."(14) Later in her adulthood, her excessive sensitivity is constantly implied by how she would interpret some natural phenomena or objects: when seeing the wreck of the chestnut tree whose trunk has been "split down the centre" by the thunder but still "the cloven halves were not broken from each other," she thinks of her inevitable separation from Rochester, her lover, and speaks to the tree "as if the monster-splinters were living things":

‘You did right to hold fast to each other. . . . I think, scathed as you look, and

charred and scorched, there must be a little sense of life in you yet: rising out of that adhesion at the faithful, honest root: you will never have green leaves more---never more see birds making nests and singing idylls in your boughs; the time of pleasure and love is over with you: but you are not desolate: each of you has a comrade to sympathize with him in his decay.” (275)

Echoing the female protagonist’s melancholy mood, the tree becomes the embodiment of her fear of the coming separation and also the object of her envy because its two halves, though being split, still hold firmly to each other.

Similarly, in some of Plath’s poem, the female speaker is someone whose extravagant sensitivity constantly responds to the outer objects. In “Tulips,” the speaker is the helpless patient that completely surrendered herself to the hand of the doctors and the nurses:

I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
 And my history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons. (6-7)

 My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
 Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.
 They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.
 Now I have lost myself (15-8)

In the fragile state owing to her illness, the speaker becomes a “stupid pupil” that could only passively “take everything in.”(10) Again the female is delineated as an oppressed and passive character. Besides, the speaker’s sensibility could also be easily detected in the poem. Generally speaking the tulips are supposed to be either neutral or pleasant flowers to most people since the flower is a symbol of beauty.

However, in the state of illness, even the tulips become the source of the speaker’s anxiety in this poem:

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.

 Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.
 They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,
 Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their color,
 A dozen red leaf sinkers round my neck. (36-42)

These beautiful flowers, instead of comforting and giving pleasure to the patient, becomes some evil living being that “hurt” and “weigh” the speaker “down” in her imagination. Even worse, their red color turns to be the malignant murderer that chokes the speaker. Were it not for her excessive, or even pathological, sensitiveness, how could the harmless tulips be imagined as an awful being? In “Elm,” a female character with similar sensitivity is found:

Love is a shadow.
 How you lie and cry after it (7-8)

 And this is the fruit of it: tin-white, like arsenic.(15)

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

 Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.

A wind of such violence

Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek. (16-21)

To the speaker, love is a shadow, the dark being, and after tasting its poisonous fruit, one could only “lie and cry.” The metaphor of the scorched and withered elm, which reminds us of Jane Eyre’s dialogue to the chestnut tree quoted previously, represents how the speaker is injured by the murderous love. In “Tulips” the patient is a fragile, obedient woman manipulated by the doctors and nurses, and the speaker in this poem is a female tortured and terrified by love. Also the pathological sensibility of the speaker is well proved in her way of defining the moon, which has a tint of masochism. Like the tulips in the previous poem, the moon is also supposed to be a natural object which contains positive connotation to most people since it usually reminds the Western readers of the image of Diana the Goddess, the symbol of innocence and virginity. However, in the speaker’s imaginative mind, it becomes a “merciless”(22) being that parallels the murderous love:

The moon, also, is merciless: she would drag me

Cruelly, being barren.

Her radiance scathes me. . . . (22-4)

The moon becomes a source of oppression that “drags” and “scathes” her. Again I would say that, it is because of the speaker’s extravagant sensitiveness that one of the heavenly bodies could echo her personal tragedy. Also in *Jane Eyre*, there is a similar episode in which the female protagonist interprets the appearance of the moon as a correspondence to her desolation:

As I [Jane Eyre] looked up at them, the moon appeared momentarily in that part of the sky which filled their fissure; her disk was blood-red, and half overcast; she seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep drift of cloud. (275-6)

Unlike Plath's merciless moon, the moon perceived by Jane Eyre seems to be a more sympathetic one because the glance she throws on her is a "bewildered," "dreary" one; however, the extravagant sensibility manifested in their interpretation of the moon is nevertheless similar.

In both "Tulips" and "Elm," the speakers' sensibility is presented by their over-reaction to the surrounding objects which eventually become the bearers of their distress and pathos. Therefore, it is obvious that the features of the conventional female characters in Gothic literature---passivity, sensibility, and always the one being persecuted---are also found in many of Plath's female protagonists and it will not be abrupt for us to assert that the female characters in both are quite similar.

However, though similar features of passivity, victimization, and sensibility are detected in the female speakers in some of Plath's poems, these speakers do not completely coincide with the conventional Gothic female protagonist. Near the end of several poems, the poet invests the female speakers with some kind of active attitude and destructive power. For instance, in "Lady Lazarus," the speaker is delineated as a puppet manipulated by the authoritative "Herr Doktor,"(65) but she is also the female that would "rise with" her "red hair" and "eat men like air."(83-4) In "Daddy," the speaker long lived in the shadow of her Colossus-like father and in the end she killed him symbolically by killing the "model"(64) of him. In both poems, the speakers appear with double faces: on one hand, they are the

helpless victims of some tyrannous male; on the other hand, they are the furious women that could terminate those men. Such a type of female characters is seldom found in the Gothic literature and it could be interpreted as the poet's wishful thinking on the impossible reverse between men's and women's positions in our patriarchal society. But also it seems to promise the possibility of the female revenge on the dominating male and makes the speaker more complicated than those Gothic female protagonists. While writing about her female protagonists, Plath simultaneously employs most features of the Gothic female protagonists and creates a new one pertaining only to the female speakers in her poems---the destructive anger. As a result, instead of merely following the Gothic convention of the female characters obediently, Sylvia Plath inherits the Gothic conventions and renews it as well.

To sum up, both the male and female protagonists in Plath's poetry are highly in accord with those in the Gothic stories, whether in the mode of their interaction or in their features. In both Plath's poetry and the Gothic stories, the tension is always built on the act of persecution in which the male is usually the persecutor and the female the persecuted. Also in both of them, the male is usually a brutal egoist and the female a passive, sensitive victim.

The Double

Elizabeth MacAndrew, when describing the Gothic fiction in the Victorian age, claims that "the world of the Gothic novel appears as a dream with physical artifacts as well as living beings that are reflections of the self."(151) Either the "physical artifacts" or "living beings" which reflect an increasing consciousness of the human mind have long been an identifiable set of devices used by authors who are interested

in portraying human nature within the Gothic tradition. For instance, the physical artifacts employed most frequently are probably the animated portraits and the reflecting statues, and the living beings include ghosts, the paired characters, figures of the grotesque, Faustian scientists, and witches. These devices have been established as the vehicles of tales dealing with the human mind and, normally, they are recognized as the symbols of the hidden self of human beings, the double of the individual. Day asserts that “doubling...is not simply a convention, but is the essential reality of the self in the Gothic world.” He thinks the Gothic is a world in which all “identity begins to break,” “the line between the self and the Other begins to waver, and the wholeness and integrity of the self begins to collapse.”(21-2) The device of double enables the Gothic tales explore into the innate duality of human psychology in which the Other is found to be the reflection of the self and the boundary between the two becomes rather precarious.

The similar devices of double are also adopted by Sylvia Plath in her poetry. Plath's honors B.A. thesis in Smith College, which is entitled “The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoevski's Novels,” reveals that Plath is highly interested in the reflecting devices in literature. It is reasonable for us to assume that, in the preparatory study for her thesis, Plath should have read a wide variety of studies about the literary and psychological significance of the double and these works have a lasting effect on Plath's posterior poetic writings because it is not difficult for the readers to detect such a device in her poetry. In the following discussion, some of the figures of double in Plath's poetry will be studied with the parallel readings of some Gothic texts with similar devices to prove the correspondence between them.

“In Plaster” is a poem in which the device of double can be easily detected.

There are two personages in this poem: “this new absolutely white person and the old yellow one.”(2) The two characters are invested with some opposite features: in comparison with the old yellow one, the former person is “one of the real saints”(4) because she “doesn’t need food,”(4) is “much whiter and unbreakable and with no complaints,”(8) and also “her tidiness and her calmness and her patience”(25) are noticeable; the latter one, in contrast to the calmness and patience of the new white one, appears to be anxious and furious:

I couldn’t sleep for a week,

I blamed her for everything, but she didn’t answer.

I could understand her stupid behavior!

When I hit her she held still, like a true pacifist. (9-12)

A violent person bothered by insomnia is the impression we could get from the poet’s description. Not only the temperament but also the appearance of the yellow one is unpleasant because she is “ugly and hairy.”(53) The two personages seem to be quite the opposite type both in their appearances and their temperaments; however, the speaker declares at the very beginning of the poem that “There are two of me now:/ This new absolutely white person and the old yellow one”(1-2) and the former one “was shaped just the way”(7) the latter one is. Such statements inform the readers that the two contrast personalities do not exist separately but coexist in the same individual---the speaker--- and thus the new white one is the perfect double of the imperfect old yellow since it stems from the defective one and shares the same body with her. The perfect one is a reflection of the hidden side of the defective one. The device of employing two characters with contrast temperaments can be frequently found in Gothic fictions. To take Stevenson’s *The strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

Hyde for example, the pleasant appearance of Jekyll is the manifestation of his virtuous nature encouraged and accepted by the society:

. . .as he[Jekyll] now sat on the opposite side of the fire---a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a slyish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness. . .(36)

And Hyde, the reversible double of Jekyll resulting from his scientific experiment, is the product of “pure evil,” which had left on his body “an imprint of deformity and decay.”(128) Stevenson endows the two characters with opposite appearances which are the manifestation of their opposite nature. However, Jekyll’s and Hyde’s totally different natures do not contradict each other; instead, like the white new person and the old yellow one in “In Plaster,” the two natures coexist in the same individual and both are the “dead earnest”(122) sides inherent in Jekyll, who is extremely aware of man’s dual nature and confessed in his letter that “man is not truly one, but truly two.”(123)

Both Stevenson and Plath employ the device of two opposite characters to embody the possible ambivalence innate in human nature. Nevertheless, if we take a closer look on how such ambivalence is defined by the novelist and the poet, an obvious difference could be easily detected. For Stevenson, the good side in human nature manifested in Jekyll is always the part people would strive to cultivate and encourage in themselves; on the contrary, the evil side represented by Hyde is usually the hidden one people endeavor to deny and suppress but still it haunts people now and then because it is impossible to wipe it out from human nature. However, Plath’s definition is quite contrary to that of Stevenson. For Plath, what haunts the speaker is not the brutal and ugly old yellow one; rather, it is the perfection of the new white

person that bothers and threatens the speaker. To compare the device of the two writers, it is obvious that Stevenson's is closer to the inner struggle most of us would have experienced. But I do not attempt to suggest that the content of Plath's poem is deviant from human experience. Instead, if we make a parallel reading between this poem and some of Plath biographical material, it will not be difficult to find that what is conveyed in Plath's poem is also significant.

A passage titled as "Letter to a demon" in Plath's *Journal* will help us to grasp the significance of the poem:

I cannot ignore this murderous self: it is there. I smell it and feel it, but I will not give it my name. . . . Its biggest weapon is and has been the image of myself as a perfect success: in writing, teaching, and living. . . . I am middling good, and I can live being middling good. . . . I have a good self, that loves skies, hills, ideas, tasty meals, bright colors. . . . I have this demon who wants me to run away screaming if I am going to be flawed, fallible. It wants me to think I'm so good I must be perfect. Or nothing. I am, on the contrary, something: a being who gets tired, has shyness to fight, has trouble than most facing people easily. (176-7)

It is indicated clearly in this passage that Plath has the tendency to separate herself into two selves: a good self that would enjoy the beauty of life and admit in herself a certain degree of mediocrity, and a demonic self that would lead her to madness for it constantly urges her to reach the impossible goal of perfection. It is very possible that "In Plaster" is the embodiment of such a tendency: the old yellow person is the "good self"---the defective self---the poet is aware of its existence in her, and the perfect new white person is the "murderous self" the poet strives to escape from. Just

like Jekyll asserts that man “is not truly one, but truly two,” Plath is also conscious of the kind of duality in her own nature which is expressed by the two opposite characters in “In Plaster.” In Stevenson’s story, Jekyll represents the human race in which “those provinces of good and ill...divide and compound.”(122) In Plath’s “In Plaster,” the speaker is the poet in whom the good self allowing her to compromise with some human defaults incessantly fights against the false self that pushes her toward the exhausting goal of being a paragon. The contrast presented in Stevenson’s story is beneficial for the readers to explore into the depth of human nature, while that in Plath’s “In Plaster” helps the readers to catch a glimpse of the poet’s inner struggle.

In addition to being a reflection of the poet’s inner “demon” that wants the poet “to run away screaming” if she is “going to be flawed, fallible,” the white new person in “In Plaster” has some other significance. If we have a more detailed examination on how this white new person is delineated by the speaker, we shall find that all the features she is invested with are the conventional qualities a woman is supposed to possess: she is “one of the real saints,”(4) “her whiteness and beauty,”(19) “her tidiness and her calmness and her patience”(25) are noticeable, and also her passivity is obvious since she “had no personality”(5) and everybody “could tell almost at once that she had a slave mentality.”(21) In contrast to her, the speaker is the one that is “ugly and hairy,”(53) might have complaints, and sometimes “blamed” “for everything.”(10) The image of the speaker is possibly much closer to that of a woman most readers would acquire from their own mothers, their own wives, and even themselves if they happen to be women; she, the yellow one, is a realistic, conventional portrayal of the female. The white new person is the idealized product generated by the long tradition of our patriarchal ideology. Virginia Woolf has

delineated in one of her essays her own predicament as a writer:

The Angel in the House. . . used to come between me and my paper when I was writing. It was she who bothered me and so tormented me. . . She (the Angel of the House) was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. . . in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all. . . she was pure.(58-9)

For Woolf, “the Angel of the House”---the idealized image of the female---is the phantom that might prevent her from speaking out her real thoughts and also the one she has to incessantly fight against in the process of creative writing. The predicament expressed here is not Woolf’s own. It could also be that of all the women who have been conscious of the invisible restriction the patriarchal convention has long imposed on them. In this poem, Woolf’s predicament is retold by the poetess, only in different form and in different words. From a woman’s point of view, these are two forces---her primitive desire of being what she is and the social criteria demanding her to be what she should be---by which the female is always dragged apart. As long as one is a woman, there is always a ready-made model, a model of a certain kind of women to serve the male-centered world, a model for her to fit in. Unfortunately such an ideal model is usually quite contradictory to women’s primal needs, such as passion and freedom, and the ambivalence in the female mentality is thus generated since she is simultaneously aware of the necessity of comprising with the patriarchal ideology and the fundamental desire innate in her. Therefore, for most

women, the perfect image of the new white person is probably the destined goal they have to pursue incessantly, like that of Dr. Jekyll, and the defective but realistic image of the old yellow one shall be the inherent part they try to reject unsuccessfully, just like the part of Mr. Hyde.

In addition to their adoption of the paired characters to manifest the duality innate in the protagonist's or the speaker's nature, Stevenson and Plath also hold a similar pessimistic attitude to human nature. In Stevenson's story, Jekyll, while being conscious of a kind of duality in himself---one is the inclination "by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellowmen" and the other is "a certain impatient gaiety of disposition"(121)---, dreamed of dividing the two elements completely so that:

. . . the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things which he finds his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. (124)

In Jekyll's naïve thought, the "just" and the "unjust" components coexisting in him not only are separable but also could appear individually at his will without contradicting the pleasure or the honor of the other. His attempt seemed to be practicable because he strives to invent the kind of drug that could separate the two:

[I] managed to compound a drug by which these powers [of the just component] should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp of lower elements in my

soul.”(125)

His invention proves to be successful and the transformation between his two selves was at first under the control of Jekyll with the help of the drug. However, unexpectedly, the more times Jekyll has transformed himself into the appearance of Hyde, the ill part of him has been much exercised and nourished and he began to detect a danger that the balance of his nature might be permanently overthrown and the character of Hyde would become irrevocably his. Jekyll was constantly terrified by the possibility that some day he might not be able to convert into his own again from the body of Hyde. In the end of the story, his fear eventually came true and only the death of Jekyll could terminate the uncontrollable transformation and the inherent evil in him. In Stevenson’s story, there is an underlying pessimism toward human nature: it seems to suggest that once the beast in human soul is released, it cannot resolve itself unless by death. The human being, according to Stevenson, is the product of a fundamentally unstable blending in which the negative part would easily overwhelm the positive one if a proper restriction is absent. The destructive power of the evil is emphasized and it becomes the long-caged devil that would come out roaring at any possible moment.

In “In Plaster,” Plath’s holds a similar pessimistic attitude while presenting the speaker’s predicament. The white new person, like Hyde in Stevenson’s fiction, is the negative aspect in the speaker’s nature and the one she constantly fights against. At the first glance, the white new person seems to play an ambivalent role since she is both the Jekyll-like force hastening the speaker to run forwards and the Hyde-like ill side of her nature she endeavors to repress. But such ambivalence is likely where the tension of the poem lies because it makes the white new one the object of both

necessity and hatred---the speaker needs her because she is the aspect leading her to social acceptance, and also the speaker hates her because she simultaneously means repression and constraint. The question would be how many proportions of her the speaker would yield to the white new person to reach the state of mental equilibrium. And it is revealed in the poem that the speaker seems to fail in the attempt to reconcile with this “murderous self.” At first the speaker still could maintain her manipulative status in her relationship with the white new person:

Without me, she wouldn't exist, so of course she was grateful.

I gave her a soul, I bloomed out of her as a rose

Blooms out of a vase of not very valuable porcelain,

And it was I who attracted everybody's attention,

Not her whiteness and beauty, as I had at first supposed.

I patronized her a little, and she lapped it up--- (15-20)

The submission and inferiority of the white new one and the controlling power of the speaker are strongly suggested here. However, the speaker gradually finds out that the situation has been reversed because she has relied on her accommodating double too much: “She'd supported me for so long I was quite limp---/ I had even forgotten how to walk or sit.”(44-5) The white new one, being aware of her superiority in their relationship, becomes arrogant and resentful:

She stopped fitting me so close and seemed offish.

I felt her criticizing me in spite of herself,

As if my habits offended her in some way.

She let in the drafts and became more and more absent-minded.

And my skin itched and flaked away in soft pieces

Simply because she looked after me so badly.

Then I saw what the trouble was: she thought she was immortal.

She wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior,

And I'd been keeping her in the dark, and she was resentful---

Wasting her time waiting on a half-corpse!

And secretly she began to hope I'd die.

Then she could cover my mouth and eyes, cover me entirely,

And wear my painted face the way a mummy-case

Wears the face of a pharaoh, though it's made of mud and water. (29-42)

In contrast to her former patience and tenderness, the white new person has revealed her maliciousness and her ambition of replacing the speaker by wishing her to die. The status of the white new one has been transformed from the previously submissive one to the demanding and authoritative one. Such a reversal of status is quite similar to Hyde's prevailing status in the end of Stevenson's story. And also it might suggest how the poet would estimate the battle between her two selves---it seems to prophesy that the destructive self in her, and probably in all the female as well, would inevitably defeat her defective but real self.

"The Other Two" is another Plath's poem in which the figures of double appear. And like "In Plaster" which reveals the dual nature of an individual, Plath explores into the ambivalence in marital relationship in this poem. Several of the poet's devices in this poem remind us of some episodes in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a Gothic fiction, so parts of the text of both shall be juxtaposed to show the similarity between the two and help us to grasp the meaning of Plath's poem.

The theme of the double self, as it is in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, is also central to Wilde's fiction. The story is the record of the "terrible pleasure of a double life"(139) led by Dorian Gray, who is quite aware of the complexity of human nature:

He [Gray] used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. (113-4)

For Dorian Gray, human being is the combination of the function of one's mentality and his inevitably decaying body. However, a casual wish of Dorian severs the link between the two while he saw a picture of himself:

‘How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. . . . If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that as to grow! For that---for that---I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!’ (24)

Dorian's wish has been granted and he becomes free to live a life of vice and self-indulgence without losing his looks and his youth, while his portrait becomes the record of his depravity in terms of physical decay. In Plath's "The Other Two," a similar story of wish-fulfillment is adopted. The setting of the poem, which is "a villa brimful of echoes,/ Cool as the pearled interior of a conch,"(1-2) reminds us of the closed, desolate castle in many Gothic stories. The speaker termed as "we" is the

human couple living and moving around in this gothic residence. Also it is delineated as an unrealistic place in which “the baronial furniture/ Foundered through levels of light seagreen and strange”(4-5) and “no one leaf wrinkled in the clearing air.”(6) Such a dream-like setting seems to foretell the coming peculiar event and probably under the influence of it, the speaker cannot help to “dreamed how we were perfect, and we were.”(7) The sentence suggests that the speaker’s dream---she and her husband could be the perfect couple---has been made true: they become the paragon of mutual affection since they “might embrace”(30) and the object of admiration because they “were the heaven”(35) dreamed by others.

In Wilde’s story, the portrait with mysterious likeness of Dorian Gray, which is the author’s double device, becomes the bearer of his evil soul. In “The Other Two,” also there is a similar double device---the spectral couple--- that reflects the negative quality inherent in the relationship of the human couple. In the desolate villa, the human couple detects that they are not there alone for there are “two others”:

Our footsteps multiplied in the shadowy chambers,

Our voices fathomed a profounder sound:

The walnut banquet table, the twelve chairs

Mirrored the intricate gestures of two others. (11-4)

They find in the reflection of the furniture the image of another couple and the “multiplied footsteps” and “profounder sound” suggest they are probably the specters that haunt the villa and follow the human couple. The spectral couple’s mode of relation and interaction are of great tension and quite a contrast to that of the human couple:

Heavy as statuary, shapes not ours

Performed a dumbshow in the polished wood,
 That cabinet without windows or doors:
 He lifts an arm to bring her close, but she
 Shies from his touch: his is an iron mood.
 Seeing her freeze, he turns his face away.
 They poise and grieve as in some old tragedy.

Moon-blanced and implacable, he and she
 Would not be eased, released. Our each example
 Of tenderness dove through their purgatory
 Like a planet, a stone, swallowed in a great darkness,
 Leaving no sparky track, setting up no ripple. (15-26)

Their “heavy” movement implies that while together their moods are gloomy, the “dumbshow” they performed and the “cabinet without windows or doors” indicate the impossibility of communication between them, and what characterizes their relationship is coldness since the male specter has an “iron mood” and the female one is in the state of “freeze.” The spectral couple is the unhappy one that could not be “eased,” “released,” and is always “implacable.” It is easily detected that the marriage of this couple is a reversal to that of the human couple, and it would be reasonable for us to assume that the spectral couple is the mirror double of the human one since they both reside in the ruinous mansion, and the mirror imagery is sometimes employed to define the existence of the spectral one: their “intricate gestures” are “mirrored” by “the walnut banquet table” and the “chairs,” and the “dumbshow” they performed is reflected by “the polished wood.” Like Dorian Gray who maintains all

the beauty and innocence in his appearance and his portrait that bears all the ugliness resulting from Gray's depravity, the human couple is the "heaven" that could enjoy all the tenderness and fondness one would grasp in marriage and the spectral couple, owing to the coldness and unpleasantness permeated in their marital relationships, is inevitably "swallowed in a great darkness" and sank into the purgatorial hell. Wilde's double device has the thematic implication of man's dual nature as it is told in Stevenson's fiction, and also he has explicitly suggested in the text: "Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him." (125) Similarly Plath's device of the two contrast couples, I would contend, is an implication to the innate duality in marriage in which both the positive traits, such as mutual affection and mutual care, and the negative traits, such as moments of incommunicability and moments of fights, would coexist and in marriage one would experience both the heavenly pleasure and the hellish sufferance.

In Wilde's fiction, with the deployment of the plot, the transmuted portrait has become a nightmarish existence that haunts the consciousness of Dorian Gray now and then:

The picture itself. . . . He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. (176)

Being a witness to Dorian Gray's moral deterioration, the picture constantly reminds him of his own evil mind and gradually it becomes a persistent threat that would not

allow him to have real joy and becomes the ghost that follows him everywhere he goes. And, like what Stevenson has concluded in his story, Wilde also has implied a similar pessimistic view toward human nature:

Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell? . . . No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognized that now. (176)

Near the end of the story, Dorian Gray came to recognize that vanity, curiosity, and hypocrisy are the reasons for him to fake the goodness that once was in him in his youth. His recognition seems to suggest the inevitability of the disappearance of real virtues in human nature and the prevalence of the negative traits. In Plath's poem, like Dorian Gray's portrait, the spectral couple haunts the human one frequently:

Nightly we left them in their desert place.

Lights out, they dogged us, sleepless and envious:

We dreamed their arguments, their stricken voices. (27-29)

The sentences manifest the entangled relationship between the two couples and they seem to suggest that the human couple endeavors to avoid the unpleasantness of marriage represented by the spectral one since they "left them in their desert place." However, their attempt turns out to be a failure because it is the grip of the nightmare from which they can not release themselves: it "dogged" them nightly by assaulting them in their dream with "arguments" and "stricken voices"---the unwanted necessity in the marital relationships. Being incessantly bothered by such spectral beings, the

speaker begins to feel that:

Burdened in such a way, we seem the lighter---
 Ourselves the haunters, and they, flesh and blood;
 As if, above love's ruinage, we were
 The heaven those two dreamed of, in despair. (32-35)

The situations of the two couples are totally reversed: due to the constant disturbance of their unhappy double, the perfection of the human couple is overwhelmed by the flaw of the spectral one and their previous tenderness and fondness now seem to be as unreal as a dream since they feel themselves are “the lighter,” “the haunters”---the ghost---that is “dreamed of” by the other two. Also the passage seems to suggest the final triumph of the spectral couple because they, by imposing on the human couple their incessant unpleasantness, eventually prove themselves to be the ones with “flesh and blood”---the ones more realistic and more authentic than the perfect human couple. The conclusion Plath makes for this poem is as pessimistic as the ending Wilde designates for his protagonist in his fiction.

Besides, if we juxtapose the poem with some of Plath's biographical material, the poem might bear some other significance. It is revealed in Plath's *Journal* that, in June, 1956, not long after she married to Ted Hughes, she was still highly confident in her incomparable marriage:

. . .it is as if he is the perfect male counterpart to my own self. . . . apart,
 we rotted in luxury. . . Together, we are the most faithful, creative, healthy
 simple couple imaginable!” (154)

More than a year later, near the end of 1957, which is probably contemporary to the time the poem was written, Plath's tone in her journal has changed drastically:

Keep quiet with Ted about worries. . . . But my fears are only magnified when reflected by him. . . . Instead of complaining to Ted, feeling my tension grow, echoed in him, I am keeping quiet about it. . . . Ted's knowing can't help me. . . . Even with Ted I must learn to be very calm & happy. (178-9)

The passage reveals that, less than two years after their wedding, Plath has come to realize that it would be inadequate to regard her husband as her soul mate to whom she could totally open herself. Rather, when facing her husband, the poet recognized that she has to wear the mask of tenderness and happiness and conceal the unpleasant side of her character to maintain the artificial harmony of their marriage. The passage provides us with another angle to interpret the poem. If we presume the poem to be a reflection of the poet's perception of her marriage, it would be reasonable to say that the contrast of the living and the spectral couples represents the gap between the poet's idealistic marriage and the realistic one: the human couple is the idealized paragon of marriage the poet strives to pretend to be, and the spectral couple is the possible reality or the coming crisis the poet perceives in her own marriage.

In both poem---"In Plaster" and "The Other Two," Plath employs the figures of double---one of the most significant devices in the Gothic literature---to explore into both the universally sensed ambivalence inherent in human mind and her personal predicament concerning her role as a woman and as a wife. Plath's thematic implication in the two poems is quite similar to what some of the Gothic writers, such as Stevenson and Wilde, have suggested in their works. In addition, in the previous discussion, we could also detect some other similarities between Plath's poems and the novels of the two Gothic writers, such as how the entangled relationships between the

protagonists and their hidden double are constructed and how the pessimistic attitude toward the dual nature of human beings is implied in the text. Therefore, we might say that, in consideration of the employment of the device of double, the correspondence between Plath's poetry and the Gothic writings is undeniable.

Two of the most recognizable conventions in the Gothic writings---the stereotyped protagonists and the employment of the double figures---are adopted by Sylvia Plath in some of her poems. These two conventions are so pervasive in almost all the Gothic writings that we could say they become a formula in the Gothic literature and the readers could randomly pick up any one of the Gothic fictions to find the trace of either or both. In Plath's poems, both conventions, though not pervasive, can easily be detected. They are adopted by the poet to either build up the tensions of her works or embody the author's own mental predicaments.

Chapter III

Gothic Terror Presented in Sylvia Plath's Poetry

"Terrifying" is an adjective frequently adopted by critics to feature Sylvia Plath's poems. For instance, Steven Spender regards Plath's poetry as "disconcerting, terrifying," (200) P. N. Furbank thinks that her poems are those "disturb and terrify" (73) the readers, and Peter Davison terms them as "a sheaf of terrifying poems." (81) These examples prove the fact that reading Sylvia Plath's poetry would provoke the feeling of terror in the reader's mind is recognized by many critics. Similarly, reading Gothic fictions is always linked with the evocation of the feeling of terror. David Punter overtly titled his influential book on the history of Gothic fictions as *The Literature of Terror*, and Ellen Moers, when defining "Female Gothic," contends that "'the Gothic' is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear." (90) Punter's title implies the idea that "terror" is the element permeating Gothic literature and Moers's words make the idea overtly expressed. Therefore, in consideration of the provocation of the feeling of terror in the reader's mind, the connection between Plath's poetry and the Gothic literature could be roughly established. However, the terror presented in Gothic stories, as it was defined in Chapter One, has some deeper significance beyond the appearances of the ghosts or the occurrences of the supernatural events: it is a reflection of the fear inherent in their contemporaneous society and this is the reason they could attract the attention of the reading public for such a long time since the terror they tell is also that rooted in the readers' minds. To justify if the terror presented in Plath's poetry is similar to that in Gothic literature, the following question should be raised firstly: what are the terrifying elements in Plath's poetry and why do they terrify?

To answer the question raised above, “Lady Lazarus” would be a good point of departure because Moers has indicated clearly that “her [Sylvia Plath] terror was not the monster, the goblin, or the freak” as it was in the stories of former Gothic writers, but “the living corpse”(110) appearing in this poem. According to Moers, the terror in this poem is manifested by Plath’s adoption of the imagery of a “living corpse”:

My face a featureless, fine

Jew linen.

Peel of the napkin

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?---

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day. (4-15)

Generally speaking, almost all the things that would stir up the sense of terror in people’s minds are those beyond the comprehension of human beings. The appearance of the ghost terrifies people because it transcends human knowledge, and so does the moving corpse in this poem. However, though the effect of the appearance of both is similar---to provoke the feeling of terror, the causes are quite different. The ghost in Gothic stories is terrifying because it is conventionally endowed with supernatural capacities which pose threats to human lives, but the walking dead in “Lady Lazarus” terrifies the readers, I would contend, because she is dehumanized.

A dehumanized human being is terrifying because his or her behavior has exceeded the norm of human morality and is no longer predictable. The terror of such dehumanization could have two facets: firstly, it is the cruelty of the one who does not treat others like human beings terrifies us; secondly, it is the extremity of the suffering that the one not being treated like human beings bears terrifies us. An episode in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) would be a good example to prove this. In the story, Edward Hyde, unlike "all human beings" "commingled out of good and evil," is a man of "pure evil" and "none could come near to him at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh." (128) The nastiness of Hyde is withheld throughout the novel because Stevenson deals with it merely in generalities by claiming that:

...into the details of the infamy at which I thus connived..., I have no design of entering; I mean but to point out the warnings and the successive steps with which my chastisement approached. (97)

However, he does hint at it in one exceptional incident in which Hyde was seen by Enfield to run into a girl of maybe eight or ten at the street corner:

...the two [the child and Hyde] ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing; for the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut. (7)

This is probably the only episode Stevenson designed in his story to reveal the "pure evil" Mr. Hyde possesses in his nature. The effect of such a design is, as the author himself puts it, "horrible" and "hellish." It lingers in the memory of those characters

who witness it in the story as well as those who read the episode because of its weirdness, which is due to the “thing-ness” featuring both Hyde and the child: Hyde has been called “it” for twice by Enfield in the text and was described as a kind of “Juggernaut,” and the child was tramped over by Hyde like a piece of lifeless rubbish. They both were invested with a thing-ness characteristic; that is, they both were dehumanized human beings. Such dehumanized human beings are the main source of terror deliberately devised by Stevenson to present the effect of the “pure evil” in his story, and they are terrifying because, as I claimed previously, the actions of a dehumanized person have gone beyond the norm most people are accustomed to and become unpredictable.

To turn back to Plath’s “Lady Lazarus,” I find the poem is terrifying because the speaker, this Lady Lazarus, is a personage similar to Stevenson’s dehumanized Hyde and child. On one hand, she is delineated as a Hyde-like unpleasant and gruesome figure both in her appearance and her behavior. Her skeletonized body and foul smell reminds us of Enfield’s remark on Hyde’s look:” He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something down-right detestable.”(12) And also her promise of the coming merciless killing in the end of poem would parallel Hyde’s hellish behavior in the story:

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air. (80-84)

However, on the other hand, she is also a pitiful victim like the child being tramped over by Hyde. The speaker's revitalization is reduced to a "big strip tease" by the voyeurism public:

The peanut-crunching crowd

Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot---

The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands

My knees.

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman. (26-34)

The speaker's body is reduced to a "thing" that would entertain the crowd and what is more unpleasant is that it becomes an object being bargained with:

There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge

For the hearing of my heart---

It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes. (57-64)

In these lines, the speaker's body is delineated as some fragmented parts that could be bargained individually by someone else, like consumable commodities. Also these lines have a strong hint of prostitution in which female bodies are lowered to mere object. And whether she is a stripper or a prostitute, both are the poet's metaphor of a total victim who is not rightly treated like a human being, like the child in Stevenson's story.

Therefore, the speaker is doubly dehumanized in this poem: she is an abhorrent walking corpse that would take her revenge by killing excessively, and she is also a pitiful woman with her body being reduced to commercial goods to entertain others. The poet's detailed delineation on such dehumanization, I think, is the main factor that the poem could stir up a kind of anxious feeling in the reader's mind and appear to be terrifying. Besides, the fact that the poem is highly autobiographical is well recognized and it is recorded in her journal that Plath has long been interested in the story of Lazarus for its resemblance to her own experience:

I feel like Lazarus: that story has such a fascination. Being dead, I rose up again, and even resort to the mere sensation value of being suicidal, of getting so close, of coming out of the grave with the scars and the marring mark on my cheek which (is it my imagination) grows more prominent.... (100)

Suicidal attempt has long been supposed to be a personal trauma that one who committed it usually will not feel like to talk about publicly. However, in this poem,

the poet transforms her traumatic experience into some absurd performance and thus instills the poem with black humor. The poet's coldness and mercilessness articulated in the voice of the speaker make her terrifying experience seem to be something she could manipulate, and this is probably another factor that makes the readers feel uneasy while reading this poem.

"Lady Lazarus" is not her only poem with dehumanized characters that terrifies the readers. "The Applicant" is another poem with similar dehumanized characters. The poem begins with descriptions of dismembered pieces of human bodies:

First, are you our sort of a person?

Do you wear

A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,

A brace or a hook,

Rubber breast or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing?... (1-6)

The central metaphor of the poem is the job-seeking and the body of the male applicant here is described as the combination of some fragmented parts of artificial human body which remind us of the monster's body composed of different part collected by Frankenstein "from charnel houses," "the dissecting room and the slaughter-house" to "animate the lifeless clay." (32) The human being is reduced to pieces separable and rejoinable at random. The poet proceeds to describe the emptiness which features the male applicant:

Open your hand.

Empty? Empty. Here is a hand

To fill it and willing

To bring teacups and roll away headaches

And do whatever you tell it. (9-13)

The hand the speaker provides with the applicant is a variant of a robot---a representative of merely functional existence. Again the human body becomes merchandise tradable as it is defined in “Lady Lazarus.” And not only the male applicant but also the female in this poem is characterized as a machine-like robot:

Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.

Well, what do you think of *that*?

Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,

In fifty, gold.

A living doll, everywhere you look.

It can sew, it can cook,

It can talk, talk, talk. (28-35)

This female is delineated as some kind of useful household commodity to be recommended by the salesman-speaker to the male applicant. Throughout the poem, what characterizes both the male applicant and the doll-like female is their being deprived of human nature and thus reduced to mere objects. Also we should not forget the horrible situation of these two characters is deployed by the salesman-like speaker's dialogue; the practical and relentless tone of the narration suggests the speaker is possibly a Hyde-like personage that considers human beings merely as some

“thing.”

In “The Surgeon at 2 a.m.,” a similar terror of dehumanization can also be found and it is defined by means of presenting the relationship between the doctor and the patient. The speaker in this poem is an egoistic surgeon who does not treat his patient as a living being:

The scalded sheet is a snowfield, frozen and peaceful.
 The body under it is in my hands.
 As usual there is no face. A lump of Chinese white
 With seven holes thumbed in. The soul is another light.
 I have not seen it; it does not fly up.
 Tonight it has receded like a ship’s light. (5-10)

To the surgeon, the soul of the patient has disappeared and his anesthetized body becomes some kind of unanimated object to be manipulated by him. Various metaphors are employed to reveal how the human body is transformed into a lifeless object by the surgeon during the process of the operation. Firstly the anesthetized body is analogous to the garden and the organs in it are “tubers” and “fruits”:

It is a garden I have to do with---tubers and fruits
 Oozing their jammy substances,
 A mat of roots. My assistant hook them back. (11-13)

Then the circulation of the blood is parallel to the aqueducts in Rome:

The blood is a sunset. I admire it.
 I am up to my elbows in it, red and squeaking.
 Still it seeps up, it is not exhausted.
 So magical! A hot spring

I must seal off and let fill

The intricate, blue piping under the pale marble.

How I admire the Romans---

Aqueducts, the Baths of Caracalla, the eagle nose!

The body is a Roman thing.

It has shut its mouth on the stone pill of repose. (21-30)

And what is more terrifying is how the surgeon defines the dismembered pieces of the body after the surgery:

It is a statue the orderlies are wheeling off.

I have perfected it.

I am left with an arm or a leg,

A set of teeth, or stones

To rattle in a bottle and take home,

And tissue in slices---a pathological salami. (31-36)

In the eyes of the surgeon, the dissected parts of human body could be many “things” that he enjoys or admires so much---it could be a plant, a hot spring, a piece of pale marble, some ancient architecture, and even a piece of delicious salami! His astonishing interpretation of the body is obviously deviant from the social norms most people accustomed to and reminds us of some morbid manslayer that would obtain pleasure in the act of murder. What is more, it reveals a kind of sickly coldness inherent in the nature of the surgeon and makes him an abnormal figure that would evoke the reader’s fear and unpleasant feeling.

In “Lady Lazarus,” “The Applicant,” and “The Surgeon at 2 a.m.,” a terror of identical dehumanization could be detected as it is presented in the interaction of Hyde

and the child in the episode in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As I stated previously that Stevenson's episode is impressive and terrifying because of the "thingness" characteristic---the symptom of a dehumanized figure---shared by both Hyde and the child---Hyde's dehumanization is manifested in the extreme cruelty he is invested with and the child's dehumanization is revealed in the unbearable cruelty he suffers from; such dehumanization is a deviation from the norm of human behavior and this is the reason it could arouse the feeling of terror in the readers' minds. The similar Hyde-child mode of dehumanization is retold by Sylvia Plath in her poetry: the speaker in "Lady Lazarus" plays the role of both Hyde and the child; the salesman-speaker in "The Applicant" is a Hyde-like character and both the male applicant and the doll-like female the child-like; in "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.," it is analogous to the relationship between the surgeon and his patient. And since the terrifying element in these poems has been indicated, we may proceed to find a possible answer to another question: what is the content of such a terror of dehumanization and is it, like the terror presented in Gothic literature, a reflection of the emotion of terror inherent in its contemporaneous society? To answer the question raised above, we shall reexamine the text of these three poems and try to find some deeper significance hidden behind those horrible lines.

In "Lady Lazarus," Plath employs two metaphors---strip tease and prostitution---to interpret her own unsuccessful suicidal attempt and these two metaphors share some similarity which enables the significance of the terror be more comprehensible to the readers. This similarity is that, in both metaphors, the female body appears as something consumable to the male. Both the strip tease performer and the prostitute described in the poem are the female who acts to satisfy the

masculine sexual needs. However, prostitutes are universally despised and thought to be outcasts in a conventional society although the service they perform is undoubtedly arising from the fact that men need some kind of women always available to satisfy their sexual desire which they are ashamed to acknowledge but afraid to leave wholly unsatisfied. In this poem, the superiority of the male⁵ is ironically suggested by investing them with enviable positions of power and dominance: “Herr Doktor,” “Herr God,” “Herr Lucifer.” In contrast to the positive traits men are often identified with, the female has always been identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, and emotional. The resurrected Lady Lazarus in this poem is ironically reduced by the poet to either a stripper or a prostitute that entertains and serves the male. This is the poet’s ironical statement criticizing the patriarchal social framework and also it reveals the fact that the terrifying dehumanization which characterizes the speaker is exactly how women are defined by patriarchal ideology. I would say that the terror presented in this poem is in fact the poet’s device to disclose the tyranny of patriarchy; the terror Plath tells in it is the terror of patriarchy. At the time when the poem was written at the beginning of the sixties, the feminist movement was in its earlier stage. According to Raman Selden, the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique* in 1963 is a “way of identifying the beginnings of the ‘second wave’ [feminist movement] . . . which put feminism on the national agenda, substantively and for the first time.”(127) The Second Wave Feminism, also known as the Women's Liberation Movement, makes an impact upon the Western societies and continues to inspire the struggle for women’s rights across the world nowadays. The beginning of the Second Wave Feminism is about the time Plath’s “Lady Lazarus” was composed. Therefore, the terror presented in the poem is pertinent in its contemporary framework.

“The Applicant” tells a similar terror as it is told in “Lady Lazarus.” The central metaphor in this poem is job-seeking and it is adopted here to imply how human relations are conditioned by “the ideology of a bureaucratized market place” (Annas, 131) in the capitalist economic system. In the poem, the speaker seems to speak directly to the readers addressing as “you” throughout and such a tone implies that all the people who read the poem are potential “applicants” like the one in this poem. The imagery of dehumanization---the crippled and dismembered pieces of bodies---launches the poem and, moreover, the pieces described here are not even flesh but “glass” and “rubber” which imply the culture we are involved in is a machine-dominated one. The hand the poet provides to the applicant is the variant of a robot, a metaphor echoing the role an individual plays in the capitalist society in which people are but “smaller replicas of a smoothly functioning larger social machine” (Annas, 132) and what they produce is “emptiness” since it is merely the copy of another copy in the world of mass-production. The “stark naked”(19) appearance of the applicant also echoes the emptiness characterizing his culture and the speaker proposes to give him a suit:

How about this suit---

Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.

Will you marry it?

It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof

Against fire and bombs through the roof. (21-24)

The imagery of a man in black is not unfamiliar to us because it recurs in some of Plath’s poems, such as “Daddy” and “Man in Black,” and it is usually employed by the

poet as a representative of the dominant male figure. The black suit the speaker recommends gives the shape to the applicant and defines him as a more dominant one in comparison with the female in this poem. Also the poem delineates explicitly the portrait of marriage in the patriarchal society in which the female is usually reduced to a “living doll,” a functional existence that could manage all the domestic affairs. The man is exploited by the capitalist society, but the woman is double exploited by both the capitalism and the patriarchy in which the man belongs to the exploiting class. While the man is a heap of collected parts given shape by a suit of clothes which could protect him from all forms of injury, the woman is a toy, an automatic puppet that could “sew,” “cook,” “talk” to satisfy his needs of all kinds. She does not even exist unless the man needs her. Besides, the man, though being manipulated by the machine-dominated capitalistic culture, still has the relative freedom of choice in comparison with the woman whose situation is greatly limited. The woman in the poem is seen as an appendage to the man: the work she does is outside the realm of the socially recognized labors because she only works for the man in the black suit and he becomes the only medium through which the woman can contact the world. As a result, her relationship with the man is the only path leading to social acceptance. The man is finally defined by the black suit he puts on, but the only thing that gives the woman meaning is the institution of marriage. Without the definition given by marriage, she does not even exist. The woman in the poem is referred to as “it”. The term indicates that she is the one without individuality, without life, and, moreover, it stresses the fact that she is a commodity consumed by the man rather than a person equal to him. The content of the poem reflects two phenomena contemporaneous to Plath’s time: the cultural crisis resulting from the capitalist social system and the

debasement of women's status in the patriarchal society. The first one concerns the social problem especially significant in the world since the 20th century in which the capitalist economic system has gradually prevailed in most countries, and the second one has been the problem long existed but did not gain much attention until the mid 20th century.

In "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.," though a dehumanized female is not found as she is in the previous two poems, the terror it tells is nevertheless identical to that implied in both of them. The surgeon here is delineated as a self-centered egoist: "I am the sun, in my white coat,/ Gray faces, shuttered by drugs, follow me like flowers."(49-50) The sun is the ultimate authority that dominates and nourishes in natural world, and the surgeon proclaims himself to be a sun-like figure for he is the one that operates and manipulates others' life in the hospital. As the doctor represents the position of power and dominance in "Lady Lazarus," the poet invests the male in this poem with the same position to suggest how men are usually defined by our conventional patriarchal ideology. In addition, a more significant feature of the surgeon is his depersonalized attitude to the patient's body mentioned previously and it implies that not only the female but also the male could be a potential victim under the patriarchal social framework since every body might become the dehumanized patient described in this poem. Unlike "Lady Lazarus" and "The Applicant" in which the tyranny of patriarchy is represented on how the female would be reduced, the poem reveals the horror of patriarchy by giving us a vivid picture of a relentless, cold-blood male doctor.

As a result, not only the employment of dehumanized characters is coherent in all these three poems, the implied meaning of such dehumanization is also quite similar.

In each of the poems, Plath creates gruesome and fearful personages and her purpose, as my previous discussion has revealed, is to express her criticism against the tyrannical patriarchy and satirize the absurdity of the system. Also it might imply that, while a person is incessantly conditioned by patriarchal ideology, dehumanization would probably be his or her inevitable destiny.

The portrayal of dehumanized human beings is simply one of Plath's many devices to disclose the terror which is caused by the patriarchy. In "Lesbos" and "The Tour," some horrible images are employed by the poet to ridicule the accustomed scene of domesticity and satirize the so-called propriety or decorum for women. The terror in "Lesbos" arises from a metamorphosis of the common place and persons most people are accustomed to. In the first stanza, at the very beginning of the poem, the prison-like surrealist kitchen has prophesied a transfigured world:

Viciousness in the kitchen!

The potatoes hiss.

It is all Hollywood, windowless, (1-3)

And then the terror is deployed by the schizophrenic daughter and the witch-like deranged neighbor termed as "you" throughout the poem:

And my child.

.....

Why she is schizophrenic,

Her face red and white, a panic,

You have stuck her kittens outside your window

In a sort of cement well

Where they crap and puke and cry and she can't hear.

You say you can't stand her,
 The bastard's a girl.
 You who have blown your tubes like a bad radio
 Clear of voices and history, the staticky
 Noise of the new.
 You say I should drown the kittens. Their smell!
 Your say I should drown my girl.
 She'll cut her throat at ten if she's mad at two.
 The baby smiles, fat snail,

 You could eat him. He's a boy. (8-25)

The kitchen, the children, the pets, and the neighbor---all the domestic scenes constructing the familiar world for conventional women---have been deliberately distorted into a strange world filled with madness, homicide, and horror. Also the world delineated is a loathsome one in which "a stink of fat and baby crap"(33) permeates and "the smog of cooking," which is exactly like "the smog of hell," floats everywhere. Being entrapped in such a distorted world, the speaker is inevitably fallen into the same fate of anger and derangement mirrored by her perverted neighbor:

Now I am silent, hate
 Up to my neck,
 Thick, thick.
 I do not speak.
 I am packing the hard potatoes like good clothes,
 I am packing the babies,

I am packing the sick cats. (64-70)

A similar transfigured domestic scene also appears in “The Tour.” The scenario tells the trip of an old maid who is expected to be entertained by her niece, the speaker in the poem. The speaker is an atypical housewife not conforming to social conventions because she, instead of the neat appearance and the masterfulness in housewifery often required for a woman, is a sloven dressing herself “in slippers and housedress with no lipstick”(6) and abandoning her house to “a bit of burnt-out,/ A bit of a wild machine, a bit of a mass!”(11-2) Besides, the “creepy-creepy” “earwig biscuits”(39) she prepares to entertain the aunt indicates that she is possibly a witch-like character. The treated “maiden aunt”(1) is also delineated as a witch-like figure because she always carries a “bold/ gecko”(3-4) with her. Another aging female---the nurse the aunt might “trip on”(42) on her way home---is more explicitly invested with similar features:

She may be bald, she may have no eyes,

But auntie, she’s awfully nice.

She’s pink, she a born midwife---

She can bring the dead to life

With her wiggly fingers and for a very small fee. (43-7)

Her “wiggly fingers” and her magic power that “can bring the dead to life” strongly remind the readers of the ugliness and the magic of a witch. The three female characters, like the neighbor in “Lesbos,” are all invested with some kind of queer, absurd quality we usually will not expect of a housewife, an aunt, or a nurse. The house of the speaker is characterized with similar absurd features because “the hall”(2) of it is “all cogs, weird sparkle and every cog solid gold.”(5) Also the utensils in

it---the frost box, the furnace---are delineated as queer and threatening:

Auntie, it might bite!

That's my frost box, no cat,

Though it looks like a cat, with its fluffy stuff, pure white.

You should see the objects it makes!

Millions of needly glass cakes!

Fine for the migraine or the bellyache. And this

Is where I kept the furnace,

Each coal a hot cross-stitch---a lovely light!

It simply exploded one night,

It went up in smoke.

And that's why I have no hair, auntie, that's why I choke

Off and on, as if I just had to retch. (14-26)

The boiling pool near the house is even more terrifying because it swallows human beings like beasts devouring their preys:

Here's a pool I thought you'd love---

Morning Glory Pool!

The blue's a jewel.

It boils for forty hours at a stretch.

O I shouldn't dip my hankie in, it hurts!

Last summer, my God, last summer

It ate seven maids and a plumber

And returned them steamed and pressed and stiff as shirts. (27-34)

In both poems, the poet creates a world that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to us. On one hand, the scenes and the characters in them---the domestic places and the acquaintances people might visit and meet every day--- are exactly those could be found in the kitchen of any house in the West. On the other hand, this seemingly familiar environment is twisted by the poet into a horrible world strange and remote to us. Such a reversal of familiarity is surely significant because it explicitly suggests that, in the poet's mind, a world dominated by patriarchy is exactly a world of derangement and distortion in which the female and the environment surrounding her are always twisted since she is supposed to accommodate herself to satisfy the masculine demand and the house is conventionally purposed for men's relax and comfort. The domestic background adopted in both poems has revealed the critical stance of the poet against the propriety our patriarchal social framework has long assigned for women. Also the speakers in both poems are housewives, the most exploited ones among the female and thus the proper ones to signify the injustice women have long been imposed on and how absurd the so-called "propriety" they are assigned to would be to them.

Another notice-worthy similarity between these two poems is how the poet characterizes all the female personages---she delineates them as more or less a witch-like figure. While the witch is conventionally associates with the possession of dark power and wickedness, the deviant behavior these female characters perform in these two poems surely is one of the factors arousing in the readers' minds the uneasy feelings. However, what the poet's specific way of characterizing these figures aims at is very likely more than causing anxiety. Sara Stambaugh proposes that the witch

is a reflection of “the idealized view of womanhood” which includes “friendship with other women, masculine independence, the rebelliousness associated with Lucifer, housewifely skills, seductiveness, and a strong attraction to men.”(2) However, such characteristics are quite contradictory to what our patriarchal society expects for a female---dependence, passivity, and purity---and such independent women are potential threats that might challenge the quasi-omnipotent masculine power. As a result, to maintain its conventional hierarchical social status in which the male is the superior and the female the inferior, to persecute the witches has become a necessary violence in the long history of the Western society. Diane Purkiss has pointed out clearly in her book on the representations of the witch in history that “the witch-craze has been a synonym for pointless persecution”:(15)

the myth of the Burning Times. . .is a myth that portrays women as nothing but the helpless victims of patriarchy, and the female body as nothing but a site of torture and death. . .”(17)

As the figure of the witch has been widely adopted as a representation of the victim oppressed by patriarchy, the characterization of these female characters in Plath’s “Lesbos” and “The Tour” are possibly the poet’s another device to remind the readers of those innocently persecuted female and the unreasonable injustice women have long been imposed on, in addition to the domestic scenes and the housewife-speaker adopted in the two poems.

Freud, in his famous essay “The Uncanny,“ distinguishes the meaning of the German word “heimlich,” which means “familiar” or “belonging to the home,” from that of “unheimlich,” which means “unhomely” or “uncanny,” and points out that the former word, in so far as it is associated with the domestic or the private, also means

those concealed or kept out of sight. Owing to such lexical ambivalence, Freud deduces that in some senses “unheimlich” coincides with its opposite “heimlich” and defines the uncanny as “the class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”(195) The word “unheimlich,” or “uncanny” in English, is thereby frequently used in the critical writings on Gothic literature to trace the possible source of terror. For Freud, “the uncanny derives its terror not from something external, alien, or unknown but--on the contrary--from something strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it.”(Morris, 121) Freud’s theory of the uncanny provides us with a good approach to explore into the significance of the terror presented in Plath’s “Lesbos” and “The Tour.” In both poem, the speakers’ narration of the transfigured domestic places and persons arouses in us the feeling of uncanniness and also proves that, to the speakers, there must be something uncanny in these domestic figures and settings. Such uncanniness felt by the female speaker results not from that unknown and unfamiliar but from “what is known of old and long familiar” instead---the repression of patriarchy. The tension of both poems is thus created by the ambivalence between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The deranged worlds in these two poems is the manifestation of such feeling of uncanniness and also they strongly suggest that, a world constructed on the basis of patriarchy is surely a familiar and accustomed one to people, but, to the female, such a world is filled with insane and absurd experiences since in which they are always the subordinated, the repressed, and the Other.

Another scene of terror recurring in Sylvia Plath’s poetry is that of the Holocaust⁶. The sheer horror at the core of the Holocaust---the horror of mass murder and the terror of the extremity of such suffering---evokes a numbing shock in the minds of the people contemporaneous to this event and those afterwards as well. After the World War Two, with

the spread of the diaries by victims, memoirs by survivors, and the investigate studies by historians and philosophers, this event has become the representation of the extremity of bloody horror and the figure of “the Holocaust Jew” the metaphor of the embattled victim, the sufferer, and the martyr. James E. Young, by tracing how such human trauma is represented by nonvictims in unrelated events, concludes that “the holocaust becomes an archetype”:

. . .once an event is perceived to be without precedent, without adequate analogy, it would be in itself become a kind of precedent for all that follows: a new figure against which subsequent experiences are measured and grasped. (99)

Among those who “measured” and “grasped” their own experiences against the event of the Holocaust, Sylvia Plath is one of the most famous. In “Getting There,” the speaker is a Jew hiding herself to escape from the massacre: “I am dragging my body/ Quietly through the straw of the boxcars”(10-11) And also she is a witness to the horrible scenes filled with the cadavers of the Jews and the dismembered pieces of bodies after the medical experiments in the concentration camps:

It is a trainstop, the nurses
 Undergoing the faucet water, its veils, veils in a nunnery,
 Touching their wounded,
 The men the blood still pumps forward,
 Legs, arms piled outside
 The tent of unending cries---
 A hospital of dolls.
 And the men, what is left of the men
 Pumped ahead by these pistons, this blood

Into the next mile,

The next hour---

Dynasty of broken arrows! (22-33)

Even the train carrying the Jews has become an embodiment of the fearful Nazism that attempts to annihilate Semitism in the speaker's mind:

The gigantic gorilla interior

Of the wheels move, they appal me---

The terrible brains

Of Krupp, black muzzles

Revolving, the sound

Punching out Absence! like cannon. (3-8)

Because it is loaded with the slaughtered ones, the train has been transformed into a devilish existence, a slaughter machinery with "its teeth/ Ready to roll"(39-40) and a screaming animal "insane for the destination."(57)

However, the purpose of the poet's detailed description of the horrible scenes of the Holocaust is not pointing to its historical significance or to revive the memory of such a brutal event; instead, the Holocaust only serves to be, as Young puts it, "an event available to her . . . as a figure, an idea"(118) by which the poet has expressed another brutality: the suffering of the female caused by the patriarchy. In this poem, such a thematic implication is not explicitly suggested except in the following lines:

How far is it?

There is mud on my feet,

Thick, red and slipping. It is Adam's side,

The earth I rise from, and I in agony. (34-37)

The implication of the biblical metaphor here is obvious. The mud on the ground reminds the speaker of the earth out of which Adam is made, of the first female formed out of Adam's rib, and then of the perceived victimization of herself. The speaker perceives in herself a sense of "agony" and these lines have the implication that her agony stems from her awareness of woman's destined subordinate position to men, the Adams. The poet's choice of the Holocaust Jew as a metaphor here is owing to its visibility as a public figure of victimization, its appropriateness as the image of mass suffering since the patriarchal oppression could possibly be the cause of mental suffering for most women. Therefore, the terror presented in this poem is neither the poet's accusation of the brutal Nazism nor an expression of her pathos to the victimized Jews; rather, it is a device to manifest how the tyranny of patriarchy is perceived by the poet and how she would interpret it. The dissected pieces of human bodies and the female speaker pursued by some nameless fear are the main images in this poem and also those recurring often in the Gothic fictions. The two devices seem to provide the readers with a possible answer since they are employed by the poet to convey the oppression the Holocaust Jews---the female--- have been imposed and the extremity of how a human being could be dehumanized, as it is presented in "Lady Lazarus" and "The Applicant."

In some other Plath's poems of the Holocaust, the similar thematic implication is more explicitly conveyed. In "Daddy," again the poet employs the image of the victimized Jews and the oppressing Nazi to define the relation between the speaker and the male. By paralleling herself to the "poor and white"(4) foot long living in the "black shoe" (2)---the symbol of her daddy---and "barely daring to breathe or Achoo,"(5) the speaker's sense of entrapment by the male can be clearly perceived. The two male characters in this poem ---the speaker's daddy and the man in black---are both delineated as the brutal Nazi: the

daddy's "neat mustache"(43) and "Aryan eye"(44) remind us of the image of Hitler and the black man biting her "pretty red heart in two"(56) is the one "with a Meinkampf look."(65) To coincide with the camp experience and reinforce her oppressed status, the speaker poses herself as the Holocaust Jew:

And the language obscene

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

.....

With my gipsy ancestress and my Taroc pack

I may be a bit of a Jew. (30-40)

Feeling deeply entrapped by both her German father and her father's mother tongue, the German language, as well, the speaker could not help relate herself to the Jews suffering from the persecution of the German Nazism.

Also in "Lady Lazarus," "The Munich Mannequins," and "Mary's Song," the identical allusion to the Holocaust is employed as it is in "Daddy." In "Lady Lazarus," the following lines imply the Nazi's crime of mass-murder⁵:

A cake of soap,

A wedding ring,

A gold filling. (76-78)

Also the German term “Herr Doktor,” which might indicate the doctors exerting medical experiments with the bodies of the Jews, explicitly reveals the poet’s intention to embed the female speaker’s traumatic experience of being materialized by patriarchy, as I have stated previously, in the broader context of the Holocaust. In “The Munich Mannequins,” the poet tries to define the meaning of the female by their ability of giving birth, by the menstrual blood discharging every month, and then concludes that the existence of women is “the absolute sacrifice”:

Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,

The tree of life and the tree of life

Unloosing their moons, month after month, to no purpose.

The blood flood is the flood of love,

The absolute sacrifice. (2-7)

Then the poet proceeds to interpret the conventional features our society expects of a woman by employing the image of the mannequins:

So, in their sulfur loveliness, in their smiles

These mannequins lean tonight

In Munich, morgue between Paris and Rome,

Naked and bald in their furs,

Orange lollies on silver sticks,

Intolerable, without mind. (10-15)

The image of the mannequins in this poem has double significances. On one hand, the “loveliness” and “smiles” featuring the mannequins are exactly those our patriarchal society requires of women. On the other hand, the poet defines the city where these mannequins lie---Munich---is the “morgue between Paris and Rome” since it is also the place the massacre of the Jews is maneuvered and the lifeless mannequins are probably a metaphor of the slaughtered Jews. Therefore, by the employment of the imagery of the mannequins, the linkage between the sacrificed female and the suffering Jews is thus established. Also these unanimated mannequins remind the readers of the imagery of the corpse in many Gothic stories and stir up in our minds a sense of horror that is extremely gothic.

In “Getting There,” “Daddy,” “Lady Lazarus,” and “The Munich Mannequins,” the terrifying scenes of the Holocaust and the image of the Jews who suffered from the horror of mass murder are evoked and connected to the personal experience of the female speakers. By merging herself into the traumatic history of human race, the speakers’ sense of victimization imposed by the patriarchy is thus explained and perceived by the readers. Joyce Carol Oates has criticized Plath’s adoption of the Holocaust Jew imagery as “snatching metaphors for her predicament from newspaper headlines,”(39) and also Irving Howe described Plath’s linkage of both as “monstrous, utterly disproportionate.”(233) To me, their criticism to the poetess would seem to be too harsh and unjust. I would contend that, since almost all women could be the possible victims of the tyrannical patriarchy, the poet’s adoption of such a

mass-murder allusion has its propriety and understandability.

In Sylvia Plath's poetry, the terror is presented in different forms, with different devices. Sometimes it is the dehumanized human beings as they are in "Lady Lazarus," "The Applicant," and "The Surgeon at 2 A.M.," sometimes it is the unfamiliar familiarity in "Lesbos" and "The Tour," and sometimes it is the horrible scenes of the Holocaust and the extremity of the sufferings the Jews bear in many of her poems. Though the terror in these poems appears in various forms, the significance of it is nevertheless coherent for the terror told in each poem is the terror of patriarchy---probably the most enduring source of terror for women ever since the time our human society has been constructed on its basis, even in the twentieth century when women's rights have been much emphasized and feminism becomes widespread. Therefore, like the terror in Gothic literature, the terror presented in Sylvia Plath's poetry is also the kind that long inherent in our society and haunts the people, especially the female, from time to time.

Conclusion

Two of the recognizable and permanent conventions of the Gothic fictions---the stereotyped characters and the device of the double figures---are adopted in numerous poems of Sylvia Plath. The poet employs the two Gothic conventions either to build up the tension in her poetry or to express as well as to probe her own personal predicament, and thus to detect and comprehend the two Gothic devices would help the readers to appreciate the meanings in Plath's poetry.

Besides, some critics have recognized that "terror," or the feeling of fear, might probably be the only element consistently appearing in all Gothic writings: Ellen Moers contends that "'the Gothic' is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear"(90), and David Punter, after evolving "the multifarious forms in which" the Gothic "has survived," concludes that "there is . . . one element which, albeit in a vast variety of forms, crops up in all the relevant fiction, and that is fear."(21) Then Anne Williams goes a step further by associating the Gothic fear with the oppression of the patriarchy. To Williams, "Gothic systematically represents 'otherness'" which is "broadly consistent with some of the most ancient categories of otherness in Western culture,"(18) such as the concept of the female, and "'the Gothic myth,' the mythos or structure informing this Gothic category of 'otherness,' is the patriarchal family."(22) For instance, according to Williams, the haunted house with a terrible secret---the conventional setting in most Gothic stories---embodies the control and confinement the patriarchy imposes on women and signifies the wealth and power of the male by which the female is always oppressed and manipulated. And the conventional Gothic narration---frame and embedded tales, found or translated manuscripts, or many narrators---not only reinforces the atmosphere of uncertainty and unreliability but also

expresses women's anxiety about "meaning" and "reality" which are conventionally established according to "the Law of the Father"(67)---the patriarchal ideology. As I have suggested in Chapter Three that, just like the Gothic fictions, Sylvia Plath's poetry could also easily arouse in the reader's mind a sense of terror and the terrifying elements in her poetry have a common thematic implication---to disclose the tyranny of patriarchy. To juxtapose the scenes that instills the terror expressed in both, the similarity shared by Plath's poems and the Gothic literature would be clearly revealed since not only the feeling of terror but also the contents of the terror told in both is quite similar.

Though Plath exhibits in her works many important elements in the Gothic tradition, strictly speaking, she cannot be categorized as a conventional Gothic writer. Firstly, instead of writing fictions---the literary form adopted by almost all Gothic writers, Plath mostly writes poetry to deliver the similar plot and the similar sense of terror⁸ as they are in the Gothic literature. Secondly, in Gothic fictions, the feeling of terror is usually aroused by the figures of the grotesque, the obtaining of mysterious power, or the appearing of the apparition. However, in many Plath's poems, it is man that becomes the source of terror. The dehumanized female in "Lady Lazarus" and "The Applicant," the deranged witches in "Lesbos" and "The Tour," the victimized female Jews in "Getting There," "The Munich Mannequins," and "Daddy"---all of these characters are victims of the dominating male power; they display women's awareness of their deteriorated, oppressed position, and deliver the female fury against the tyrannous man's power. Thus, rather than passively obeying the writing conventions established by the previous Gothic writers, Plath renews the Gothic tradition by adding some new element---terrifying poetry to express the female anger against man's dominating power.

Plath's poems of female anger have attracted much attention of the literary critics and influenced, inspired many contemporaneous poetesses, such as Carolyn Kizer, Adrienne Rich, and Anne Sexton⁹. Also these poems with these terrifying images have become those impress the readers most and those linger in the readers' memory constantly among Plath's oeuvre.

In sum, in the long tradition of the Gothic literature, Sylvia Plath occupies a unique position. Owing to the Gothic elements presented in her poetry, it would be reasonable to assert that she could be deemed as a Gothic writer. In addition to inheriting some elements of the Gothic tradition, she also adds something new to enrich the content of this Gothic tradition. However, though the poetess's unique position in the Gothic tradition has been secured, still another question occupied my mind: that is, why is her poetry so Gothic?

Some autobiographical material indicates that Sylvia Plath is very likely the kind of writer who tends to write to meet the favor of certain people, such as the editors or the readers. In a letter written to her mother in *Letters Home*, a passage explicitly suggests such a tendency:

I'll never get anywhere if I just write one or two stories and never revise them or streamline them for a particular market. I want to hit *The New Yorker* in poetry and the *Ladies' Home Journal* in stories, and so I must study the magazines the way I did *Seventeen*.(107)

The poet's strong ambition to have her works published and her comprehension of the necessity to write purposely can be easily detected in this passage. In the introductory essay in *Letters Home*, Plath's mother has made a further explanation to the poet's writing strategy:

As she critically surveyed her long list of rejections and the short, . . . , Sylvia discovered that her exuberant, joyous outbursts in both poetry and prose brought rejection slips, while the story or poem with pathetic twist was found more acceptable. More people would identify with the plain heroine beset with doubts and difficulties. . . . Advice and experience in regard to writing led her now into an examination and analysis of the darker recesses of self.(35-6)

In the passage, in addition to the same ambition and comprehension as they are shown in Plath's letter, the poet's thematic concern is again suggested---"the story or poem with pathetic twist" and "the darker recesses of self." Both the "pathetic twist" and "the darker recesses" would easily remind the readers of the stories told in most Gothic fictions.

To make a comparison with the traits characterizing the Gothic stories, it might not be difficult to detect the similar features characterizing both Plath's works and Gothic fictions. Fred Botting, while defining "Gothic," terms it as a genre of "excess" and "transgression": in Gothic productions, "imagination and emotional effects exceed reason,"(3) and by "transgressing the bounds of reality and possibility," they also "challenge reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights."(6) And David Punters, while tracing the dimensions of Gothic, declares that Gothic "is a literature of psychic grotesquerie."(3) It is obvious that, for the two critics, Gothic literature is probably synonymous to the writing of psychological deviation because what is explored in it is the kind of emotion inherent in men but long ignored, or even negated in the so-called literary canons¹⁰, such as repression, anxiety, and fear. By moving away from morality and reason---the

canonical value long held by most realistic novels, Gothic fictions articulate the hidden and darker side of human nature and the result is that they have become quite popular and attract a mass amount of reading public, especially the female. Therefore, like the writers of the Gothic fictions, to meet the specification of certain people or the reading public, Plath writes about the darker and the twist---the conventional thematic concern in Gothic literature, and this is probably one of the reasons why her works would become so Gothic.

Besides, William Patrick Day proposes that the Gothic depicts a world in which “the identity begins to break up. . . . The line between the self and the Other begins to waver, and the wholeness and integrity of the self begins to collapse.”(21-2) For instance, in *Frankenstein*, the male protagonist creates his creature, seeks to destroy it, and finally embarks on an endless chase across the frozen arctic. While reading the story, the readers could deeply feel that it is confusing and difficult to distinguish the pursuer from the pursued and as Frankenstein battles with his creation, his self-identity becomes the ultimate object of his fear because it is no longer clear and integral as it seemed to be. In Plath’s many poems, the speaker finds herself in a predicament similar to Frankenstein’s. In “Poem for a Birthday,” the persona is shifting and fragmentary, and her ambivalent feeling between the role of a daughter and the role of a mother is strongly suggested. The so-called “Bee Poems”---including “Beekeeper’s Daughter,” “Arrival of the Bee Box,” “The Bee Meeting,” “Stings,” “Wintering,” and “Swarm”---is considered to be a set of poems by which Plath “examines the contradictory workings of power and the dimensions of the poetic self that might be recovered in the aesthetic process.”(Broe, 95) In many poems, the poet constantly explores the identity of the female with different tones and playing different roles.

Like many Gothic protagonists, the poet Plath endeavors to sustain her self by identifying herself with the roles of being a daughter, a mother, a woman, and a poet; however, the world her works reveals, instead of being integral and singular, is rather complex and instable.

Therefore, Plath's Gothicism revealed in her poetry, I shall contend, is the result of two factors. Due to her ambition and her contrived strategy, she consciously writes about things gothic to attract both the readers and the editors. Due to her need to find in her a sense of wholeness and integrity---probably a primal need for all human beings, she constantly explores her true self in her poems but discovers a Gothic world in which the self identity is always uncertain and changeable.

Notes

- ¹ The three *Alien* films released in 1979, 1986, and 1992.
- ² The reversibility of human identity in this story is the monstrous result of Jekyll's scientific experiments.
- ³ According to Fred Botting, the progress of scientific theories since the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century greatly threatened "the cultural and moral values": "In disclosing threatening natural forces, scientific theories gave shape to the anxieties about cultural degeneration and provided ways of disciplining and containing deviance." For instance, Darwin's theories "undermined the superiority and privilege humankind had bestowed to itself," and Paul Broca's work on the division of the brain into left and right hemispheres "grounded dichotomies in human nature."(137)
- ⁴ As Plath's father was also dead in her early youth (when she was eight,) the poem is often interpreted as a highly autobiographical one in which the interrelationship among the speaker, the daddy, and the man in black implies that of the poetess, her father, and her husband. Linda Wagner Martin asserts that in "Daddy," Plath "returns to the theme of the problem that has darkened what feels to have been her entire life, coping with the man in her household who has ruined her idyl---whether that man be her father or her husband."(128)
- ⁵ According to the definition given by Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."(20) This definition of patriarchy suggests that the gender relation in a patriarchal society is constructed on a mode of male as the dominator and

female as the subordinate. Most of the civilizations in our world in the past few centuries are constructed on such a male-centered system in which the male is always identified with the positive traits, such as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, and creative.

⁶The word “holocaust” originally means “widespread destruction by fire,” and it is also the name given to the mass murder of six million Jewish people planned and carried out by Hitler in Europe during World War II.

⁷The three images are employed by Plath to represent Nazi’s crime of mass murder operating in the gas chamber. “A cake of soap” was what the Jews were given before they went into the gas chambers which “were disguised as shower rooms or inhalation rooms”(Kogon, 27) and “a wedding ring” and “a gold filling,” which refers to the gold teeth, are things that would be taken away and collected from those dead Jews in the gas chambers before they were burned in the oven.

⁸Sylvia Plath also wrote short stories and fictions, and the most famous one should be *The Bell Jar*. To take a look on the literary devices in *The Bell Jar*, it is not difficult to find some important Gothic conventions in this novel. For instance, the hospital, which is specifically for the rich with psychiatric disease, is quite similar to the castle in the Gothic fictions for both are the buildings confining the female protagonists and both are aristocratic symbols. In addition, Esther, like the persecuted and imprisoned heroines in numerous Gothic fictions, feels herself like being restricted within a limited space while she is suffering from the attack of mental illness:

...wherever I sat---on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris

or Bangkok---I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air. ...I sank back in the gray, plush seat and closed my eyes. The air of the bell jar wadded around me and I couldn't stir.(152)

⁹ For instance, Carolyn Kizer in her "Semele Recycled," Adrienne Rich in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," and Anne Sexton in "Cripples and Other Stories" and "Loving the Killer," have delineated the similar image of furious female.

¹⁰ According to M. H. Abrams, the literary canon "in recent decade . . . has come to designate---in world literature, or in European literature, but most frequently in a national literature---those authors who, by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, have come to be widely recognized as 'major,' and to have written works often hailed as literary classics. The literary works by canonical authors are the ones which, at a given time, are most kept in print, most frequently and fully discussed by literary critics and historian, and most likely to be included in anthologies and in the syllabi of college courses with titles such as 'World Masterpieces,' 'Major English Authors,' or 'Great American Writers.'"(29) Since the 1970s, the canon has been challenged and adjusted by the critics of minority literatures, ethnic literature, post-colonialism, etc.

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